

# “For the Good of the City”: An Early Evaluation of the Catto Scholarship

June 2024

## Background

The Octavius V. Catto Scholarship is a last-dollar scholarship with wraparound supports offered at Community College of Philadelphia (CCP); the Scholarship began enrolling students in Spring 2021. The scholarship was launched as part of then-Mayor Jim Kenney’s second term in office and was designed as an anti-poverty initiative to support Philadelphians, and especially those living in poverty, to achieve college success. The initiative was created after Mayor Kenney’s 15-year push to erect a statue of Octavius Catto, which sits outside of City Hall honoring one of Philadelphia’s important civil rights leaders.<sup>1</sup> The title of this report is inspired by Octavius Catto’s 1864 speech to the graduating class of the Institute for Colored Youth (now known as Cheyney University), advocating that broadening access to quality education was “for the good of the nation.”<sup>2</sup>

In addition to last-dollar funding, the Catto Scholarship provides an array of wraparound services to address common obstacles faced by community college students. Wraparound services include individualized academic coaching and advising, monthly stipends,<sup>3</sup> bookstore credits, and social service support through referrals to community resources. By providing targeted financial, academic, and social supports, the Catto Scholarship helps students navigate toward degree completion and academic success.

The Catto Scholarship at CCP engaged Research for Action (RFA) to conduct an external evaluation focused on:

- Situating the Catto Scholarship among similar initiatives,
- Identifying early program successes, and
- Recommending opportunities for growth.

To meet these aims, RFA employed a mixed-methods study design, drawing on data from interviews with key members of the Catto Scholarship community as well as analyses of administrative data. This report summarizes high-level findings from the mixed-method study.

### Data & Methods

This mixed-methods study draws on multiple sources of data, including Catto Scholarship administrative data from fall 2020–spring 2023 as well as five hour-long semi-structured interviews with Scholarship developers, four staff focus groups, and six focus groups with Scholars.

The research team conducted descriptive and thematic analyses to identify key themes related to the evaluation aims, triangulating findings across data sources to generate robust learnings about the Catto Scholarship.

<sup>1</sup> <https://why.org/articles/philly-presents-long-overdue-honor-true-american-hero-octavius-catto-photos/>

<sup>2</sup> <https://exhibits.library.villanova.edu/institute-colored-youth/graduates/ov-catto>

<sup>3</sup> While we refer to this monthly payment as a stipend, it is important to note that this is part of the cost of attendance to attend CCP as calculated by the U.S. Department of Education and therefore does not interfere with students’ abilities to obtain public assistance.

## Findings

Study findings are organized as follows: First, we describe the origins of the Catto Scholarship<sup>4</sup> and situate it relative to other similar last-dollar scholarships with wraparound supports. Next, we describe the characteristics of Catto Scholars to identify early trends in enrollment. We then highlight early successes of the Catto Scholarship, with particular emphasis on persistence, completion, and the role of the Catto Scholarship components in promoting student success. Last, we identify opportunities for growth, improvement, and partnership that emerge from our interviews with staff and Catto Scholars.

### Origins of the Catto Scholarship

The Catto Scholarship was created through a partnership between the Mayor’s Office and Community College of Philadelphia (CCP). As a self-styled “Education Mayor,” Kenney had worked during his first term in office to expand access to quality pre-Kindergarten and return the Philadelphia School District to local control. In his second term, his primary focus was on higher education.

*“I could say honestly with Jim Kenney, the former mayor who helped head this program, it has been the best thing he ever done for the Philadelphia community.” – Catto Scholar*

#### *The Catto Scholarship designers “wanted to give people hope.”*

Recognizing higher education as a path toward economic and social mobility, the investment in Philadelphia – the country’s poorest big city<sup>5</sup> – was viewed by the development team as a way to get more students upskilled and into good paying jobs, which in turn had implications for enhancing workforce investments and reducing poverty.

In interviews, the development team reported that there were many champions of the Catto Scholarship, from City Councilmembers to State Senators: “Lots of people’s fingerprints are on this, which is a good thing in the end because people want to buy in.” The development team noted that all of the key players – the Mayor’s Office, CCP, the School District of Philadelphia (SDP), City Council – were in favor of the program, which respondents hoped would ensure that the Scholarship would not be defunded in future administrations.

#### *Strong partnerships between the City and CCP facilitated the creation of the Scholarship.*

The development team spoke with pride about the strong collaboration and personal relationships between the City and CCP teams that facilitated the Scholarship’s development. City and CCP partners learned about each other’s perspectives and asked tough questions about how to leverage existing resources and avoid redundancy. These conversations, they believe, strengthened the proposal and eased the approval process. The development team utilized CCP enrollment and completion data to support budget development through forecasting eligibility scenarios.

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<sup>4</sup> We refer to the Catto Scholarship in this report alternately as “Catto,” “the Catto Scholarship,” or “the Scholarship.”

<sup>5</sup> <https://www.pewtrusts.org/en/research-and-analysis/reports/2023/04/philadelphia-2023-state-of-the-city>

Respondents suggested shared political leanings and values around expanding education access and support in Philadelphia made it easier to make the case for the Scholarship. Additionally, some on the development team suggested that the initiative was a way for the City to “right-size” its investment in CCP. Finally, they noted that City representatives understood from the outset that they would help to build the Scholarship but would have to let go and trust CCP with the implementation, an additional indication of the strong relationships on the development team.

*“I think it felt very normal to us in Philadelphia that what we're ultimately trying to address is moving people out of poverty in a way that is sustainable. They have the skills, the ability to move into higher paying jobs. We want people to achieve their best and what they're capable of. I don't think it's much deeper than that.” – Catto Scholarship initiative designer*

### *The Catto Scholarship is rooted in an evidence-based model.*

Staff in the Mayor’s Office identified the City University of New York (CUNY) Accelerated Study in Associate Programs (ASAP) program as a model of an anti-poverty higher education initiative with strong evidence of effectiveness. The CUNY-ASAP program began in 2007 with a pilot cohort and has grown rapidly, with replication sites in California, New York, North Carolina, Ohio, Tennessee, and West Virginia. The CUNY-ASAP model is one of several Comprehensive Approaches to Student Success (CASS)<sup>6</sup> which have been the subject of several randomized control trials (RCTs) demonstrating the program’s impact on full-time enrollment, retention, credit accumulation, 2- and 4-year degree completion, transfer, and earnings<sup>7</sup> despite local adaptations in student supports. CCP has a formal partnership with the CUNY-ASAP|ACE National Replication team and has received tailored technical assistance and training for several years.

## How the Scholarship’s Design & Offerings Compare to Similar Initiatives

Free College or “Promise” programs have proliferated over the last 20 years as a strategy to increase college access and minimize student debt. These programs discount college tuition for students meeting a set of eligibility criteria. While they share the goal of making college more accessible to a broader population of students, these programs vary widely in their design.

### *Affordability, Access, Success: A Framework for College Promise Programs*

To support the field’s understanding of these models, RFA developed and published a framework in 2019 based on a 50-state scan and a two-year multi-site study (Figure 1).<sup>8</sup> The framework organizes program components along three key outcomes for learners: affordability, access, and

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<sup>6</sup> The Institute for College Access and Success has identified a set of promising initiatives that provide comprehensive supports to students to bolster completion: <https://ticas.org/our-work/college-completion-2/comprehensive-approaches-to-student-success-programs-nationwide-by-state-and-institution/>

<sup>7</sup> Linderman, D., & Kolenovic, Z. (2009). Early Outcomes Report for City University of New York (CUNY) Accelerated Study in Associate Programs (ASAP). *Unpublished report, City University of New York, NY*; Weiss, M. J., Ratledge, A., Sommo, C., & Gupta, H. (2019). Supporting community college students from start to degree completion: Long-term evidence from a randomized trial of CUNY’s ASAP. *American Economic Journal: Applied Economics*, 11(3), 253-297; Miller, C., Headlam, C., Manno, M., & Cullinan, D. (2020). Increasing Community College Graduation Rates with a Proven Model: Three-Year Results from the Accelerated Study in Associate Programs (ASAP) Ohio Demonstration. *MDRC*; Miller, C., & Weiss, M. J. (2022). Increasing community college graduation rates: A synthesis of findings on the ASAP model from six colleges across two states. *Educational Evaluation and Policy Analysis*, 44(2), 210-233; Hill, C., Sommo, C., & Warner, K. (2023). From Degrees to Dollars: Six-Year Findings from the ASAP Ohio Demonstration. *MDRC*.

<sup>8</sup> Callahan, M.K., et al. (2019). Affordability, access, and success: A framework for examining statewide college promise programs. Research for Action. <https://www.researchforaction.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/07/RFA-CollegePromise-Nov19-final.pdf>

success (or persistence toward and completion of a degree). Each outcome includes an essential lever for reaching the outcome. While this research draws primarily from statewide College Promise programs, it provides a framework for initiatives like the Catto Scholarship, to understand the critical levers to success at community colleges like CCP.

Figure 1: RFA's Framework for College Promise Programs



Source: Research for Action, 2019

**Affordability: Financial Resources.** The first part of the Framework addresses **Affordability**; that is, what financial resources are allocated through the program. Critical design differences include whether a program is first-, last-, or “middle”- dollar, as well as what the program covers. Last-dollar programs leverage federal, state, and local dollars before applying program funds, which means that program dollars can support a greater number of students. Additionally, while many programs cover tuition and sometimes mandatory fees, some programs provide additional resources to students such as stipends to support the additional costs of college. The Catto Scholarship is a “last-dollar” scholarship, like many other Promise programs, including CUNY-ASAP. Unlike the majority of Promise programs, Catto and CUNY-ASAP both provide additional financial support to students in the form of a monthly stipend and bookstore credit each term.

**Access: Eligibility and Messaging.** The second part of the Framework, **Access**, focuses on eligibility considerations as well as how the program is advertised to the public. Many programs include eligibility requirements such as in-state residency and financial need, as well as requiring students to complete a FAFSA or alternative state-approved financial application form. Some programs also have restrictions about when a student must apply for the program. The messaging of the program is important to consider, especially as many Promise programs advertise as “free college” despite only covering certain costs of college. This confusion and misunderstanding can lead to mistrust and can deter students from applying for and benefiting from the programs.

