



College Initiatives Redefined

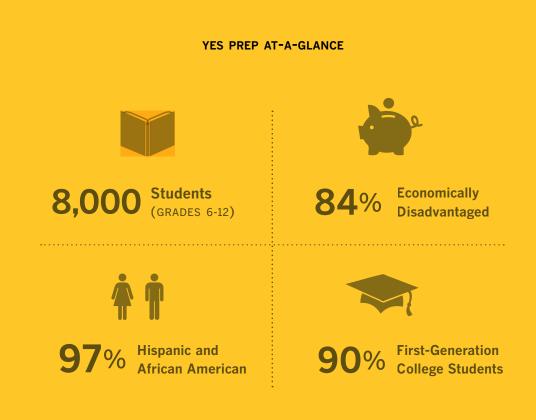
A RESPONSIVE APPROACH TO COLLEGE COUNSELING & ALUMNI SUPPORT

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YES Prep Public Schools is a network of thirteen high-performing public charter schools serving 8,000 students in grades 6-12 in the Houston area and opening our doors to the students of Memphis, Tennessee, in 2015. Founded in 1998 and winner of the inaugural Broad Prize for Charter Management Organizations in 2012, YES Prep exists to increase the number of students from low-income communities who graduate from a four-year college or university prepared to compete in the global marketplace and committed to improving disadvantaged communities.



ST. MARY'S UNIVERSITY

Executive Summary

This past spring, YES Prep graduated over 450 high school seniors, and we will see over 97% of them matriculate to colleges and universities across the country. This is an incredible accomplishment for our students, the majority of whom reside in some of Houston's highest poverty neighborhoods. More than 90% of our 1,700 alumni are first-generation college students.

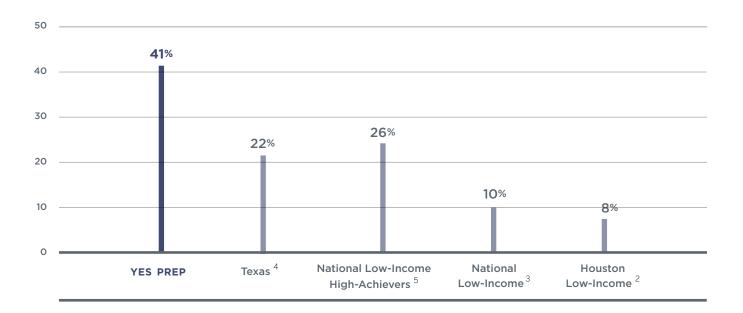
We are heartened that over 72% of our alumni are either still persisting in college or have graduated, and that, since 2001, 44% of our total alumni have earned their college degrees. Our six-year college graduation rate currently stands at 41%.¹ This rate is significant: our students are graduating from college at five times the rate of their peers in Houston² and more than quadruple the rate of their peers nationally.³

Yet, we are still not where we need to be, and we have learned some hard lessons along the way.

Though our students have continually outpaced national college graduation statistics for low-income and students of color, our rates initially began to falter as our graduating classes grew. Our six-year graduation rate for the Class of 2005 is 50%, but for the Class of 2006, that rate dropped to 45% and to 34% for the Class of 2007.

We worked hard to study why. We concluded that we cannot assume college matriculation inevitably leads to college graduation or that a rigorous academic program is all our students need to set them up for success in college.

Our students are graduating from college at **5***X* the rate of their peers in Houston and more than **4***X* the rate of their peers nationally.



SIX-YEAR COLLEGE GRADUATION RATES

In order to improve our graduation rate as we continue to grow, we have layered in new programs and supports for our students that prepare them to overcome the nonacademic and financial hurdles they face in college. This more holistic approach to college counseling and alumni support, including a far higher-than-average number of college counselors and formal partnerships with nearly 30 colleges and universities, is rectifying our early shortcomings and raising college persistence and graduation rates.

The major programs we put into place to correct our early missteps focused on:

- Revising and Expanding our College Initiatives Model
- 2 Formalizing Alumni Support
- (3) Collaborating with Higher Education
- 4 Tackling College Affordability

With the implementation of these new efforts in 2006, our graduating class in 2008 began college significantly more prepared. Their six-year graduation rate rose to 46%. Looking at our later classes, we are seeing their persistence rates rise, as well. For the Class of 2010, for example, at the end of their fourth year of college, a full 73% are still persisting. And for the YES Prep Classes of 2010-2012, 87% have persisted to their sophomore year compared to a national freshmen to sophomore persistence rate of approximately 72%, regardless of ethnicity or income level.⁶

Building on the fundamentals of our current programming, we are expanding our college counseling and alumni support into a sustainable, scalable system for the future success of our graduates. For the YES Prep Classes of 2010–2012, **87%** have persisted to their sophomore year compared to a national freshmen to sophomore persistence rate of approximately **72%**, regardless of ethnicity or income level.

Our goal is for at least 80% of our alumni to earn college degrees within six years of high school graduation. To accomplish this audacious goal, we know we have to keep raising the bar to analyze our data, refine our programs and respond with urgency to problems and opportunities.

With this paper, we set out to share our experiences, strategies and results with the goal of aiding K-12 and higher education institutions across the country in their efforts to make college graduation a reality for more students. We are far from having all the answers to the national crisis of low college persistence for students from low-income communities, but we have made some strong inroads towards clearing the path to college graduation for many more of our students. We are committed to continuing to put our resources and focus towards finding replicable pathways that lead to high rates of college success for all students across the U.S.



A Unique Place Within Both Local & National Contexts

A fully-grown YES Prep campus has approximately 900 students and serves grades 6-12. Currently, 97% of our students are Hispanic and African American, 84% are categorized as economically disadvantaged, and over 90% will be first-generation college students.

