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BUILDING KNOWLEDGE TO IMPROVE SOCIAL POLICY

WICHE LAC Meeting

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"Supporting students to boost retention and completion"

Alexander Mayer, Director, Postsecondary Education

Michelle Ware, Senior Associate, Postsecondary Education

About MDRC

- Nonprofit, nonpartisan organization with experience conducting demonstrations in postsecondary education

Specializes in:

- Finding what works
- Random assignment evaluations
- Qualitative studies
- Program enhancement & technical assistance

National college completion problem

- Less than 40% of students who start at community college earned a degree or credential within 6 years of enrolling.

- Large achievement gap in community colleges
  - Hispanic students: 12 percentage points lower than white students
  - Black students: 19 percentage points lower than white students

- Adults and rural students also have lower completion rates.

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Why are college completion rates low?

Academic Challenges

Financial Barriers
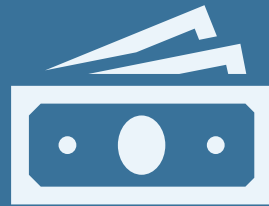
Work-Life-School Balance

Lack of College Know-How

Institutional Barriers

Postsecondary Interventions + Policies
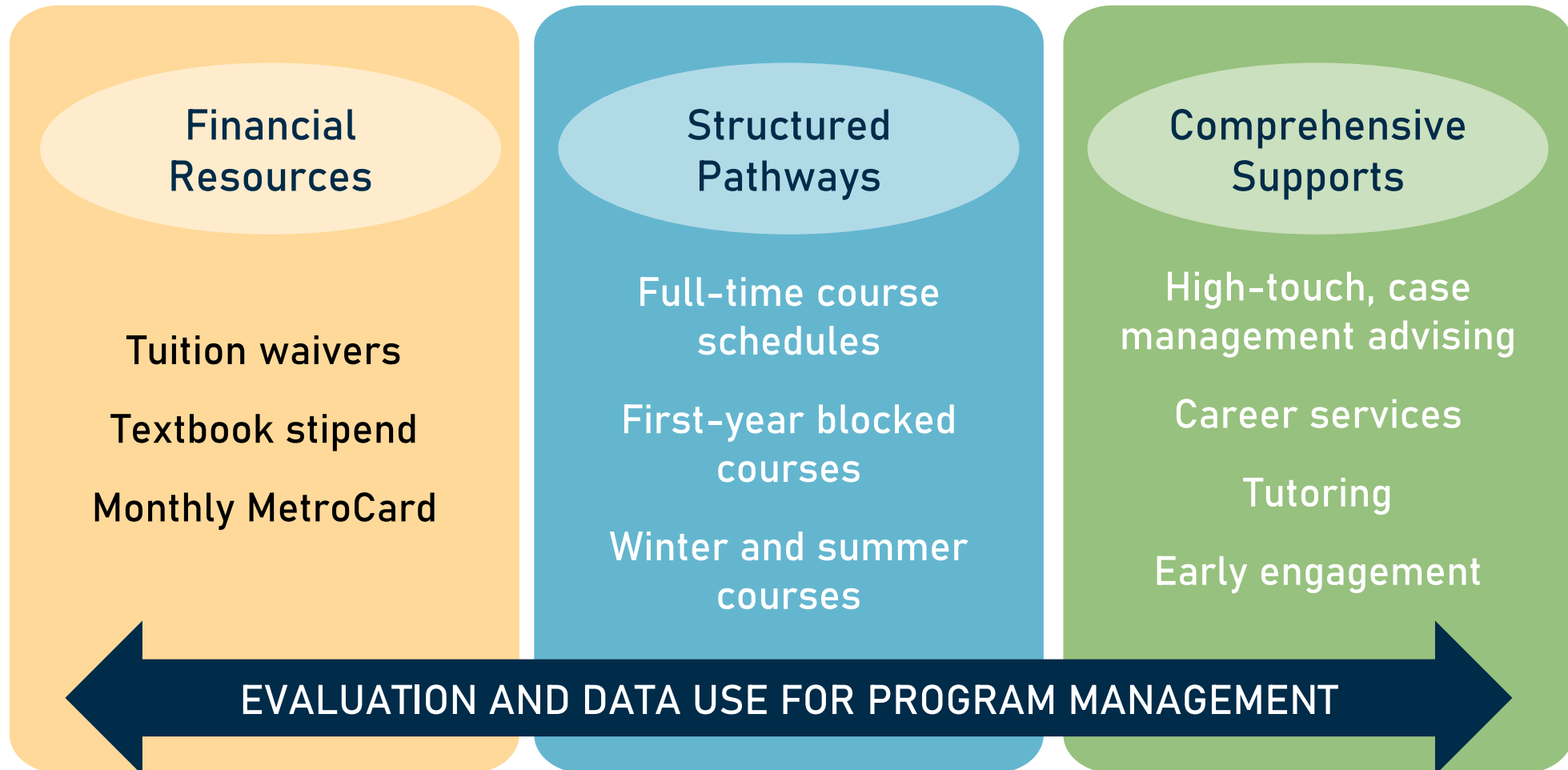
What does the evidence say?