The Catto Scholarship, like most Promise programs, is a place-based scholarship. It is intended to serve Philadelphians and impact the local workforce and economy. As such, in order to be eligible for the Scholarship, students must have been residents of the City of Philadelphia for at least one year, and have graduated from a Pennsylvania high school (traditional public, public charter, parochial, private independent, homeschool) or earned a Commonwealth diploma by way of a high school equivalency (GED) program with fewer than 30 college credits accumulated, or a former CCP student with at least a 2.0 cumulative GPA who is returning after not taking classes for at least one year.

The fact that the Catto Scholarship extends eligibility to students who have previous college credits is a departure from most Promise programs, which are targeted at traditionally-aged students (those between the ages of 18-25) enrolling in college directly after high school graduation. The Scholarship leverages the CCP Marketing and Communications team to reach out to prospective students through email, digital ads, social media, radio and television ads, transit shelter posters, and in local high schools.

Catto, like CUNY-ASAP, permits students who indicate the need for remedial education upon entry. Students must place at college-level or one-level-below in either English, math, or both; this is a noteworthy difference from most Promise programs and removes a significant barrier for accessibility. Like many Promise programs, Catto is aimed at low-income students; there is an income cap of \$8,000 Expected Family Contribution (EFC) towards tuition.<sup>9</sup>

*Success: Program Requirements and Student Support.* The last component of the Framework is **Success**, which considers factors that support or undermine students' persistence through the program to a credential. Many programs require students to maintain full-time enrollment and a minimum GPA needed to remain eligible for the program. Other programs require students to complete activities such as advising and/or coaching sessions. While these activities are often grounded in best practices for student retention, they can also serve as barriers for students. This part of the Framework also considers any additional supports provided to students as well as limitations to what the program covers.

As in most Promise programs, Catto Scholars must enroll full-time; this design feature is tied to research suggesting that full-time enrollment is related to persistence and timely credential completion<sup>10</sup>. In order to remain eligible for the Scholarship, Catto requires that Scholars earn at least a 2.0 GPA which is a common minimal expectation to remain enrolled in Promise programs. The Catto Scholarship also requires that Catto Scholars meet monthly with their Success Coaches and participate in workshops each semester; these are additional requirements that many Promise programs do not have. With any additional requirement, it is important to understand whether these program components are experienced as the supports they are intended to be, or as obstacles that challenge students' ability to remain enrolled. Our understanding is that the Scholarship works to be as flexible as possible with Scholars to keep them enrolled rather than seeking to disqualify Scholars from the Scholarship.

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<sup>9</sup> Expected Family Contribution (EFC) determines a student's eligibility for federal and state aid and is calculated based on income information provided on the FAFSA or alternative application.

<sup>10</sup> A 2022 Complete College America report highlights discrepant outcomes between full- and part-time students while highlighting that part-time students are disproportionately Black, Indigenous, Latinx, People of Color students, community college students, and aged 25 and over. <https://completecollege.org/resource/parttimestudentsmustbeafulltimepriority/>

Table 1: RFA Framework Analysis of the Catto Scholarship

Framework Components	Catto Scholarship
<b>Affordability – Financial Resources</b>	
• Tuition only	
• Tuition and mandatory fees	
• Tuition and fees+	•
<b>Access – Eligibility Criteria</b>	
• Residency	•
• Time of Application Restriction <sup>a</sup>	•
• Merit	
• Financial Need	•
• FAFSA or alternative	•
<b>Access - Messaging</b>	
• Content of messaging	"Free college and the support you need to succeed"
<b>Success – Program Requirements</b>	
• Full time status required	•
• Maintain college GPA >2.0 <sup>b</sup>	
• Additional student commitment <sup>c</sup>	•
• Limits to use of Financial Award	
• Additional financial or non-financial supports provided <sup>d</sup>	•

<sup>a</sup> Catto requires that students have no more than 30 previous college credits.

<sup>b</sup> Catto does not require students to earn a GPA higher than 2.0; this design element promotes access.

<sup>c</sup> Catto requires students to maintain Philadelphia residency, attend monthly workshops and meetings with Success Coaches, and meet annual credit attainment milestones (20+ credits in year one; 42+ credits in year two).

<sup>d</sup> Catto provides students with additional wraparound support including a bookstore credit of \$500 each semester, a monthly direct payment for basic needs of \$275, and direct access to Catto financial aid advisors, tutors, resource and support specialists, and career connections staff.

## Enrollment Trends: Who are Catto Scholars?

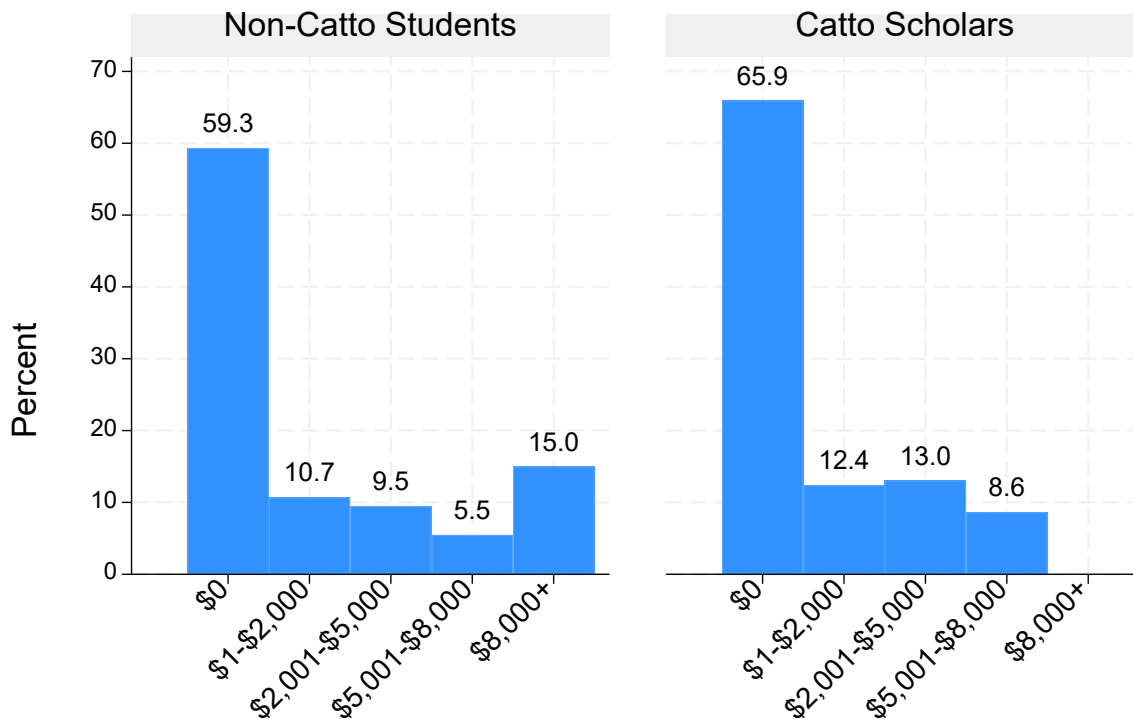
To understand the Catto Scholars in relation to CCP students without a Catto Scholarship, we analyzed income (as proxied for by Expected Family Contribution [EFC]), race and ethnicity, gender, age, and geography of Scholars. In accordance with the RFA's framework described above, our analysis sought to uncover how the Catto Scholarship is addressing affordability and access to postsecondary education and using its criteria to enroll Scholars.

In line with its anti-poverty mission, the Catto Scholarship is enrolling students from low-income and historically minoritized communities.

Catto Scholarship enrollment data and interviews with Catto Scholarship staff suggest that the majority of Catto Scholars are traditionally underserved by higher education institutions, indicating that the initiative is serving its intended student population.

Our analysis of college administrative data suggests that most Catto Scholars come from low-income families. Figure 2 shows the distribution of Catto and non-Catto CCP students by expected family contribution (EFC) capped at \$8,000 per the eligibility criteria.<sup>11</sup> The majority (65.9 percent) of Catto Scholars report an EFC of \$0 and 12.4 percent report an EFC under \$2,000. In comparison, 59.3 percent of non-Catto CCP students report an EFC of \$0, and 10.7 percent report an EFC under \$2,000. In interviews, Catto Scholarship staff noted that many Catto Scholars are first-generation college students. This observation is supported in the administrative data, which show that 66.3% of Catto Scholars are first-generation college students.<sup>12</sup>

Figure 2. Expected family contribution (EFC) for non-Catto CCP students and Catto Scholars enrolled in the Community College of Philadelphia (Spring 2021 – Fall 2023)



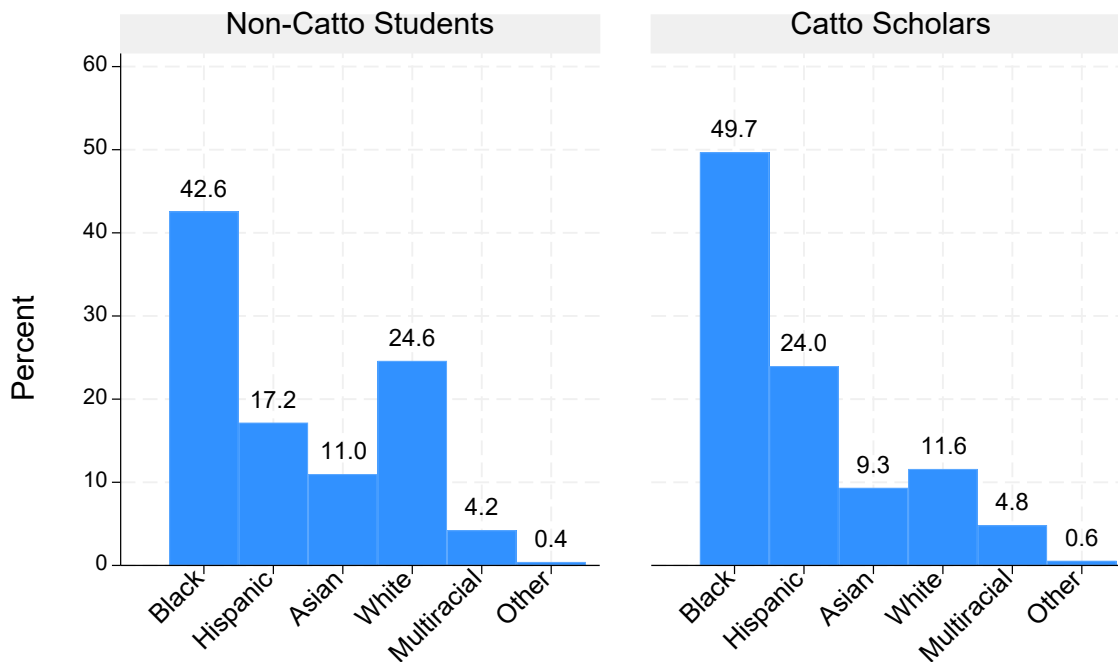
Notes: Authors' calculations of Catto Scholarship administrative data, Spring 2021 – Fall 2023. Sample is restricted to all students who enrolled in CCP in calendar year 2021 or after to align with the introduction of the Catto Scholarship. EFC represents students' first term EFC to align with Catto eligibility criteria, which is that EFC eligibility is determined on students' initial application. Students do not lose Catto Scholarship supports if their EFC rises above the \$8,000 cap in subsequent terms. N (non-Catto) = 9,622; N (Catto) = 1,906.