The Texas educational landscape where we operate has both great need and great opportunity. A full 20% of Texas adults lack a high school diploma or its equivalent; this is worse than almost any other state in the nation.⁷ College readiness is also behind: 50% of college freshmen in Texas are enrolled in remedial or developmental education, according to the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board, compared with 28% across the United States. The result is that only 26% of Texas adults currently hold a bachelor's degree. That number climbs to a mere 31% when you add in associate's degrees – as opposed to a higher 39% average nationally. For every 100 Texans of any race or economic background who enter college, only 13 are expected to earn a bachelor's degree in 8 years.⁸

Combine these sobering statistics with the current population trends in Texas. A full 50% of Texas students are classified as low-income.⁹ In Houston, 25% of the population is classified as Limited English Proficiency,¹⁰ and 67% of the city's population is Latino and African American.¹¹ These latter two groups are also the two least likely in Texas to graduate from college. Without positively changing the educational outcomes for low-income communities and students of color, the futures of our city, state and nation are bleak. Population trends in the rest of the country are beginning to follow those of Houston, meaning that the solutions we are able to find here can point the way for the rest of the country.

For every **100** Texans of any race or economic background who enter college, only **13** are expected to earn a bachelor's degree in 8 years.

Statistics reveal that making it to and through college is one surefire strategy for breaking the poverty cycle and eradicating the racial and economic opportunity gap. Yet, college graduation figures are consistently discouraging for populations such as those who attend YES Prep.

YES Prep has managed to change what is possible for students from low-income communities. With this paper, we aim to share provable methods for changing what have for too long been tragically static outcomes in hopes of increasing college access and graduation rates for all students across the U.S.



College Initiatives 1.0 | LAYING THE FOUNDATION

YES Prep Public schools was founded in 1998 with a simple proposition: That ALL students, regardless of their zip code, can achieve at high levels when given access to the same resources and support as students from affluent communities. In fact, we believed in this idea so strongly that we have always required college acceptance as a prerequisite for graduating from our high schools. Our work has been focused on serving more students while keeping a singular focus on preparation for post-secondary success. We graduated our first senior class of 17 students in 2001 and now have 13 schools serving almost 8,000 students in grades 6-12 and a 2014 graduating class of over 450 students. 100% of our graduating seniors have earned an acceptance into at least one college or university¹², and, historically, 97% of our students have matriculated to college within one year of high school graduation. Our current six-year graduation rate, 41%, is five times the rate of our students' peers in Houston and four times the national average for the same population.

With our first five graduating classes, we found higher than average rates of success by focusing on three major areas:



First and foremost, our teachers worked relentlessly to make sure our students had a solid academic background before they went to college. All of our students were, and still are, exposed to college level coursework in high school. All of our students took at least one AP course and many completed dual credit courses. And early on we forged a partnership with The Princeton Review, providing focused preparation for the SAT.

This focus paid off initially and continues to be a cornerstone of our program. We are finding that the overwhelming majority of our students are able to handle their college coursework. While 28% of college students nationally and 50% in Texas enroll in remedial or developmental coursework, on average less than 15% of our students have required remedial coursework in college. In some years that number has dropped as low as 5% of the matriculating class.¹³ We credit this both to a strong academic curriculum and a focus on ensuring our students are matriculating to schools that are an appropriate academic match for them.

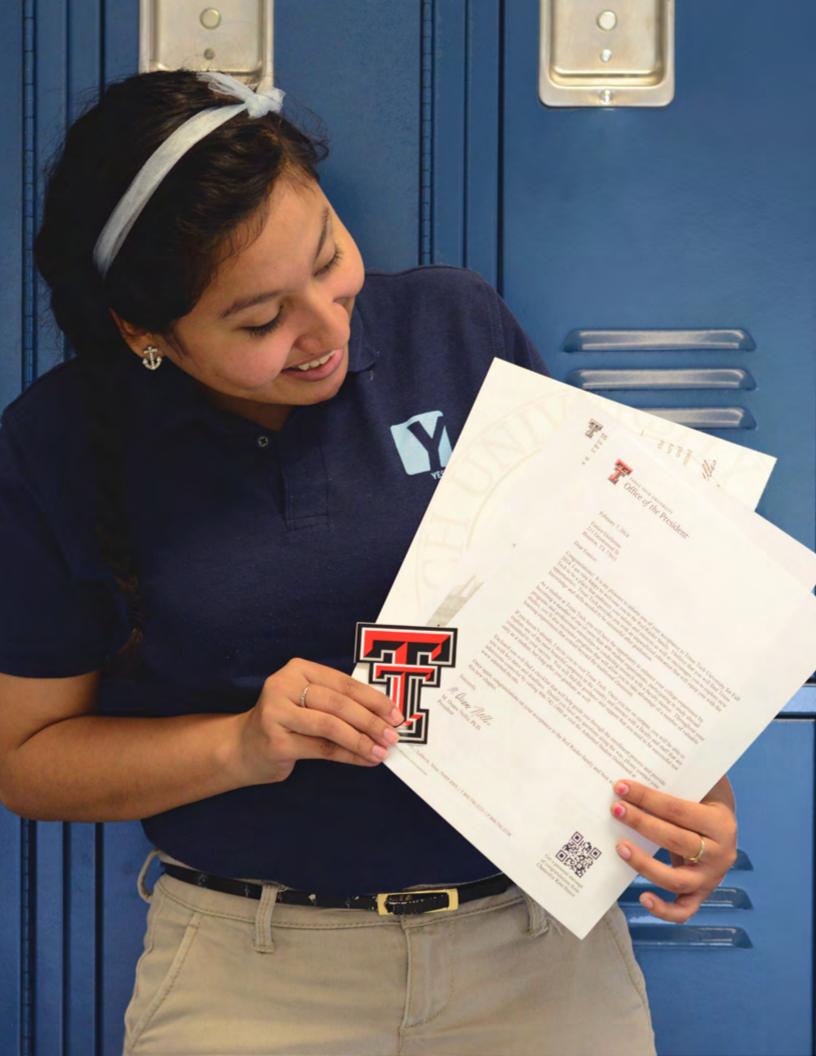
While 28% of college students nationally and 50% in Texas enroll in remedial or developmental coursework, on average less than 15% of our students have required remedial coursework in college.