Evidence for Short-term interventions

- **Short-term** interventions designed to address just one or a few barriers can lead to positive, but modest, effects

- Examples of intervention components:
  - Financial aid
  - Learning communities
  - Developmental education reform
  - Coaching/Advising
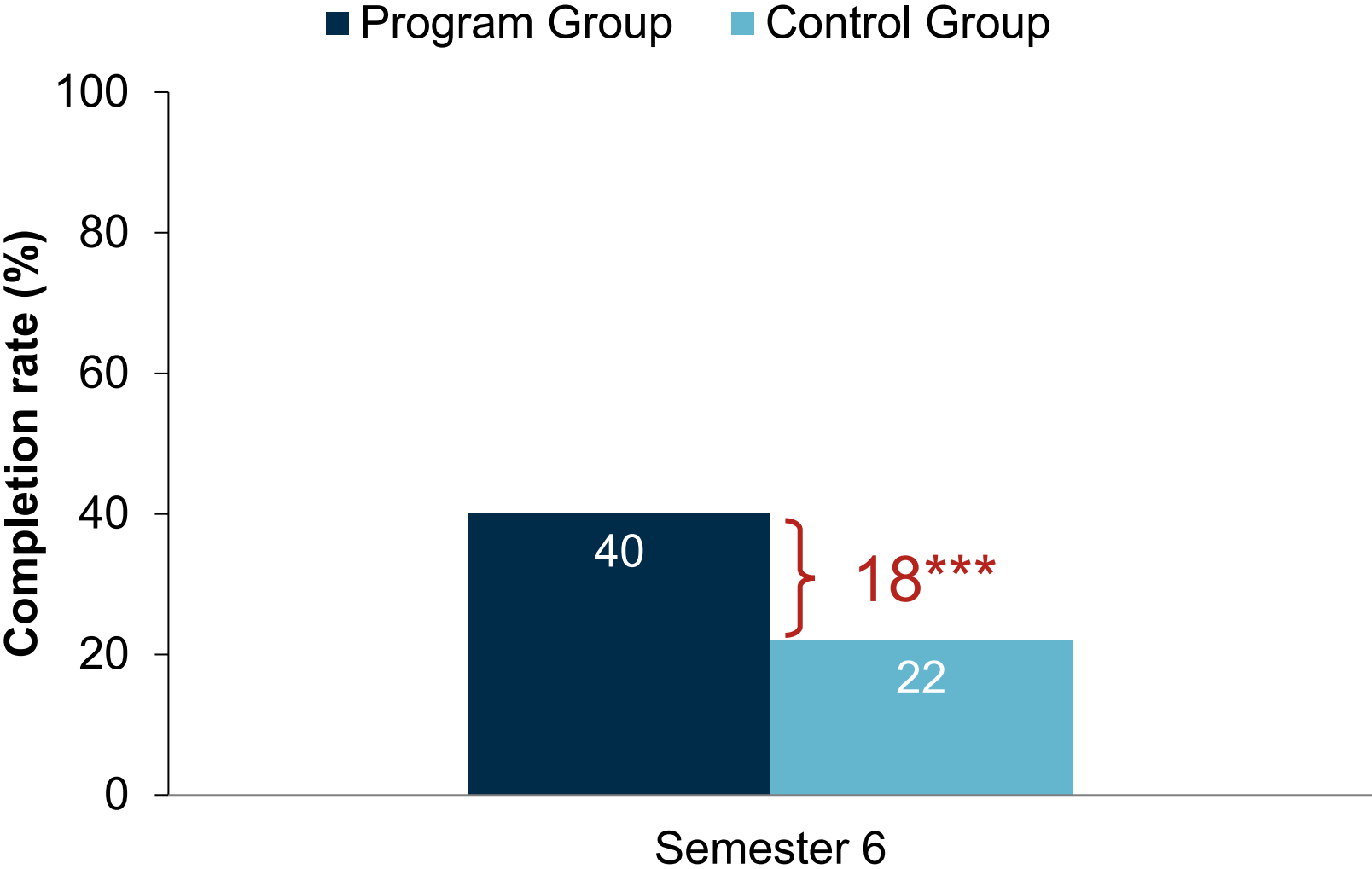 - Summer engagement
  - Outreach + communication

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Big Picture: What Works

- **Comprehensive programs** that combine strategies and are **sustained over time** can dramatically impact completion.