<sup>11</sup> In our analyses of administrative data, we define Catto Scholars to include all students who ever received Catto Scholarship supports. We note, however, that approximately 29.4 percent of all Catto Scholars were disconnected from the Scholarship during the study's observation period.

<sup>12</sup> We identify the percent of Catto Scholars who are first-generation students based on the sample of all Catto Scholars who enrolled in CCP in calendar year 2021 or after.

We next examined the distribution of student race/ethnicity by Catto Scholarship participation (Figure 3). Our analysis further demonstrates that the initiative is serving its intended population of students underserved by higher education institutions. The majority of Catto Scholars identify as Black (49.7 percent) or Hispanic (24.0 percent), communities that have historically experienced institutional barriers to college access and success. Catto Scholars are less likely to identify as white (11.6 percent) than CCP students at large (24.6 percent).

Figure 3. Racial/ethnic background of non-Catto CCP students and Catto Scholars at the Community College of Philadelphia (Spring 2021 – Fall 2023)



Notes: Authors' calculations of Catto Scholarship administrative data, spring 2021 – fall 2023. Sample is restricted to all students who enrolled in CCP in calendar year 2021 or after to align with the introduction of the Catto Scholarship. n (non-Catto) = 15,708; n (Catto) = 1,948.

While our data suggest that the Catto Scholarship is serving its intended population, we also see that the broader CCP student population generally resembles the Catto Scholarship's target population. **This suggests an opportunity for expansion of the Catto Scholarship to meet the needs of CCP students.** As noted above, 85 percent of non-Catto CCP students report an EFC below \$8,000 and would be considered low-income for the purposes of Catto eligibility. The overlap between Catto Scholars and non-Catto CCP students was also noted in interviews with staff, where staff shared their perception that Catto Scholars were largely similar to the rest of the CCP student population, except for the fact that they received more support. These authors note that another significant difference between Catto and non-Catto CCP students is that the overwhelming majority of CCP students are enrolled part-time (approximately 70.3%)<sup>13</sup>, and Catto requires full-time enrollment.

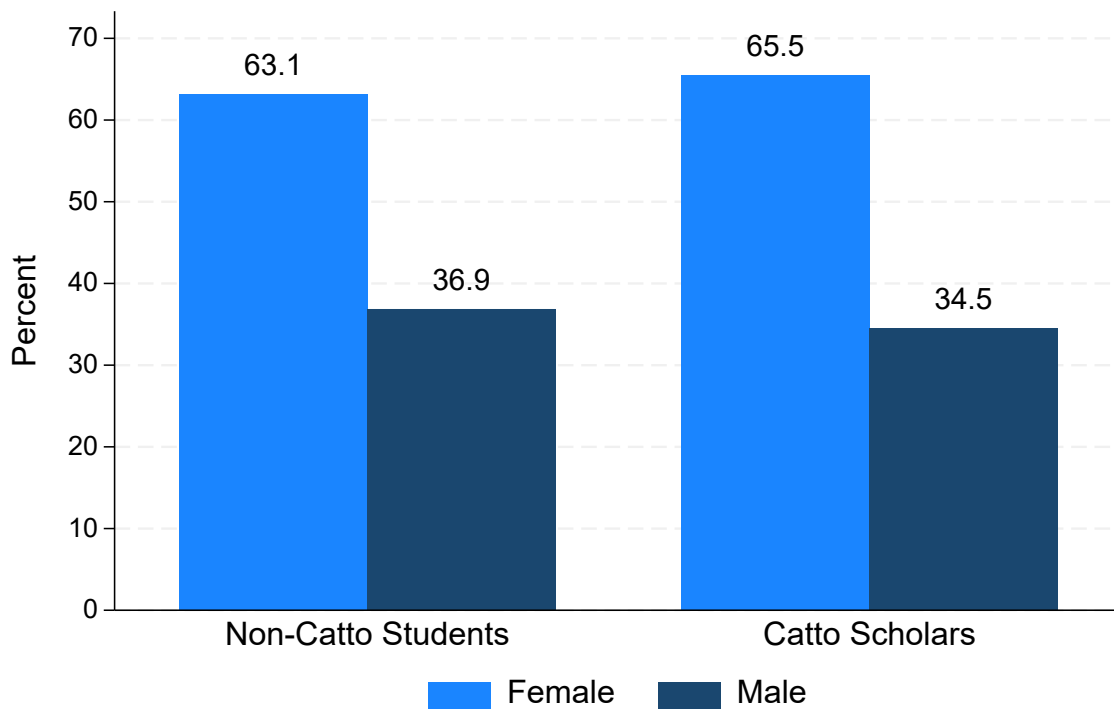
<sup>13</sup> We calculate part-time enrollment for CCP students based on the sample of all non-Catto CCP students who enrolled in CCP in calendar year 2021 or after.



*Catto Scholars are similar to non-Catto CCP students in terms of gender, but the Catto Scholarship enrolls a larger proportion of traditionally-aged students than their non-Catto cohorts.*

We also examined the gender and age distribution of Catto Scholars and their non-Catto CCP peers, shown below in Figures 4 and 5, respectively. We find that Catto Scholars and non-Catto CCP students are similar in terms of gender (Figure 4), with female students overrepresented in both groups, consistent with community college enrollment data nationally.<sup>14</sup> However, Catto Scholars tend to be slightly younger than the rest of the CCP student population (Figure 5). While the majority of Catto Scholars (55.3 percent) are 19 years old or younger, just under 40 percent (37.9) of non-Catto CCP students are younger than 19. This difference suggests that Catto Scholars are more likely to enter CCP directly from high school, which may reflect the Scholarship’s outreach and recruitment efforts.

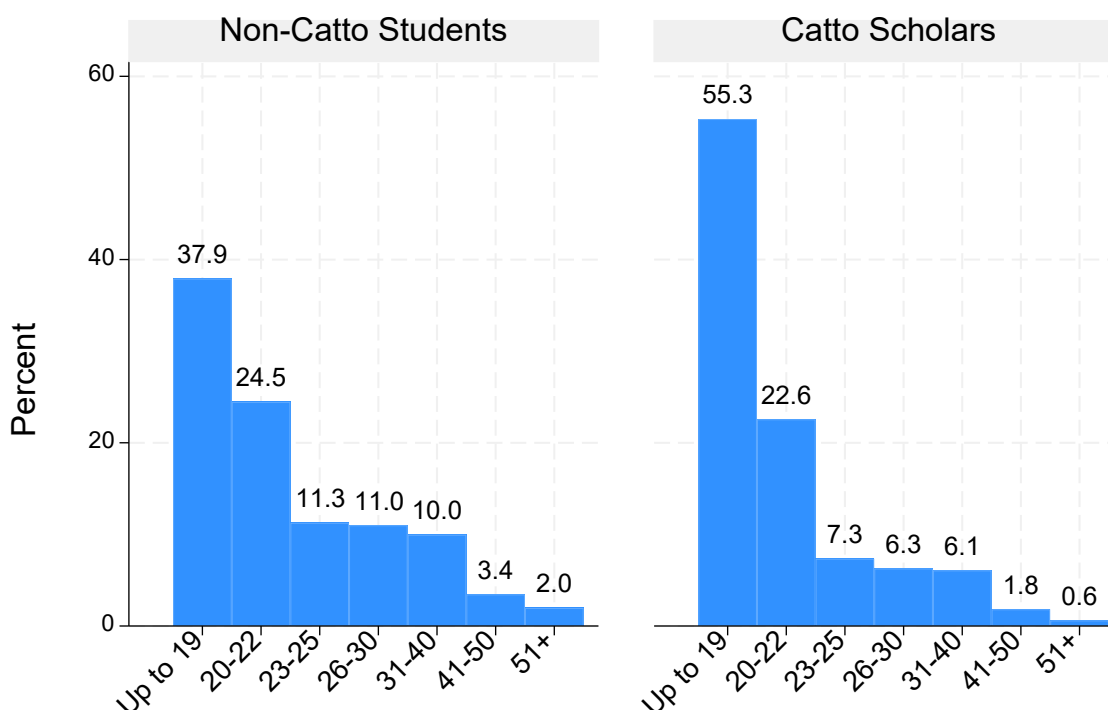
Figure 4. Gender of non-Catto CCP students and Catto Scholars at the Community College of Philadelphia (Spring 2021 – Fall 2023)



Notes: Authors’ calculations of Catto Scholarship administrative data, spring 2021 – fall 2023. Sample is restricted to all students who enrolled in CCP in calendar year 2021 or after to align with the introduction of the Catto Scholarship. n (non-Catto) = 16,001; n (Catto) = 1,950.

<sup>14</sup> <https://nscresearchcenter.org/current-term-enrollment-estimates/>

Figure 5. Age of non-Catto CCP students and Catto Scholars at the Community College of Philadelphia (Spring 2021 – Fall 2023)



Notes: Authors' calculations of Catto Scholarship administrative data, spring 2021 – fall 2023. Sample is restricted to all students who enrolled in CCP in calendar year 2021 or after to align with the introduction of the Catto Scholarship. n (non-Catto) = 16,117; n (Catto) = 1,977.

*The Catto Scholarship reaches students across the city and serves communities that reflect the geographic reach of the Community College of Philadelphia.*

To better understand who the Catto Scholarship serves, we explored where Catto Scholars and non-Catto CCP students lived during the study period. We found that the Catto Scholarship serves students across Philadelphia, largely reflecting the geographic dispersion of the broader CCP student population.