Personal support was an important lever in our students' early success. During high school, our juniors and seniors had a dedicated class where they prepared for the SAT, researched and applied to colleges, and completed all other paperwork including scholarship applications and FAFSA forms. Since most were first-generation college students, we provided substantial support in making sure that all students were eligible for college matriculation. With only one campus graduating seniors, fewer than 200 total alumni, and a full-time college counselor, we also gave individualized assistance to every alumnus who needed it. We were able to make sure over 97% of our graduates matriculated and every alumnus received a face-to-face advising visit on his/her college campus, whether in Houston, Washington D.C., or California.

During those early years, the majority of our students matriculated to schools outside of Houston. Knowing the financial burden many families would face, we focused heavily on identifying and having our students apply for scholarships and grants during their junior and senior years. Colleges offered over \$13 million to our students from 2001-2005 and this funding was crucial to the persistence of many of those students.

Without any actual college graduates before 2005, these assumptions guided our work with our students through our first few years and led to strong levels of success. However, on average, only 46% of our first five classes earned their college degree within six years. We learned that there were many flaws in our thinking that would begin affecting our students' success if we did not shift our focus.

What We Thought		What We Learned
College access is our students' biggest barrier	¢	College access ≠ college success
If our students are academically prepared for college, they will be successful in college.	Þ	Non-academic skills are often the determining factor in our students' success.
We can and will provide whatever supports our alumni need in order to graduate.	¢	We can't provide every support at scale; partnerships are key.
College affordability is pivotal.	\rightarrow	College affordability is still pivotal.



Lessons Learned

In our early years, YES Prep dedicated an unprecedented level of support to our students and alumni to ensure their success in college. Despite our efforts, however, we were far from our initial goal that at least 90% of our graduates earn a college degree. When our first few classes of students began graduating from college, we began refining our approach based on our college persistence data and information supplied directly from our alumni. While we had largely overcome the college access challenge with more than 97% of our students matriculating, our college persistence and graduation numbers were not nearly where we wanted them to be. Additionally, our student feedback told us that outside of academics, our students struggled with non-academic issues including prioritizing school over personal and family needs, fitting in on their campuses, and finding solutions for financial barriers. At the time, there was emerging literature on the growing crisis of college persistence for low-income and students of color; however, most research failed to point to specific interventions that could change this tide. The major lessons we learned from our early graduating classes are:

- 1. College access ≠ college success
- 2. Non-academic skills were often the determining factor in our students' success.

For example, despite the fact just 15% of our students require remedial courses in college compared to 50% of other Texas students and 28% of students nationwide, our six-year college graduation rate has dropped as low as 34% for some alumni classes.

3. We can't provide every support at scale; partnerships are key.

When our graduates matriculate to schools outside of Houston and receive university-based support, over 70% graduate within six years.

4. College affordability is still pivotal.

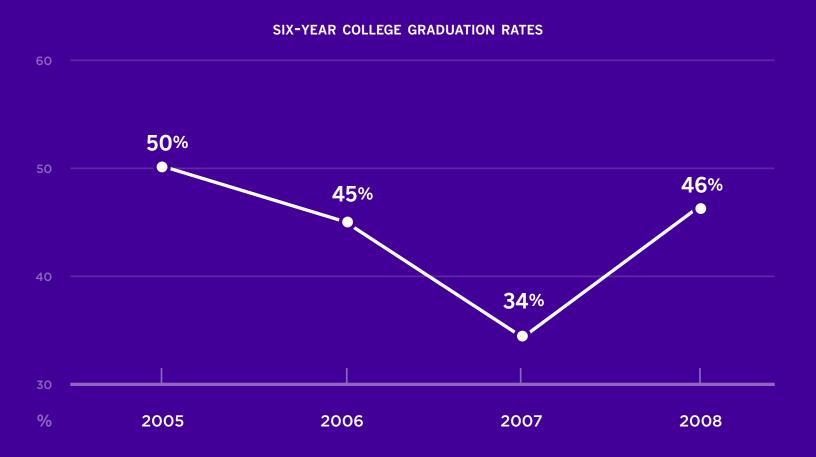
Though our students continued to outpace national college graduation statistics for low-income and minority students, our rates began to falter as our graduating classes grew.

Looking back, we believed college access and college aspiration were synonymous – a flawed assumption. When our first-generation college students said they wanted to go to college, we took for granted that they understood what that meant and that strong academic skills and a scholarship would inevitably lead to a college degree. Considering the variety of obstacles they faced that we had not prepared them for, the level of success they were able to achieve is both remarkable and deeply humbling.

The impact of our early missteps was significant. Though our students continued to outpace national college graduation statistics for low-income and minority students, our rates began to falter as our graduating classes grew. Our six-year graduation rate for the Class of 2005 is 50%. For the Class of 2006, it dropped to 45% and to 34% for the Class of 2007.

With the implementation of these new efforts in 2006, though, our class of 2008 began college more prepared than the students before them and their six-year graduation rate rose to 46%. Looking at our later classes, we are seeing their persistence rates rise, as well. For the Class of 2010, for example, at the end of their fourth year of college, a full 73% were still persisting. We expect our persistence and graduation percentages to continue to climb as our students currently in college have benefitted from the more comprehensive program we have today, focused not only on college acceptance and academic preparation, but also on building mindsets and skills for college success, and creating more partnerships with higher education that create a comprehensive support system for our students.