- Examples:

  - CUNY ASAP

  - ASAP in Ohio

  - Project Quest

  - Bottom Line

  - One Million Degrees

  - Valley Initiative for Development and Advancement

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CUNY ASAP Program Model

Financial Resources

Tuition waivers

Textbook stipend

Monthly MetroCard

Structured Pathways

Full-time course schedules

First-year blocked courses

Winter and summer courses

Comprehensive Supports

High-touch, case management advising

Career services

Tutoring

Early engagement

EVALUATION AND DATA USE FOR PROGRAM MANAGEMENT

College Completion Strategy Guide

- Summarizes the research and provide clear policy guidance for strategies to increase college completion
    - Salient, relevant, and actionable
    - Centers Equity
    - Clear standards for evidence
- Leverages the expertise of MDRC, SHEEO, The Education Trust, and TICAS
- **16** briefs in production with **28** authors representing **17** organizations and universities

Implementing Evidence-based Strategies

What does implementation look like?

SUCCESS

Scaling Up College Completion Efforts for Student Success

Multi-faceted, long term program that builds on MDRC's 15 years of postsecondary research

Combines the most effective elements and uses existing resources to create lower-cost programs that are more likely to be sustained and scaled

SUCCESS Model

Coaches who reach out **proactively** and meet **frequently** with students

Financial incentives to encourage students to satisfy program requirements and to provide additional funding

Programs that serve students for at **least three years** and focus on strategies to increase **academic momentum.** Students earn 24 credits per year through **full-time** enrollment in main semesters and summer term enrollment.

Management information systems (MIS) that provides data to support program management and improvement

Commitment to program **affordability** and **sustainability** by **leveraging** and **consolidating existing resources**

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Building SUCCESS

1. Streamline program model – focused on multiple components with the strongest evidence-base

2. Strengthen state partnerships – state agencies support state expansion efforts

3. Align with existing initiatives and priorities – states and colleges find efficiencies

4. Focus on ROI – annual costs and long-term returns

SUCCESS

Bakersfield College, California

SUCCESS at Bakersfield College

Integrated with Kern Promise and Guided Pathways

SUCCESS Implementation Research Lessons

1. Students highly value coaching.

   a) Students reported asking for help with a variety of issues, both personal and academic.

2. Students are facing information overload.

3. Students desire community and support in the virtual college world.

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SUCCESS Student Quotes

"They say it takes a village to raise children. Well, it also takes a village to help you get through college when you have children and work a full-time job…my coach is always there for me to talk to and help get me through issues."

"Without my coach I might have dropped out after a bad experience…I was so discouraged and wanted to give up. But she called me, and I was able to be honest and express what was going on. She helped me through it."

"My coach makes me more accountable…I know our appointment is always coming up, and I want to tell them good news."

Tools for Postsecondary Schools

California, Hawaii, Montana

What is Tools for Postsecondary Schools (TfPS)?

- MDRC researchers and practitioners discuss **components of evidence-based comprehensive student supports strategies** to help close the success gap for students from low-income families and students of color.

- Over 30 colleges across 10 states participated in monthly, **interactive** workshops. Focused on **putting research into practice** in ways that make sense for the state and campus context.

- State higher education leaders in the 10 states participated in two learning community events. Discussed best practices for how state leaders can help **scale and financially sustain comprehensive support strategies statewide.**

- WICHE state participants: CA, MT, HI

Tools for
Postsecondary Schools
Putting Evidence to Work for Student Supports   @MDRC

What are the six topics?

Student-Centered Program Design

Core Components of High-Impact Coaching

Data Management for Continuous Program Improvement

Behavioral Science Principles for Effective Communications

Encouraging Academic Momentum

Return on Investment & Financial Sustainability

Tools for Postsecondary Schools
Putting Evidence to Work for Student Supports   @MDRC

MONTANA 10

Montana's Office of the Commissioner of Higher Education (OCHE) and participating colleges participated in TfPS to learn best practices to maximize student supports in their Montana 10 project.

Financial Supports
Scholarships
Textbook Stipends
Monthly Incentives

Academic Momentum
Full time Schedule
Corequisite Math & Writing
Tutoring

Purpose & Belonging
Specialized Advising
Career Development
Orientation
Freshman Seminar

Montana 10's components are:

Financial Supports - scholarships, textbook stipends, monthly incentive

Academic Momentum - full-time schedule, corequisite math and writing tutoring

Purpose & Belonging - specialized advising, career development orientation, freshman seminar
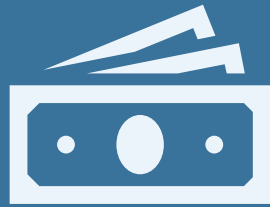
Implementing evidence-based practices

1. Build on the evidence. There is room to experiment and grow

2. Align with campus and state priorities

3. Focus on understanding student needs and their experiences especially coming out of the pandemic

4. Focus on equity and addressing institutional practices that may continue to support inequalities.

5. Align staffing and monetary resources to support implementation

Resources

MDRC resources for states and campuses

ROI Tool

https://www.mdrc.org/intervention-roi-tool

Strategy Guide

https://www.mdrc.org/college-completion-strategy-guide

Discussion and Q&A