Figure 6 on the following page maps student enrollment by zip code for non-Catto CCP students and Catto Scholars, with enrollment mapped as the percent of total students from each zip code.<sup>15</sup> Darker shades indicate higher enrollment and lighter shades indicate lower enrollment. **Both Catto Scholars and their non-Catto CCP peers are geographically dispersed across the city, with no single zip code accounting for more than five percent (non-Catto CCP students) or eight percent (Catto Scholars) of students.** As shown in the bottom panel of Figure 6, the Catto Scholarship enrolls students from all but three Philadelphia zip codes.<sup>16</sup>

Additionally, and perhaps of more interest from an equity perspective, the distributions of enrollment across zip codes look relatively similar for non-Catto CCP students and Catto Scholars, though slightly greater concentrations of Catto Scholars from some neighborhoods in Philadelphia

<sup>15</sup> See Figures A1 and A2 in the Appendix for enlarged maps.

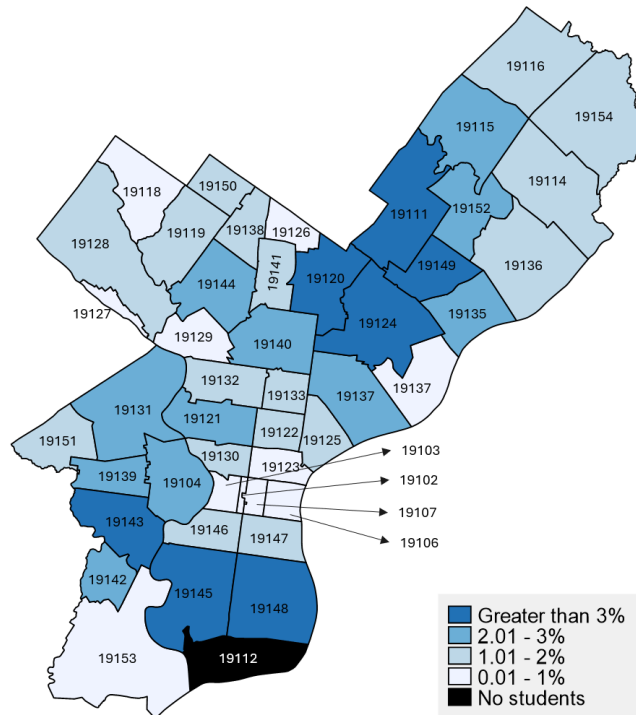
<sup>16</sup> The three zip codes from which there are no Catto Scholars are 19103, 19106, and 19112.

(zip codes 19144, 19140, 19132, 19134, 19135). This indicates that **the Catto Scholarship generally serves communities in proportion to their CCP enrollment, a sign of equitable outreach and enrollment.**

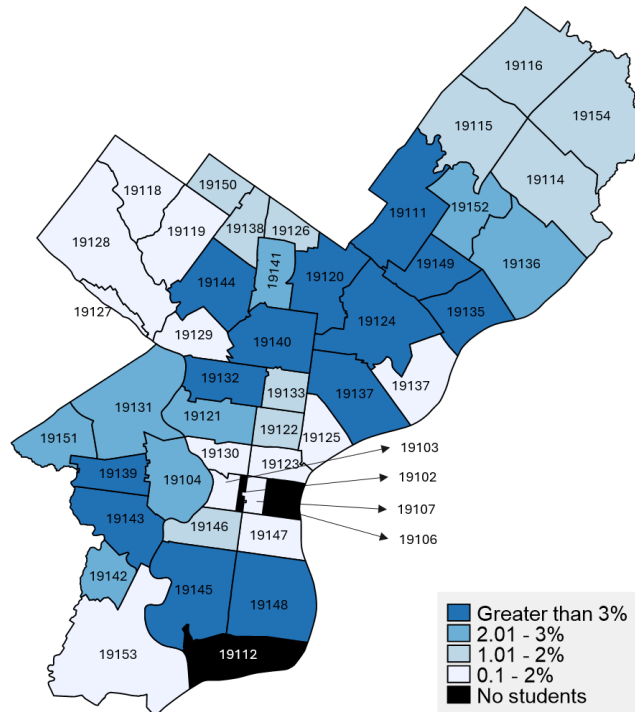
A Catto Scholar noted the role that the Scholarship plays in helping students imagine opportunities beyond their neighborhood:

*“[Catto] literally opens doors... Some people just feel hopeless. And they might be in a situation where they're in a part of the city that they don't want to be in, and this is allowing them to step outside of that and see something that is not their normal. Some people don't even come out of their block. They stay on their block for their entire life, but their kids might not want that. They might want to look out into the world and see, what can I actually do? What are the possibilities? And I feel like this Scholarship gives people the opportunity, even if your parents can't pay for school, even if you're working a minimum wage job.” – Catto Scholar*

Figure 6. Student enrollment by zip code (Spring 2021 – Fall 2023)  
**Non-Catto Students**



**Catto Scholars**



Notes: Authors' calculations of Catto Scholarship administrative data, spring 2021 – fall 2023. Map reflects levels of student enrollment calculated as the percent of total students within each zip code. Sample is restricted to all students who enrolled in CCP in calendar year 2021 or after to align with the introduction of the Catto Scholarship.  
 n (non-Catto) = 16,147; n (Catto) = 1,979.

## Early Academic Indicators of Success: Persistence, Retention, and Completion

In alignment with the RFA framework described earlier, the Catto Scholarship focuses on Success through a range of student supports delivered by staff who are attuned to the experiences of students. To assess early indicators of success, we compared Catto Scholars and non-Catto CCP students on three Success metrics: **Persistence**, defined as students who remain enrolled from the fall to spring within the same year, **Retention**, defined as students who remained enrolled from one fall semester through the next fall semester, and **Completion**, defined as the three-year degree completion rate.<sup>17</sup> In addition, we interviewed Catto Scholars to understand their experiences with initiative program supports and reflections on the role supports played in their academic journeys.

*First-time full-time Catto Scholars persist and are retained at higher rates than their first-time full-time non-Catto CCP peers.*

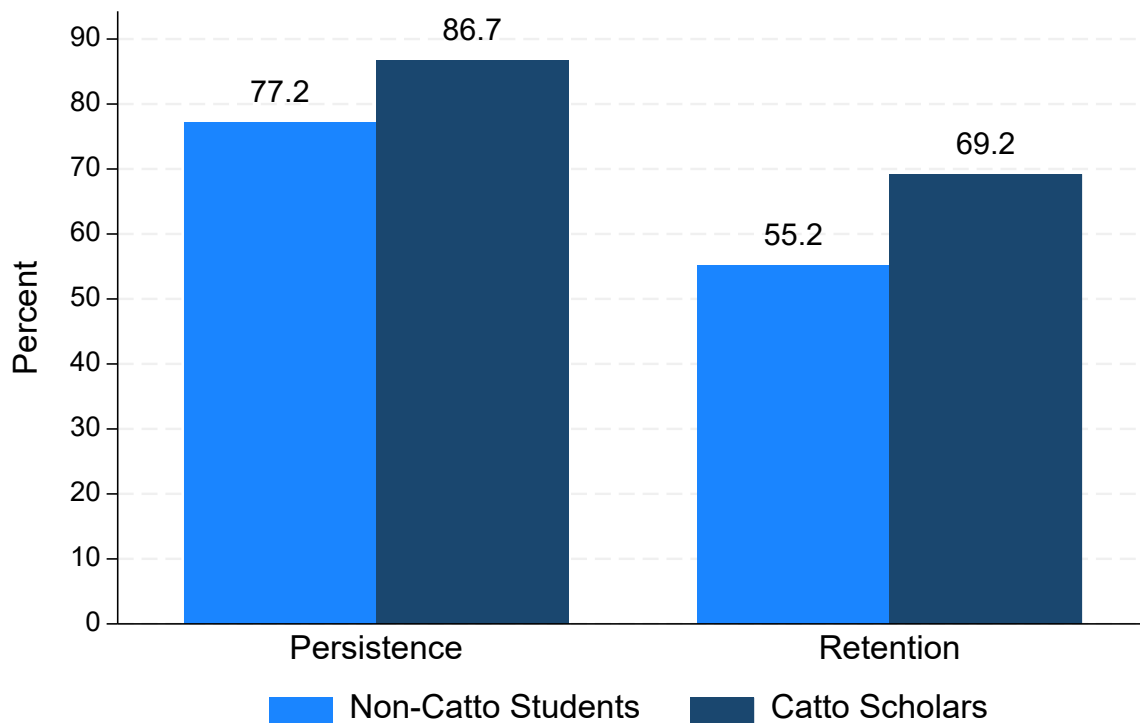
In Figure 7, we show average persistence and retention rates by Catto Scholarship participation, for the fall 2021 and fall 2022 cohorts of first-time, full-time students.<sup>18</sup> We find that, on average, **persistence and retention rates are higher for Catto Scholars than for non-Catto CCP students**. Note, because this is not a rigorous causal impact study that accounts for other differences between Catto Scholars and non-Catto CCP students that might explain persistence and retention differences, we cannot interpret our findings as evidence of the impact of the Catto Scholarship. However, the differences we see here represent positive outcomes for Catto Scholars.

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<sup>17</sup> We adopt definitions of persistence and retention from those used by the Community College of Philadelphia.

<sup>18</sup> In Figures 7 and 8, we restrict our sample of non-Catto CCP students and Catto Scholars to first-time, full-time students to be consistent with standard reporting practices. We note, however, that while Catto Scholars must maintain full-time status, they do not have to be first-time college students, and approximately 9.1 percent of all Scholars are not first-time students.

Figure 7. Persistence and retention rates for first-time full-time non-Catto CCP students and first-time full-time Catto Scholars at the Community College of Philadelphia (Fall 2021 – Fall 2023)



Notes: Authors’ calculations of Catto Scholarship administrative data. Persistence is defined as fall-to-spring. Retention is defined as fall-to-fall. Sample is restricted to the first-time full-time students in the entering fall 2021 and fall 2022 cohorts. Persistence and completion rates shown here reflect cohort averages, with values here representing the overall average across cohorts. n (non-Catto) = 1380; n (Catto) = 721.