With the implementation of these new efforts in 2006, our Class of 2008 began college more prepared than the students before them and their six-year graduation rate rose to 46%.





College Initiatives 2.0 | BUILDING CAPACITY & FORGING PARTNERSHIPS

Starting in 2006, based on alumni feedback, the fact that we were expanding as an organization and now graduating significantly more seniors every year, we refined our approach in order to find sustainable and scalable solutions. Since no one else seemed to know the answers either, there was a certain level of experimentation involved in finding solutions. We pressed forward, trusting that responsive action focused on college completion would move us in the right direction.

Our key efforts starting in 2006 focused on:

- (1) Revising and Expanding our College Initiatives Model
- 2 Formalizing Alumni Support
- (3) Collaborating with Higher Education
- (4) Tackling College Affordability



(1) Revising and Expanding our College Initiatives Model

We have made a deliberate decision to prioritize college initiatives by investing significant money, people, and time toward preparing our students for success in college. Our first five graduating classes had fewer than 200 combined students, yet we had a full-time college counselor already committed to their support. The earliest phase of our programming included a senior seminar class that focused primarily on the college application and financial aid process.

As we steadily learned more about our students' college success factors, we added to our model. On our first campus, our senior seminar became a daily class in 2002 and we added a junior seminar class and an additional college counselor in 2006. Then we added another college counselor in 2008. We realized we needed to capitalize on the time students were with us on campus so that they had more of the tools they needed to be successful before they matriculated to college.

Today, our model at a full campus of approximately 900 students consists of a director of college counseling and alumni programs, 2-3 additional college counselors, and 1-2 additional seminar teachers. During each year of high school, students spend 3-5 hours per week in seminar classes participating in our college counseling curriculum: analyzing their personal strengths and weaknesses, developing a growth mindset, practicing realistic goal setting and planning, and honing a myriad of other college-ready skills. Our college counselor to student ratio is no more than 40:1 compared to the national average of 471:1, equating to almost 12 times the individualized support for each of our students.¹⁴ Approximately 4% of each school's annual operating budget is committed to college counseling and initiatives at a total cost of close to \$600 per high school student per year.

This model has meant that each of our seniors has had individualized, systemic support throughout their junior and senior years when researching and applying for colleges, finding and applying for scholarships, and choosing the college or university that is the best match for them. In addition to this personalized support, our model allows all of our high school students to receive SAT/ACT test prep classes during the school day, attend several formal college fairs, meet with dozens of college representatives right on campus and have dedicated opportunities to build the non-academic

skills needed to be successful in college, such as grit self-control, and perseverance.

This level of dedication has not come without a cost. For example, we have made the strategic decision to limit our electives offerings in order to staff our college counseling

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program. We have also channeled money into college initiatives instead of opting for more expensive facilities or cost-intensive extracurricular programs like football. Contrast the YES Prep approach to college counseling with what most students in underserved communities across the country have access to – limited or nonexistent SAT/ ACT test prep, perhaps only one face-to-face meeting with a counselor the entire year, no strategic exposure to colleges and universities – and the importance of our investment becomes all the more clear.

YES PREP

40 Students : 1 College Counselor



Our college counselor to student ratio is no more than 40:1 compared to the national average of 471:1

UNITED STATES

471 Students : 1 College Counselor

A Comprehensive Developmental Curriculum

Our college seminar programming has been articulated into a vertically-aligned, comprehensive curriculum delivered through our college seminar classes in grades 9-12 and organized around five pillars.

I. Aspiration

This pillar is centered around developing a college-going identity. Students need to be able to envision themselves as college graduates, believe they can do it, aim to do it by setting realistic goals throughout school, and then organize themselves in such a way as to make it happen. It is not enough for teachers and parents to want their students to go to college and for kids to say they want to go – for many students who are first-generation college bound, it is a long process of consistent effort and small victories that over time cement into a vision of college success. YES Prep's aspiration strand is directly based on the work of Dr. Mandy Savitz-Romer and Dr. Suzanne Bouffard in their book *Ready, Willing, and Able* and this developmental approach is carried through all of the five pillars.¹⁵

II. Preparation

Non-cognitive skills are the focus of this pillar; the outside-ofthe-classroom variables that can often make or break a student's college experience. Our curriculum focuses on eight non-cognitive skills, which are emphasized during all four years of seminar classes. The non-cognitive skills we focus on come from the work of Dr. William Sedlacek:¹⁶

- Self-Concept: Possessing confidence, strong 'self' feeling, strength of character, determination, and independence
- **Realistic Self-Appraisal**: Ability to assess one's strengths and weaknesses to allow for self-development
- Understands How to Handle Racism; Navigate the System: Ability to deal with policies, procedures and barriers, intentional or not, that interfere with the development of people
- Long-Range Goals: Developing long-range goals and understanding the relationship between efforts and ultimate practice of their professions
- **Strong Support Person**: Utilizing a person of strong influence who provides advice, particularly in times of crisis
- Leadership: Ability to organize and influence others
- **Community**: Involvement in a community, often based on race and/or gender, from which support is received
- Nontraditional Knowledge Acquired: Ability to learn outside of school

III. Application

This strand focuses on college eligibility, including a plan for co-curricular and community service experiences, the creation of a resume, preparing for the SAT/ACT, and the college application process. Across four years, the emphasis is on building the skills and experiences that shape a strong resume and compelling college application.

IV. Transition

Based in financial literacy and study skills, this pillar spans from high school through to college graduation and guides the support our alumni team gives students throughout their college experience.