Among Catto Scholars, 86.7 percent persist beyond their first semester compared to 77.2 percent for non-Catto CCP students, a difference of 9.5 percentage points. Approximately 70 percent (69.2 percent) of Catto Scholars are retained into their second year compared to 55.2 percent of non-Catto CCP students – a difference of 14 percentage points. The gap between Catto Scholars and non-Catto CCP students widens from persistence to retention, which suggests that **differences in Success outcomes between Catto Scholars and non-Catto CCP students increase over time.**

*Catto Scholars credit their persistence to their relationships with Catto Scholarship staff and a sense of belonging engendered by the initiative.*

In interviews, Catto Scholars reported that the Catto Scholarship provides an environment where they feel supported and valued throughout their college journey and had given them the “best chance to succeed.” The Catto Scholarship offers a robust network of support systems, including workshops, dedicated tutors, and academic advising, and ensures that students receive support and advocacy from staff that foster a sense of trust and security. Catto Scholars described Success Coaches as understanding, empathic, and passionate, and reported feeling a connection with Coaches regardless of background and reported that Success Coaches respond to the needs that may arise for each student. Catto Scholars also reported that the vulnerability and personal sharing by Success Coaches about their own struggles helped them feel that Coaches are trustworthy and helped some students who were initially hesitant to open up.

Additionally, Catto Scholars frequently described Catto Scholarship staff as advocates for them, addressing needs beyond – but integral to – academics. Catto Scholars highlighted the initiative’s holistic focus on student wellbeing and academic growth and reported benefiting from these additional layers of support. Finally, Catto Scholars reported developing connections with their peers, creating a community throughout the initiative. Many Catto Scholars we spoke with have a strong sense of connection and belongingness to the program.

*“[What’s] different [about Catto] from the other [scholarship programs] is that how much they care... they want you to be a part of this community. It’s not just a Scholarship. It’s a community of people that want to see you succeed. It’s a good feeling having a community of people wanting you in this space with them. People are loving you, taking care of you.” – Catto Scholar*

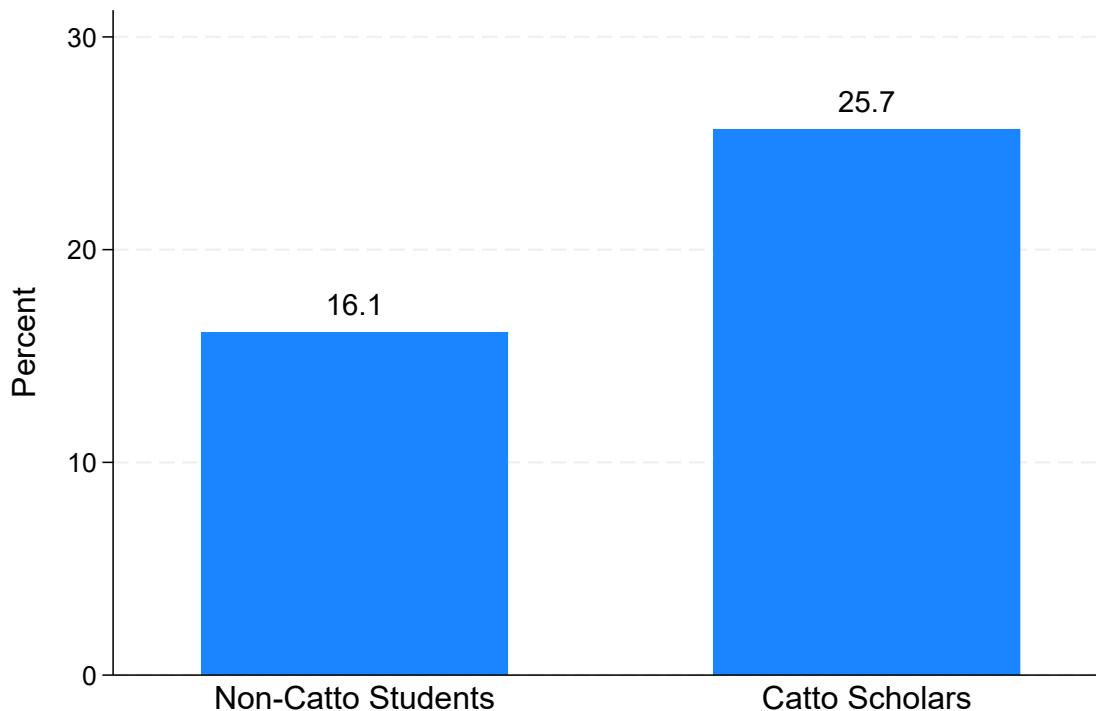
### *First-time full-time Catto Scholars have higher rates of associate degree completion relative to first-time full-time non-Catto CCP peers.*

A primary goal of the Catto Scholarship is to support Scholars towards successful degree completion. To this end, our analysis focuses on three-year completion rates given the initiative’s three-year duration and its aim of helping students towards timely degree attainment.<sup>19</sup> We examined completion for the 2020-21 academic year cohort, the first cohort of students with a three-year completion rate since the launch of the Catto Scholarship in Spring 2021. This is an early indicator for the initiative, with only 113 Catto Scholars included in the analysis. Yet, the results are promising.

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<sup>19</sup> The Catto Scholarship sets and monitors internal degree completion metrics as programmatic goals for progress monitoring and continuous improvement; these goals are set based on historical rates of degree completion in CCP prior to the introduction of the Catto Scholarship. We focus our analysis on three-year degree completion to be consistent with the broader literature on last-dollar scholarship programs (e.g., Kolenovic, Z., Linderman, D., & Karp, M. M. (2013). Improving student outcomes via comprehensive supports: Three-year outcomes from CUNY’s Accelerated Study in Associate Programs (ASAP). *Community College Review*, 41(4), 271-291.)

Figure 8. Three-year associate degree completion for first-time full-time non-Catto CCP students and first-time full-time Catto Scholars in the Community College of Philadelphia (Fall 2020 – Fall 2023)



Notes: Authors' calculations of Catto Scholarship administrative data. Sample is restricted to first-time, full-time students entering in the fall 2020 or spring 2021 cohorts. Completion rates shown here thus reflect the average 3-year degree completion for the 2021 academic year cohort, which includes the fall 2020 and spring 2021 cohorts pooled together. We recognize that reporting for an academic year cohort does not align with traditional reporting practices that typically track fall cohorts; however, we construct the academic year cohort here to allow us to observe a 3-year degree completion rate for the first academic year for which the Catto Scholarship was introduced (spring 2021). It is likely that 3-year completion rates may be higher in later cohorts of Catto Scholars, given that the Scholarship launched in the spring 2021 semester so Scholars in the cohort shown here only received one full semester of Catto supports in AY 2020-21.

Figure 8 above shows three-year degree completion rates for the fall 2020 and spring 2021 cohorts of first-time, full-time Catto Scholars and their non-Catto CCP peers. **We find that Catto Scholars experience higher rates of associate degree completion, on average, relative to non-Catto students at CCP.** The average three-year degree completion rate for Catto Scholars is 25.7 percent compared to 16.1 percent for non-Catto CCP students, a difference of 9.6 percentage points.<sup>20</sup>

<sup>20</sup> When we restrict the sample here to exclude Catto Scholars who were disconnected from the Scholarship (n=81), the 3-year associate degree completion rate for first-time full-time Catto Scholars increases to 90.6%. This indicates that Scholars who are able to maintain eligibility for continued Scholarship supports are also likely to graduate, and that an area of focus for the Catto Scholarship team may be to support Scholars' continued participation in the Scholarship.



### *Catto Scholarship components are important for completing a degree.*

The Catto Scholarship is advertised as “*Free College and the Support you Need to Succeed.*” Indeed, Catto Scholarship services appear to be crucial for students’ engagement and success in college. Scholars reported greatly enjoying and benefiting from the diverse workshop offerings on motivation, wellness, and resume-building. Monthly check-ins with Success Coaches have been described as brief and effective, providing valuable support and academic guidance and much-needed encouragement. **Scholars appreciate the comprehensive support system that the Catto Scholarship offers, viewing it as a “job” that holds them accountable in their personal and academic life.** Catto Scholars expressed appreciation for the additional financial support for books and other expenses, which allows them to focus on their schoolwork. The “one-stop-shop” nature of the Catto Scholarship, with dedicated tutoring, advising, and additional supports all housed within one space, enhances the accessibility of resources and support.

*“Having somebody waiting for you at the finish line like, “I’m proud of you.” I think that’s something that the Scholarship really does. And the advisors too, I think they’re super great people and I think at the end of the day, they’re right behind you talking about your achievements and stuff like that. I think they’re also really proud of you and they just see these two years you’re with them and connected with them and getting to know them. It’s a really good experience.” – Catto Scholar*

### *Catto Scholars vary in their experiences by age and educational format, with implications for equity.*

Although we find promising evidence of positive outcomes of the Catto Scholarship, we also note that Scholars reported varying experiences by age and education modality (i.e., in-person, remote, hybrid). These differences carry important equity implications for how Scholars experience the Catto Scholarship supports and services. To support equitable experiences and outcomes, there may be opportunities to design differential and targeted supports that meet the needs of the Catto Scholarship’s diverse students.

***The role of age in shaping the needs and experiences of Catto Scholars.*** Catto Scholars who are older than 25 stated in interviews that having life experience has helped them feel more adept at managing the challenges that come with being a student, such as managing multiple responsibilities. Many stated that they have served as role models and mentors to younger Scholars, encouraging their engagement in group workshops. Traditionally-aged students also face additional challenges outside of school; staff noted their perception that housing insecurity seems to disproportionately affect younger Scholars. At the same time, Catto staff noted that Catto Scholars who are older than 25 may need additional support, particularly those who are returning to school after a long absence and/or working multiple jobs.

***The role of modality in shaping the needs and experiences of Catto Scholars.*** Catto Scholars who attend school in a hybrid or online modality reported that they tend to have less engagement with the full range of supports compared to Catto Scholars who attend school in-person. Administrative data show that the percent of Catto Scholars who attend college fully online has ranged from 39.8% in the fall 2021 semester to 16.8% in the fall 2023 semester, for an average of 27.3% across the five semesters.<sup>21</sup> While many workshops are offered virtually, Scholars who attend in-person benefit from in-person office hours, workshops, and the on-campus community of Catto Scholars. Catto Scholars who attend school fully online spoke to a lack of community and shared their perception that getting support from professors would be easier if they were on campus.

## Catto Scholarship Assets and Infrastructure

The Catto Scholarship’s sustainability and quality relies heavily on dedicated resources and staff. These intensive case management models require creative and supportive staff who can leverage additional resources as needed to address students’ needs. One component of the CUNY-ASAP model is reducing the caseload for advisors<sup>22</sup>; the model recommends a 150:1 ratio which is much lower than traditional postsecondary caseloads. The Catto Scholarship’s structure and success is undergirded by dedicated staff, supportive supervision, and alignment with the initiative’s values and mission.

*The Scholarship attracts high-quality, dedicated staff who view this work as their calling.*

Our conversations with Catto staff, particularly Success Coaches, indicated that the individuals serving in this role consider their work a vocation and more than just a job. They reported being honest and vulnerable about their own educational journeys, sharing their stories to help Catto Scholars understand they are not alone. They indicated that Catto Scholars responded favorably to staff’s “raw” stories and “being real” about the struggles of college. Success Coaches shared that they felt it was important to be responsive and follow-up about small things as a way of demonstrating to Catto Scholars that they care and “won’t let them fall through the cracks.” Success Coaches spoke of being drawn to the work, with some indicating that it was their “dream job, just without the dream salary.” Staff expressed pride in the trust bestowed by Catto Scholars and the difference they were making.

Beyond the technical responsibilities of the job which include tracking students’ credits and clearing flags in the college’s early alert system, Success Coaches also reported picking up books when a Catto Scholar wasn’t able to get to the bookstore before closing, helping them negotiate their salary in a new position, and reviewing their transfer applications. Success Coaches shared that they enjoyed helping Catto Scholars stay on track academically and made a point to celebrate their accomplishments, because they recognize that students may not have anyone else cheering them on.

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<sup>21</sup> We calculate the percent of Catto Scholars who attend fully online as the number of enrolled Catto Scholars taking courses online only divided by the total number of enrolled Catto Scholars in a given semester. We exclude the spring 2021 semester (the first semester of the Catto Scholarship), as 100% of Catto Scholars attended college online due to COVID-19.

<sup>22</sup> CUNY-ASAP staff called “advisors” are what the Catto Scholarship refers to as Success Coaches.

*"I love what I do. I love being [in] a student-facing role. And especially it makes it so heartwarming when the students are like, "Thank you so much. If it wasn't for you, I wouldn't be this far." And I'm like, "Oh, you want to make me cry." It is heartwarming. This is where I want to be. And I could literally do this forever as long as they pay me. I just love it here. I love the culture, I love what I do." – Success Coach*

### *Staff report that they are trained and supported well by their supervisors.*

Training and support for case management staff in a program like Catto is critical. Staff reported that they received well-organized onboarding, indicating that their handbook was helpful. Staff appreciated the opportunity to shadow more experienced staff and gradually phase into a full caseload and having a Catto-provided cell phone to support appropriate work/life boundaries. Staff reported that their caseloads were manageable, and praised an internal Teams chat for all on-campus crisis response partners, facilitating quick mobilization of resources when needed.

### *Supervisors are intentional about hiring staff who are mission- and culture-aligned.*

In our interviews with Catto leadership, Success Coach supervisors reported that they recruit staff with case management experience and strong people skills, who are going to advocate for Catto Scholars. They emphasized the importance of compassion and flexibility for the individuals serving in this role, as well as creativity and a willingness to challenge structural barriers. Supervisors noted that they explicitly look for individuals who have experienced similar challenges to those experienced by Catto Scholars, those who feel called to this work, and will “bring their heart.” Supervisory staff also indicated that they sought individuals who would complement the existing group dynamic, recognizing that staff work well together and lean on each other. Leaders shared their pride in the growth of the Catto Scholarship and its ability to support students on a “sliding scale of need,” echoing the importance of the quality of the staff.

*"It's really important to me that we have a positive, cohesive, strong organizational culture where folks really want to be here because they love the work, but also feel appreciated and seen and respected. I think that that piece of the puzzle is critical to our success. We can have all the funding for last-dollar tuition and basic needs and all of those things. We can have the right amount of staff, but if folks are coming and they're not able to be fully present, then I think we really erode our potential when it comes to impact." – Catto leader*

## Opportunities for Continued Growth and Partnership

Based on interviews with Catto staff and Scholars and the current literature on College Promise and similar programs, RFA offers the following three recommendations and next steps to consider as the Scholarship team continues to refine the model.

Our recommendations are to:

1. Identify or create additional wraparound resources to support Catto Scholars
2. Build out infrastructure and supports for Success Coaches
3. Create more community building opportunities among Catto Scholars

## 1. Identify or create additional wraparound resources to support Catto Scholars

Interview respondents noted that additional supports would be helpful in a few key areas: housing, mental health, childcare, and transportation. The Scholarship is aware of these needs and is already working on initiatives that will address many of these challenges. We offer these additional suggestions in support of their work.

**Housing.** Staff shared that many Scholars use their monthly stipends for rent, going without groceries, which they attributed to the cost of living in Philadelphia: “Our monthly disbursement that we give them, [for] a lot of them, that’s a portion of their rent. They don’t even get to use it for transportation or to go get some groceries or stuff like that.” One Success Coach described the level of housing insecurity as “outlandish,” and another estimated that between 10-15% of Catto Scholars lacked consistent secure housing. Success Coaches also noted that this was more prevalent among younger than older Catto Scholars. Success Coaches indicated that family and housing issues presented enormous challenges for Scholars, including dealing with legal issues regarding the inhabitability of their residences.

**Mental health supports.** Success Coaches universally lamented the lack of adequate and sufficient mental health resources for Scholars. They noted that mental health referrals are common and that there are insufficient accessible services available in the city.

**Childcare.** There is currently no subsidized childcare available to students on campus.

**Transportation.** Staff advocated for partnership talks with SEPTA, suggesting that CCP should follow the model of other higher education institutions and provide access to discounted transportation for Scholars.

### *Next steps to consider:*

- *Explore additional community partnerships to support short- and long-term housing solutions.* Housing insecurity among college students is a national issue,<sup>23</sup> and many 2- and 4-year colleges are developing creative responses, including partnering with other institutions and non-profit organizations to offer subsidized housing,<sup>24</sup> providing vouchers that can be used at local hotels,<sup>25</sup> and matching students in need of short-term housing with community member hosts.<sup>26</sup> Catto staff shared that in addition to housing insecurity, many Scholars are dealing with legal issues related to their housing. It is critical for Catto staff to know when and how to make referrals to local non-profit legal experts<sup>27</sup> who can support low-income students in navigating legal issues related to their housing.

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<sup>23</sup> Butler, N. & Torres, F. (August 2023). Housing Insecurity and Homelessness among College Students. <https://bipartisanpolicy.org/blog/housing-insecurity-and-homelessness-among-college-students/>

<sup>24</sup> Affordable Rents for College Students, a collaboration between campuses and non-profits in Oregon is one example. <https://chnw.org/arcs/>

<sup>25</sup> Los Rios Community College Foundation has an Emergency Hotel Program for Homeless Students. <https://foundation.losrios.edu/where-to-give/give-to-our-students/emergency-hotel-program-for-homeless-students>

<sup>26</sup> Housing Options for Students Today is a partnership between North Carolina State University and local community members. <https://www.hostnc.org/>

<sup>27</sup> <https://clsphila.org/services/housing>; <https://philalegal.org/consumer-housing-unit>

- *Develop innovative approaches to address mental health challenges.* In the wake of COVID-19, our country's awareness of, and willingness to seek treatment for, mental health has increased, while the nation's supply of practitioners has decreased.<sup>28</sup> To address this challenge, many colleges have engaged in partnerships with community resources, in addition to developing innovative strategies such as providing mental health first aid training<sup>29</sup> to faculty and staff and creating peer-to-peer resources.<sup>30</sup>
- *Invest in childcare supports.* The rising cost of high-quality childcare is unaffordable for many families<sup>31</sup>, creating barriers for college students with children, including the 13.8% of Catto Scholars who have children.<sup>32</sup> Catto staff mentioned that subsidized childcare was no longer available at CCP. Catto should consider partnering with local community organizations and childcare providers to offer discounted rates to Catto Scholars.
- *Continue conversations about transportation supports.* Some members of the Catto development team mentioned that they had engaged in discussions about offering Scholars SEPTA Keycards or providing other kinds of transportation support. Recognizing that transportation can be a barrier for Scholars, we recommend continuing this conversation and working toward a resolution that will ensure that Scholars have additional low-cost transportation options.

## 2. Build out infrastructure and supports for Success Coaches around data collection and caseloads

In interviews with Success Coaches and Catto Scholars, two areas for improvement related to infrastructure and supports emerged: support for data collection and reduced caseloads.

**Support for data collection.** Part of the Success Coach job is documenting contacts with students and collecting data for the research team. Success Coaches shared that they face challenges in collecting data efficiently. In some cases, Success Coaches have designed data collection tools to support this process due to a lack of existing tools, and expressed the desire for data collection tools built out for them to allow them to spend more of their time focusing on Scholars' needs. They stressed the desire for additional support to gather relevant data for their large caseloads (Coaches reported having ~150 students each). As the Scholarship grows so should data support for the staff. Success Coaches play a crucial role in the Catto Scholars' experience, and providing more support to these staff can lead to better Scholar outcomes. Success Coaches expressed the need for improved integration and support between themselves and the data team. This integration is essential for enhancing the Scholarship's ability to measure impact and promote team collaboration.

**Reduced caseloads.** While staff did not raise concerns about their caseloads, Scholars suggested that staff caseloads were too heavy. Reducing the caseload may not only prevent burnout among staff but also offer better support to Scholars. One Scholar shared their perception that Success Coach caseloads impacted the responsiveness of their Success Coach:

<sup>28</sup> Weiner, S. (August 2022). A growing psychiatrist shortage and an enormous demand for mental health services. <https://www.aamc.org/news/growing-psychiatrist-shortage-enormous-demand-mental-health-services>

<sup>29</sup> Mental Health First Aid is an evidence-based, early intervention course. <https://www.mentalhealthfirstaid.org/>

<sup>30</sup> RADical Hope is a peer-to-peer mental health support program. <https://radicalhopefoundation.org/>

<sup>31</sup> <https://www.dol.gov/newsroom/releases/wb/wb20230124>

<sup>32</sup> We identify the percent of Catto Scholars with children based on the sample of all Catto Scholars who enrolled in CCP in calendar year 2021 or after.