V. Graduation

Our comprehensive curriculum leads up to college graduation, at which point our alumni support team overlaps to layer in career readiness resources.

College Assessment Portfolio Project (CAPP)

All of our high school students complete work each year to measure and document their progress towards college readiness. The ongoing work for the project focuses on non-cognitive skills and allows students to self-identify their own areas of strengths and weaknesses in order to develop all eight skills, as necessary, over the four years of high school. An internally developed rubric and project design allow students to gather anecdotal evidence of their application of the skills, receive regular coaching from their college counselor, and incorporate this work into all of their classes and with all of their teachers.



2 Formalizing Alumni Support

To build on the extensive programming and support our students receive in high school, we have also been leveraging the strong relationships our college counselors have with our graduates to ensure they are continuing to successfully matriculate to college, persist through college, and begin a promising career.



COLLEGE MATRICULATION SUPPORT AREAS

Alumni Support Program

YES Prep's comprehensive Alumni Support Program, made up of three full-time staff members, was created to provide ongoing support to YES Prep alumni by maintaining effective, ongoing communication and support through a resource-rich alumni network. To that end, the Alumni Support Program offers alumni direct links to YES Prep staff, both campus-based and regional-based, through large-scale initiatives like our Alumni Scholarship program and social gatherings, as well as individualized support for the myriad of questions and concerns that might arise. This program also allows our alumni to participate directly with the next generation of YES Prep graduates by speaking in college seminar classes and working on campuses during summer programming. Additionally, collective efforts and support services include:

- Transition programming and support (from senior year of high school through freshman year of college)
- · Organized alumni events throughout the year
- Mentorship pairing within the community or college campus
- Social media outreach and information sharing, email blasts, phone calls, site visits, and periodic mailings to maintain communication with alumni
- · Graduate school preparation events
- Webinars on financial aid, time management, and other pertinent topics

Transition Programming

Nationwide, roughly 20% of students from low-income communities who intend to matriculate to college never show up on their college campus, with rates as high as 40% for some populations, a phenomenon that has been dubbed the 'summer melt'.¹⁷ Historically, 97% of YES Prep

graduates have matriculated to college within one year of high school graduation. We have been working to keep this number high and also focus on making sure our students are supported throughout their freshman year and during other key transition times like the long winter and summer breaks.

To this end, when our second campus began graduating seniors in 2010, we started formally conducting a risk assessment for all of our seniors and have dedicated new alumni support staff to this effort. Throughout senior year, the three college counselors on each campus gather data on the seniors that could affect their college matriculation and persistence. This data is filtered through three categories - academic, financial, and situational. Prior to graduation, seniors participate in a comprehensive transition process, including formalized exit interviews, in order to support all students in this critical time, especially those students most at-risk of not matriculating to college in the fall semester. The goal of this process is to collect data and gain context for each student in order to prioritize support. During those crucial summer months when the 'summer melt' can occur, college counselors and our alumni support team conduct targeted outreach to help support our most at-risk graduates in making a successful transition to college and through the freshman year. Recent examples of interventions have included:

- Making collaborative plans to help families manage outof-pocket college expenses
- Facilitating discussions to help families make college decisions and plans they are comfortable with both personally and financially
- Connecting students with work-study and student support personnel on their college campuses before they matriculate
- Consistent, relationship-driven coaching, support, and motivation



③ Collaborating with Higher Education

When we looked at the students who were able to successfully graduate from college in four years, there was a clear trend. Historically, over 70% of our students who matriculated to selective schools, lived on campus, and had significant financial aid packages graduated on time. In this scenario, our students typically did not need much support from us because they found the support they needed through campus-based services and financial aid. Our findings mirrored national research on the impact of on-campus supports. For example, in 2009, Crisp and Cruz found that "Mentoring minority college students results in those students being twice as likely to persist as nonmentored minority students and to have higher GPA's."¹⁸

In order to capitalize on these findings, we created the IMPACT Partnership Program in 2006 to formalize relationships with selective colleges and universities across the country who are committed to providing the level of support needed for low-income students to succeed in a collegiate environment. We began with one partner, Grinnell College, and have grown to 29 IMPACT partners today including Vanderbilt University, Boston University, Washington & Jefferson College, Scripps College, University of Tulsa, and George Washington University.

Commitments from an IMPACT Partner

- ★ Give special consideration to qualified YES Prep students in the admissions process to allow a cohort of at least 3-5 students matriculate together each year.
- Meet 100% of the demonstrated financial need for selected students through a combination of scholarships, grants, federal student loans, and work-study.
- ★ Provide consistent, structured, and on-going support for the IMPACT Scholars on campus.
- Participate in YES Prep-based IMPACT programming throughout the year

To date, more than **10%** of YES Prep graduates have matriculated to school as IMPACT Scholars and our six-year graduation rate for those students is currently **86%**.

To date, more than 10% of YES Prep graduates have matriculated to school as IMPACT Scholars and our sixyear graduation rate for those students is currently 86%.

Much of what has made this program successful is a mutual and formal commitment to our students' success. The institutions that we partner with appreciate that we are a proven model and that they can trust that our students are well prepared for college and have a history of success in college. There is also no cost to the institutions beyond meeting the financial need of their admitted students. Building strong partnerships with institutions of higher education in order to collaboratively support our students is crucial to our continued success.





(4) Tackling College Affordability

When we first began our efforts, we focused on finding college money for our students - and money for college continues to be a key lever. In fact, college affordability for our students is at an all-time low. The average amount that students from low-income communities have paid for college has gone up almost 20% from \$16,955 in 2008 to \$19,888 in 2012.¹⁹ The Dallas Morning News analyzed data from the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board in 2012 to find that the average cost of tuition at state universities for in-state students in Texas rose by as much as 55% from 2002.²⁰ Average published tuition and fees at public four-year universities across the country increased by 27% between 2008-09 and 2013-14.21

While it is essential that real change happens on a national level to make college more affordable and accessible, we don't have time to wait for an outside solution.

One approach to addressing the financial challenges our students will face has been to broaden our Alumni Scholarship Fund, an in-house fund where we coordinate and administer dozens of scholarships every year. It is often the gaps in a financial aid package that can make the difference in a student being able to matriculate to and persist through college; closing those gaps is a key lever to raising our students' graduation rates.

As YES Prep grew and established itself in the Houston educational landscape, many individuals and organizations wanted to offer scholarship opportunities to our students, but were not necessarily in a position themselves to organize and administer the process of selecting for and distributing the money. Our Alumni Scholarship Fund has allowed us to secure many more scholarships for our students than we may have been able to without an internal system. Thirty-five percent of our total graduates have received scholarship money from this fund with an average scholarship amount of \$2,000 and a total of over \$250,000 awarded last year alone.

Our formal tracking of the outcomes of these scholarships began in 2010 and as those students progress through college, 93% of our scholarship recipients since 2010 are currently persisting at a four-year or two-year college. For students with a renewable award, their persistence rate is currently 96%.

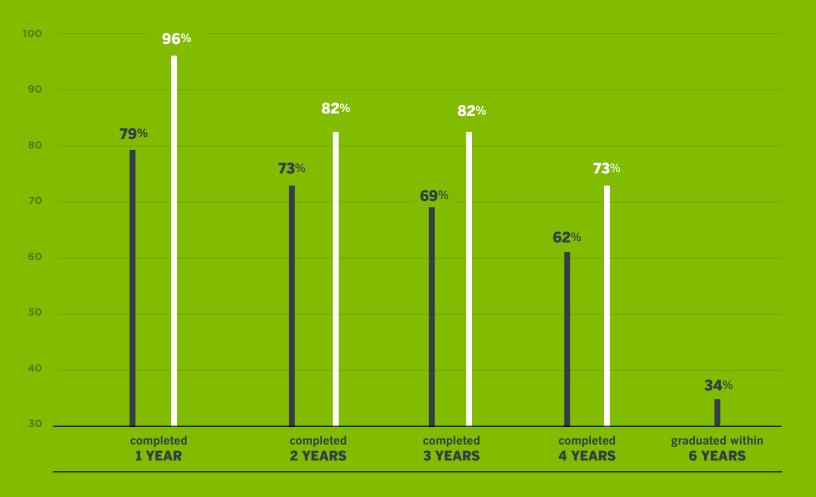
35% of our total graduates have received scholarship money from the Alumni Scholarship Fund with an average scholarship amount of \$2,000 and a total of over \$250,000 awarded last year alone.



Taking a cue from the Dell Scholars Program, we have begun analyzing the persistence rates for students who receive varying amounts of scholarship money. For example, from 2009-2012, through the generosity of our donors, YES Prep awarded 34 renewable alumni scholarships ranging from \$2,000-\$8,000 per year to help close the gaps in financial aid packages. Our data suggests alumni receiving an award average of \$4,000 or less per year have an increased likelihood of maintaining their scholarship award and persisting at the college or university they matriculated to as compared to alumni who received a higher award. We have also seen that persistence rates remain high for students who receive gradually less scholarship money over the course of their years in college. For example, if a student receives \$2,000 in their freshman year, \$1,500 their sophomore year, and \$1,000 in their junior year, he or she is able to individually make up those small but increasing gaps in aid without a negative impact on persistence. This is important data to have as it allows us to maximize both the number of students who can receive funds, as well as the impact of those funds.

The results of our current programming are strong. For the YES Prep Classes of 2010-2012, 87% have persisted to their sophomore year compared to a national freshmen to sophomore persistence rate of approximately 72%, regardless of ethnicity or income level.²² And for our Class of 2010, 73% have graduated or are persisting after four years.

As YES Prep's college counseling and alumni support programming improves, college persistence rates for our students are increasing.



IMPROVED COLLEGE PERSISTENCE DATA (2007-2010)





While we are confident that our current programming is moving us forward, we are not satisfied with our current graduation rates and are continuing to improve our program in order to reach our goal of having at least 80% of our students earn a college degree within six years of graduation. We have begun several initiatives recently in order to build on our core programming and find more and better solutions for our students.

1. Mindset-based Pilot Programs

Building on the success of our college counseling curriculum, we are participating in the following projects this year on several of our campuses that relate to strengthening our students' non-academic skills and developing a growth mindset.

- Social Belonging and Mindset Interventions, led by Dr. David Yeager out of The University of Texas at Austin and Dr. Gregory Walton out of Stanford University
- National Mindset Pilot run by the PERTS program, led by Dave Paunesku and his team out of Stanford University
- Brainology, a program aimed at developing a growth mindset, developed by Dr. Carol Dweck at Mindset Works
- The Character Growth Card, developed by Dr. Angela Duckworth in collaboration with The Character Lab

Our involvement in these cutting-edge initiatives allows us to adapt our system-wide programming quickly and efficiently based on the student outcomes they produce.

2. Increased Collaboration with Higher Education

One of our major efforts towards improving our students' college graduation rates is increasing our collaboration with colleges and universities. Building on the early success of our IMPACT program, we are planning to expand the program to at least 40 schools by 2015-16. Our goal in this expansion is to provide our students more and varied options within the IMPACT program so that they can find a school that is a good match for them and provides a clear path to college graduation.

Nationally, 51% of college students lived at home in 2012 in order to save on college costs.¹⁹ Following this trend, approximately 40% of the Class of 2013 is going to school right here at home, up from 27% in 2010. These numbers represent both a huge opportunity and a huge responsibility towards which we are putting a renewed effort. We have started building relationships with three local/regional universities – University of Houston-Main Campus, University of Houston-Downtown (UHD), and Stephen F. Austin State University – by creating Alumni Success Teams at each one, made up of staff from both YES Prep and the university.