*"I wish their caseload wasn't so heavy. From my understanding, they have 140 students per success coach, and there's 11 success coaches or whatever. If they had less students, I think it would help a little bit, 'cause sometimes I don't get a response for a week, 'cause she is busy." – Catto Scholar*

*Next steps to consider:*

- ***Expand the data team to include a data liaison.*** There are currently two staff dedicated to managing the data for the Catto Scholarship. These staff members are primarily focused on producing reports that monitor the progress of Catto Scholars and demonstrating the effect of the Catto Scholarship. Adding a data liaison, someone whose primary role is working with the student-facing staff to understand their needs and support their data collection, might help Success Coaches spend more time providing supports to Scholars. The data liaison might develop data collection tools and work to improve integration between the teams to ensure good data are being collected as efficiently as possible.
- ***Hire more Success Coaches to reduce caseloads.*** The Catto initiative prides itself on having low Catto Scholar-to-Success Coach caseloads, aiming for 125:1, similar to adaptations of the CUNY-ASAP program at Bronx Community College<sup>33</sup> and in Ohio.<sup>34</sup> Catto Scholars expressed that, due to the varying and complicated needs that students are facing while attending college, caseload size is still impacting their experience of the program. While the literature is clear that advisor caseloads should be “manageable”<sup>35</sup> there is no universally recommended number. We recommend that Catto experiment with caseload size and composition (e.g., program/major clusters, level of need<sup>36</sup>) to minimize the load on student-facing staff.
- ***Consider additional ways to support and compensate staff.*** Our research demonstrates the value of the Catto staff, so we encourage efforts to retain them and prevent burnout. Some staff shared the concern that their salary was not a livable wage, and while some reported that work/life balance was not an issue, others seemed to struggle to set appropriate boundaries, given their workloads. The literature on compassion fatigue, “the traumatization of helpers through their efforts at helping others,”<sup>37</sup> and burnout among social work and health care providers is a useful and applicable reference. We encourage the Catto team to consider attending to staff mental health and wellness. We encourage the Catto team in collaboration with the City which funds the scholarship, to explore additional financial benefits that might be offered to boost morale. Finding opportunities to

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<sup>33</sup> Cormier, M., Sanders, J., Raufman, J., & Strumbos, D. (2019). Scaling Success: Lessons from the ASAP Expansion at Bronx Community College. CCRC Research Brief. *Community College Research Center, Teachers College, Columbia University*.

<sup>34</sup> Miller, C., Headlam, C., Manno, M., & Cullinan, D. (2020). Increasing Community College Graduation Rates with a Proven Model: Three-Year Results from the Accelerated Study in Associate Programs (ASAP) Ohio Demonstration. *MDRC*.

<sup>35</sup> Feygin, et al. (2022). Advising for college success: Next steps for policymakers, practitioners, and researchers. <https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED626636.pdf>

<sup>36</sup> CUNY-ASAP sorts students into high-, medium-, or low-support levels to manage caseloads.

<sup>37</sup> Potter, P., Deshields, T., Divanbeigi, J., Berger, J., Cipriano, D., Norris, L., & Olsen, S. (2010). Compassion Fatigue and Burnout. *Clinical journal of oncology nursing*, 14(5).

acknowledge and celebrate staff, providing formal and informal check-ins, and nurturing community building among staff, can also support staff retention.<sup>38</sup>

### 3. Create more community building opportunities among Scholars

Scholars expressed a desire for more community-building opportunities. Research suggests that relationships with peers and faculty at community college help students feel a sense of belonging and bolster their retention, particularly among racially minoritized populations.<sup>39</sup> Scholars suggested that the Catto Scholarship “Academic Brush-up” might be considered an opportunity to meet others and initiate community building. One Scholar we spoke to suggested creating a buddy system within the initiative. Having a buddy might offer students a form of social accountability, especially for Catto Scholars who attend college fully online (16.8% in the fall 2023 semester) and who may find it challenging to feel socially connected.

#### Next steps to consider:

- *Experiment with cohort or learning community approaches.* Social connectedness can be challenging in the community college context because students typically commute to campus. CUNY-ASAP, the model for Catto, includes a requirement that students take classes together as a cohort. The program suggests that these cohorts encourage students to develop study groups and attend tutoring together, which facilitates the development of social networks.<sup>40</sup> This cohort or learning community model is grounded in the research on integration as a key component of retention, and suggests that this model can promote engagement, belongingness, and retention.<sup>41</sup>
- *Develop a buddy/peer-mentor system.* While the initiative has recently developed a Catto Ambassador program, Catto Scholars expressed interest in a buddy system, which might involve pairing Catto Scholars up within or across cohorts to support their social integration. It may be worth considering pairs of Catto Scholars who are close in age as well as cross-age peers, building on what we heard from older Catto Scholars who felt that they were able to help their younger peers open up and ask for help.

#### Additional recommendations from Catto Scholars

Catto Scholars were appreciative of the many resources and supports that the Scholarship provides and offered additional suggestions to improve the Scholarship experience. Catto Scholars requested that additional consideration be given to **providing support to alumni**, to smooth the transition out of the program; relatedly Scholars expressed a desire for **partnerships with local four-year schools that include wraparound supports** to support transfer. Additionally, some indicated that **communication and outreach about the initiative**, including eligibility, should be expanded, so

<sup>38</sup> Kim, H., & Stoner, M. (2008). Burnout and turnover intention among social workers: Effects of role stress, job autonomy and social support. *Administration in Social Work*, 32(3), 5-25.

<sup>39</sup> Strayhorn, T. L., & Johnson, R. M. (2014). Black female community college students' satisfaction: A national regression analysis. *Community College Journal of Research and Practice*, 38(6), 534-550; Strayhorn, T. L. (2012). Satisfaction and retention among African American men at two-year community colleges. *Community College Journal of Research and Practice*, 36(5), 358-375.

<sup>40</sup> Kolenovic, Z., Linderman, D., & Karp, M. M. (2013). Improving student outcomes via comprehensive supports: Three-year outcomes from CUNY's Accelerated Study in Associate Programs (ASAP). *Community College Review*, 41(4), 271-291.

<sup>41</sup> Engstrom, C. M., & Tinto, V. (2008). Access without support is not opportunity. *Change*, 40(1), 46-50; Otto, S., Evins, M. A., Boyer-Pennington, M., & Brinthaup, T. M. (2015). Learning communities in higher education: Best practices. *Journal of Student Success and Retention*, 2(1).

that more students can learn that this is an opportunity for them. Scholars suggested that **providing snacks** at in-person workshops might bolster attendance, although they also requested that **more virtual workshops** be offered. Catto Scholars specifically requested workshops on career-specific topics. Scholars suggested that **tutoring topics** be expanded, and that it would be beneficial to **vary Success Coach meeting times**, noting that if meetings with Success Coaches were offered during evenings and weekends could support accessibility for those who work and/or have children.

*Next steps to consider:*

- *Invest in supporting alumni transitions.* The Catto Scholarship provides up to three years of intense wraparound supports, after which Catto Scholars transition either to continued higher education or to the workforce. This transition out of a wraparound program can be difficult,<sup>42</sup> and many Catto Scholars and staff advocated for additional supports to alumni. We encourage Catto leadership develop a survey to learn from alumni which supports would be most helpful, to consider utilizing alumni as mentors for current Catto Scholars in the program,<sup>43</sup> and to cultivate additional partnerships with local four-year institutions that include continued wraparound support.
- *If possible, expand Catto eligibility to serve additional students, including part-time students.* Catto Scholars see higher rates of success than their non-Catto peers but are demographically similar. While this is not direct evidence of impact, the results are promising. We suggest that future research examine the causal impact of the Catto Scholarship, and if there is evidence of impact on persistence, retention, and completion outcomes for students, the initiative could be scaled, including enrolling additional students such as part-time students. While most Promise programs deem part-time student ineligible, there is research suggesting that part-time student completion can also be improved through the provision of additional supports.<sup>44</sup>
- *Offer snacks at in-person workshops.* Offering snacks at in-person workshops is a common practice to bolster attendance, particularly for students who are low-income and tend to experience food insecurity. These workshops may also be an opportunity to provide information about on-campus food pantry resources, SNAP benefits,<sup>45</sup> and local low-cost food options. We encourage Catto leadership to consider workshops as an outreach opportunity to address food insecurity and leverage community partnerships.
- *Survey Catto Scholars on workshop topics to ensure relevance.* While Catto Scholars generally reported high satisfaction with the workshop offerings, it may be worth

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<sup>42</sup> Program participants of Promise program often request additional support during transition: Escobar, C., Friedmann, E., & Tovar, S. (2023). More than just money? Early outcomes of Lake Tahoe Community College (LTCC) College Promise Program. *New Directions for Community Colleges*, 2023(203), 49-61.

<sup>43</sup> Several mentoring and wraparound programs include alumni as staff or mentors for students. Some examples: Tull, R. G., Rutledge, J. C., Carter, F. D., & Warnick, J. E. (2012). PROMISE: Maryland's Alliance for Graduate Education and the Professoriate enhances recruitment and retention of underrepresented minority graduate students. *Academic Medicine*, 87(11), 1562-1569; The Women in Natural Science program at the Academy of Natural Science: <https://ansp.org/education/programs/wins/>

<sup>44</sup> Collom, G. D. (2023). A quasi-experimental investigation of adult student enrollment responses to the Tennessee Reconnect Grant. *Community College Journal of Research and Practice*, 47(7), 478-493.

<sup>45</sup> A waiting room intervention increased participants' use of SNAP benefits in this study: Cohen, A. J., Richardson, C. R., Heisler, M., Sen, A., Murphy, E. C., Hesterman, O. B., ... & Zick, S. M. (2017). Increasing use of a healthy food incentive: a waiting room intervention among low-income patients. *American Journal of Preventive Medicine*, 52(2), 154-162.



periodically surveying them about additional topics they would like to see explored in workshop formats.