Unlike our IMPACT partners, most public universities cannot commit to meeting the full financial need of all YES Prep matriculants, especially as total state appropriations for higher education have fallen by about 20% between 2007-08 and 2012-13.²¹ Therefore, we are concentrating our efforts on supplementing the on-campus social and academic supports that already exist on those college campuses. At UHD, for example, we have a total of 123 alumni currently persisting. Our partnership effort there has been built on an existing mentorship program the university has in place and fueled by a shared commitment to increase the overall graduation rate at UHD, not only for our students, but for all of the Houstonians matriculating there. Just as we see in our IMPACT partnership schools, the crucial ingredient for success is a shared commitment to the success of our students. The progress we've made so far is promising and is helping to guide how we look at our role and work with other local/regional universities.

3. uAspire Partnership

In order to better prepare our students and families for the financial requirements of a college education, we are partnering with uAspire, a national organization that will assist us in analyzing our financial aid data and provide training to our staff. Through this partnership our staff will be better able to:

- Educate families about college affordability and the financial process earlier so they can better plan for their child's education
- Develop a system for collecting and analyzing our students' FAFSA data
- Help our future graduates choose the school and path that best meets their needs personally, academically and financially.

4. Career Readiness Initiatives

According to the Center on Education and the Workforce, by 2018, 63% of jobs will require a college degree.²³ YES Prep is committed to making sure our graduates are ready to compete for those jobs. In our efforts to increase workforce readiness, we are in our second year of hosting workshops and webinars about topics such as preparing for graduate school and job interview tips. Working alongside community partners we were also able to host a career readiness panel where our alumni connected with and learned from various Houston business leaders. This programming provides the context and relevance many students need to help motivate them to persist and graduate, a connection to the tangible outcomes and next steps that can only be taken with their college degree. Moving forward, we have plans to add formal internship and mentoring programs with local business leaders in Houston.

5. Innovative Data-Tracking and Communication Systems

As we grow, we do not want to sacrifice the strong relationships we have been able to build with our students and that they have built with each other. This year, we are launching the Alumni Connect data portal which will serve as a main communication platform for our alumni. It will be a place for them to connect with their fellow alumni and YES Prep staff, as well as a hub for a variety of resources for financial aid, degree planning, and career preparation.

The portal will also provide us with a platform to more effectively collect and analyze our alumni data as our alumni numbers grow. Up to this point, our staff has had to commit a great deal of time toward tracking, analyzing, and maintaining our alumni data. With the portal, instead of struggling to keep up with the data, they will be able to concentrate on the important work of responding to data and supporting our alumni.



Conclusion

Our nation is facing a crisis in its public education system. At a time when a college diploma is more important than ever to compete in the global economy, only 10% of students from low-income communities across the country are projected to complete their college degree.

Efforts are underway at various educational agencies to improve access to postsecondary education, but the students who are in school today cannot wait on studies and government mandates to reverse this trend.

YES Prep will not wait or quell our sense of urgency. We are now refining our third generation of solutions to the problem of low college persistence among low-income students. Our steps have helped raise our alumni's college graduation rate to five times the rate of peers in Houston and four times the national average for students from low-income communities.

The practices that we have developed and highlighted in this report include:

- Placing far greater resources on college counseling and alumni support than most other schools nationally
- Expanding our non-academic, holistic support system both in high school and continuing into college
- Partnering with colleges that are committed to providing the level of financial and personal support that students from low-income communities need to succeed in a collegiate environment
- Refining scholarship models to give a targeted financial boost when it is most needed to a greater number of students
- Piloting new programs with renowned experts to develop a more robust college-going mindset
- Rigorously mining data about our graduates in order to identify needs and respond more urgently to trends that may hurt our students' persistence and graduation rates

Despite the fact that 44% of YES Prep alumni have earned their college degree, we simply do not view that as good enough. We believe our more recent persistence rates will continue to improve as we refine the best practices that we have highlighted in this report. But we will not get there unless we continually critique the job we are doing and collaborate with others to innovate.

As we implement new initiatives and programs, we know that some will work and some might not; no one has yet figured out all aspects of this complex challenge. However, institutions across the country who are truly invested in the success of all students and dramatically increasing college completion rates can certainly start as YES Prep did: aligning our resources with our ultimate outcomes and continuing to adapt our programs responsively and swiftly. At YES Prep, we are digging in and pushing forward in order to find real solutions for making college graduation a reality for more students. 30STON

Redefine Possible

End Notes

¹ 41% represents the percentage of our alumni who earn their college degree within six years of graduating from YES Prep.
44% represents the percentage of our alumni who have earned a college degree, regardless of the number of years it took them to complete it.

² THECB, TEA, and NSC (as cited in The National Center for Higher Education Management Systems, 2012) report 8% of Houston's low-income population earns a college degree.

³ Martha J. Bailey and Susan M. Dynarski, "Inequality in Postsecondary Attainment," 2011. In Greg Duncan and Richard Murnane, eds., Whither Opportunity: Rising Inequality, Schools, and Children's Life Chances, pp. 117-132. New York: Russell Sage Foundation

⁴ National Center for Higher Education Management Systems. A New Measure of Educational Success in Texas: Tracking the Success of 8th Graders into and through College. Houston Endowment, February 2012. Print.

⁵ "Affluent Students Have an Advantage and the Gap Is Widening." *The New York Times.* The New York Times, 21 Dec. 2012. Web. 07 May 2014.

⁶ National Collegiate Retention and Persistence to Degree Rates. Rep. ACT, 2012. Web.

⁷ The State of Texas: Report of the Select Commission on Higher Education and Global Competitiveness. January 2009. Print.

⁸ Texas: Complete College America. (2011). Data Reported by U.S. Department of Education, IPEDS 2009-10 Graduation Rates. Retrieved from http://completecollege.org/wp-content/themes/ cca/pdfs/Texas.pdf.

⁹ Suitts, Steve, Nasheed Sabree, and Katherine Dunn. *Research Report Update: A New Majority - Low Income Students in the South and Nation.* Rep. N.p.: Southern Education Foundation, October 2013. Print.

¹⁰ Houston: Planning & Development Department. (2013). Limited English Proficiency: 5 Years and older. ACS U.S. Census Bureau, 2007-2011. Available: http://www.houstontx.gov/planning/Demographics/docs_pdfs/Cy/Limited_English_Proficiency.pdf.

¹¹ American Fact Finder. (2010). Race and Hispanic or Latino Origin. U.S. Census Bureau, 2010. Available: http://factfinder2. census.gov/faces/tableservices/jsf/pages/productview.xhtml?pid=-DEC_10_SF1_QTP3. ¹² Beginning in 2013, YES Prep has graduated special education students who earned an acceptance into a two-year or certificate-based post-secondary program in accordance with their individualized education plans. The number of students in this category is less than .5%.

¹³ The state of Texas has identified criteria for determining whether or not students will be exempt from remedial coursework at public institutions in Texas: http://info.sos.state.tx.us/pls/pub/ readtac\$ext.TacPage?sI=R&app=9&p_dir=&p_rloc=&p_tloc=&p_ ploc=&pg=1&p_tac=&ti=19&pt=1&ch=4&rl=54. In addition to these criteria, YES Prep considers students exempt from remedial coursework only if they are not required to take pre-enrollment courses (such as bridge coursework) as a contingency for full-time enrollment in the college to which they intend to enroll.

¹⁴ "Student-to-School-Counselor Ratio 2010-2011." American School Counselor Association. Web. http://www.schoolcounselor.org/asca/media/asca/home/Ratios10-11.pdf>.

¹⁵ Savitz-Romer, Mandy, and Suzanne M. Bouffard. *Ready, Willing, and Able: A Developmental Approach to College Access and Success.* Cambridge, MA: Harvard Education, 2012. Print.

¹⁶ Sedlacek, W. E. "Using Noncognitive Variables in Assessing Readiness for Higher Education." *Readings on Equal Education* (2011): 187-205. Web.

¹⁷ Castleman, Benjamin L., and Lindsay C. Page. "A Trickle or a Torrent? Understanding the Extent of Summer 'Melt' Among College-Intending High School Graduates." *Social Science Quarterly* 95.1 (2013): 202-20. Web.

¹⁸ Crisp, Gloria, and Cruz, Irene. "Mentoring College Students: A Critical Review of the Literature between 1990 and 2007." *Research in Higher Education* 50.6 (2009): 525-545. Web

¹⁹ Ipsos Public Affairs. *How America Pays for College 2012: Sallie Mae's National Study of College Students and Parents.* Rep. N.p.: n.p., 2012. Web. http://news.salliemae.com/sites/salliemae.new-shq.businesswire.com/files/publication/file/HowAmericaPays2012. pdf>.

²⁰ Cardona, Claire. "Texas College Tuition up 55% since 2003 Deregulation, Analysis Shows." *The Dallas Morning News* [Dallas] 22 Sept. 2012. Print.

End Notes

 21 The College Board. "Tuition and Fee and Room and Board Charges over Time, 1973-74 through 2013-14, Selected Years." The College Board. Web

 $^{\rm 22}$ National Collegiate Retention and Persistence to Degree Rates. Rep. ACT, 2012. Web.

²³ Carnevale, Anthony P., Nicole Smith, and Jeff Strohl. Help
 Wanted: Projections of Jobs and Education Requirements Through
 2018. Rep. Georgetown University, 15 June 2010. Web.

Current IMPACT Partners

Current IMPACT Partners	Year Joined
Abilene Christian University	2014
Austin College	2010
Boston University	2009
Bucknell University	2010
Claremont McKenna College	2009
College of St. Benedict/St. John's University	2013
Connecticut College	2010
Creighton University	2007
Davidson College	2008
George Washington University	2010
Grinnell College	2006
Hamilton College	2009
Iowa State University	2011
Johns Hopkins University	2011
Kenyon College	2012
Lewis & Clark College	2007
Lycoming College	2013
Macalester College	2009
Oberlin College	2009
Rhodes College	2014
Scripps College	2012
Sewanee: The University of the South	2013
St. Olaf College	2011
Trinity University	2010
University of Rochester	2009
University of Tulsa	2007
Vanderbilt University	2007
Washington & Jefferson College	2009
Whitman College	2009

Appendix

GRADUATION DATA

Class	Total YES Prep Graduates	Total YES Prep Campuses Graduating Students	Six-Year College Graduation Rate*	Total Alumni Who Have Earned Their College Degree	Have Earned a Degree or Still Persisiting in College (Most recent six graduating classes)
2001	17	1	35%	41%	
2002	19	1	63%	68%	
2003	21	1	29%	33%	
2004	35	1	46%	46%	
2005	76	1	50%	58%	
2006	47	1	45%	49%	
2007	71	1	34%	38%	
2008	78	1	46%*		69%
2009	81	1	*		52%
2010	124	2	*		73%
2011	175	3			75%
2012	194	4			81%
2013	294	4			84%
2014	~ 464 **	6			

* Context: Awaiting National Student Clearinghouse data to confirm six-year graduation rates for the Classes of 2008-2010.

** Total # of graduates is based on completion of final credits this summer



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