- *Offer evening and weekend appointments with Success Coaches.* Because many Catto Scholars are working and/or juggling other responsibilities while attending school, some evening and/or weekend appointments with Success Coaches should be offered to alleviate scheduling challenges. To minimize impact on Success Coaches, we suggest rearranging their schedules so that these hours would be offset by having time off during the regular work week.

## Conclusions

This report summarizes early learnings from the Catto Scholarship initiative. Drawing on a mixed-methods design, including a review of similar initiatives, interviews with Scholarship developers, staff, and Scholars, as well as analysis of administrative data, this report situates the Catto Scholarship within the broader field of last-dollar scholarship programs and identifies early successes with regard to enrollment, persistence, retention, and completion.

The findings indicate that the Scholarship is expanding college Affordability, Access, and Success for Philadelphians who might have otherwise lacked a path toward social mobility.<sup>46</sup> The Scholarship serves primarily students from low-income and minoritized communities and who are generally representative of the broader CCP population. Early indicators of success for the Catto Scholarship include higher rates of persistence, retention, and completion for Catto Scholars relative to their non-Catto CCP peers. Scholars largely credit this success to the Catto staff, and particularly the Success Coaches, whom Catto Scholars view as mentors who help them maintain academic progress and direct them to resources that address non-academic needs that might otherwise become barriers to academic success. Catto Scholars and staff alike express pride and gratitude for the Catto Scholarship and the community that it has built. Within these broad successes, however, we learned of salient differences in how Catto Scholars experience the program – particularly across lines of age and education modality – which indicate growth opportunities.

Our report concludes with evidence-informed recommendations, drawn from conversations with Catto staff and Scholars as well as broader learnings from the field, to support and sustain the Catto Scholarship. Our recommendations intend to support the work of the Scholarship as an important initiative with the potential to lift Philadelphians out of poverty and put them on the path to success. We note that our study and associated recommendations reflect early evidence of the Catto Scholarship as the initiative continues to develop, and we suggest that future research expand on this report through more rigorous evaluation of the Catto Scholarship's impact on students' postsecondary success.

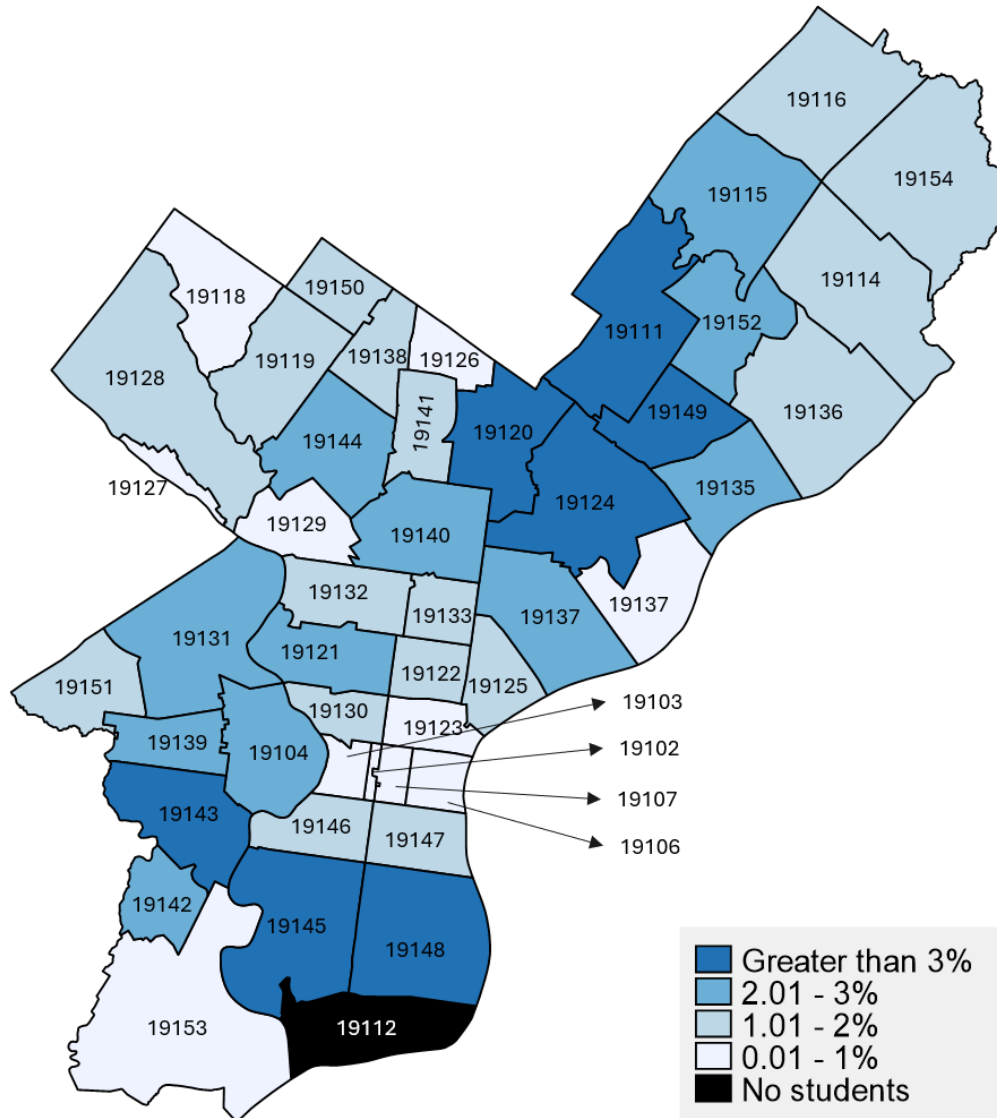
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<sup>46</sup> Research for Action, 2019

## Appendix

Figure A1. Student enrollment by zip code: Non-Catto CCP students in the Community College of Philadelphia

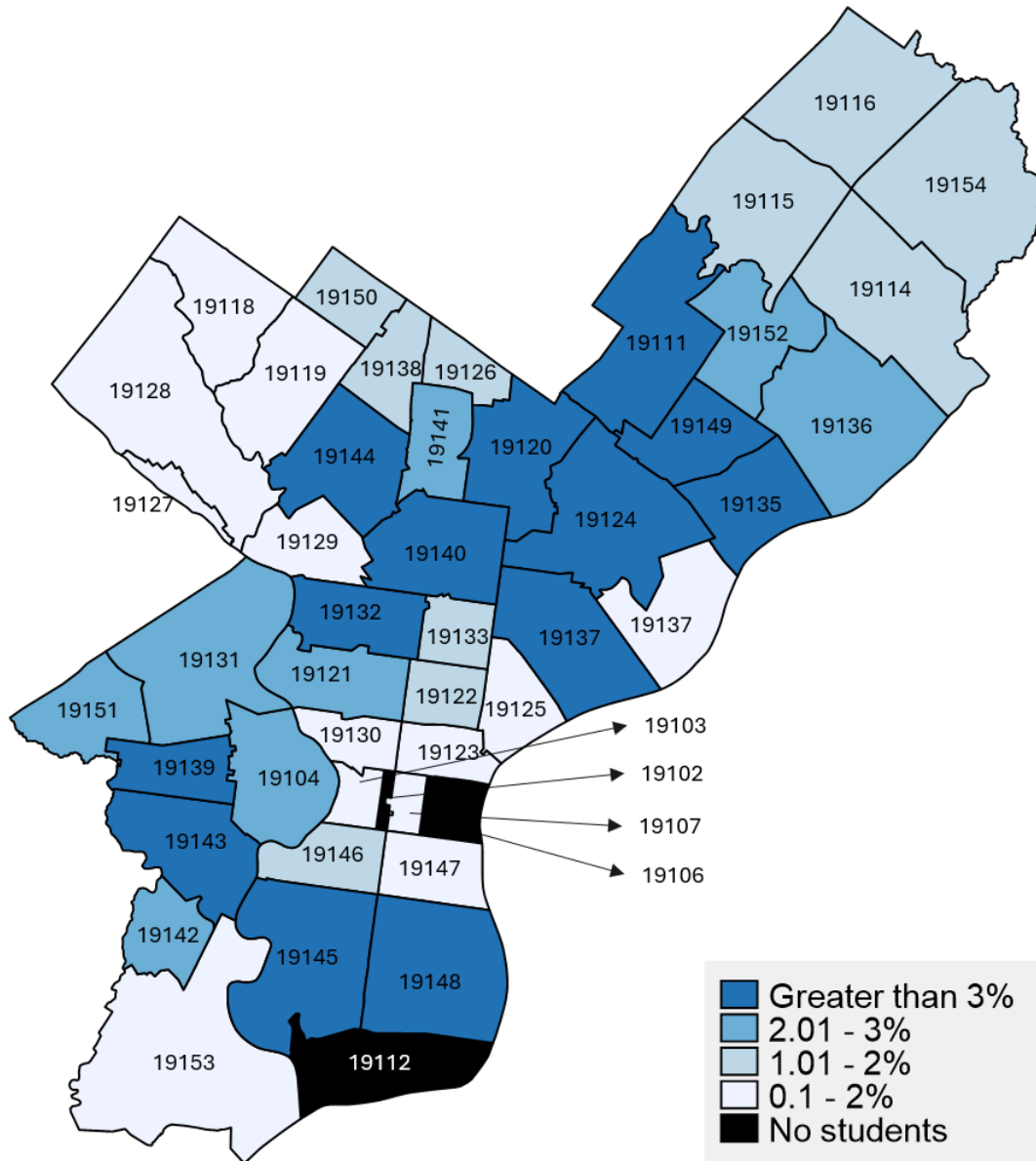
### Non-Catto Students



Notes: Authors' calculations of Catto Scholarship administrative data, spring 2021 – fall 2023. Map reflects levels of student enrollment calculated as the percent of total students within each zip code. Sample is restricted to all students who enrolled in CCP in calendar year 2021 or after to align with the introduction of the Catto Scholarship. n (non-Catto) = 16,147; n (Catto) = 1,979.

Figure A2. Student enrollment by zip code: Catto Scholars in the Community College of Philadelphia

## Catto Scholars



Notes: Authors' calculations of Catto Scholarship administrative data, spring 2021 – fall 2023. Map reflects levels of student enrollment calculated as the percent of total students within each zip code. Sample is restricted to all students who enrolled in CCP in calendar year 2021 or after to align with the introduction of the Catto Scholarship. n (non-Catto) = 16,147; n (Catto) = 1,979.