



Improving College Persistence and Completion Rates

June 2026

Response to, “**Persisting Through the Pandemic and Beyond: Trends in the college enrollment, persistence, and completion experiences of BPS graduates**”

About MDRC

- Nonprofit, nonpartisan organization conducting evaluations across social policy domains including higher education



Specializes in:

- Random assignment evaluations
- Qualitative studies
- Program enhancement & technical assistance

College Completion Rates

The 3-year graduation rate for first-time, full-time freshmen in community colleges is only 35 percent, per IPEDS.

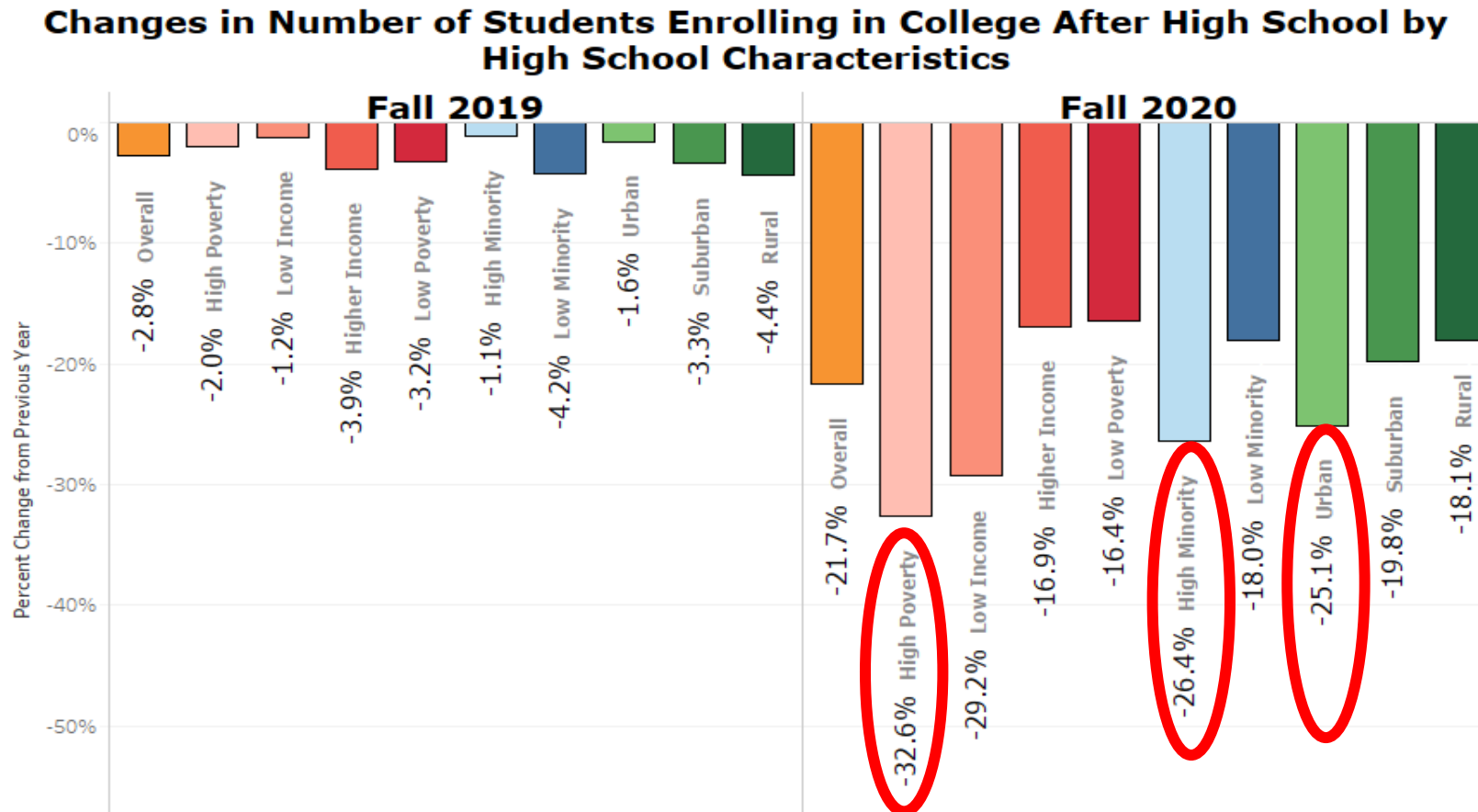
Community colleges serve a disproportionate share of our nation's students of color, low-income, part-time, rural, and first-generation students.

Today, National Trends Mirror Boston

- High poverty, high minority enrollment, and urban districts – like BPS – were among those bearing the greatest decreases in college-going during the pandemic.
- Gaps have widened for Black and Latino students, compared to White students
- Persistence and completion rates at 2-year colleges are far lower than at 4-year colleges

COVID-19 & Education

COVID-19 significantly impacted postsecondary enrollment for the HS class of 2020.

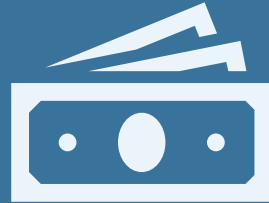


Why are college persistence rates low?

Academic
Challenges



Financial
Barriers



Work-Life-School
Balance



Lack of College
Know-How



Institutional
Barriers



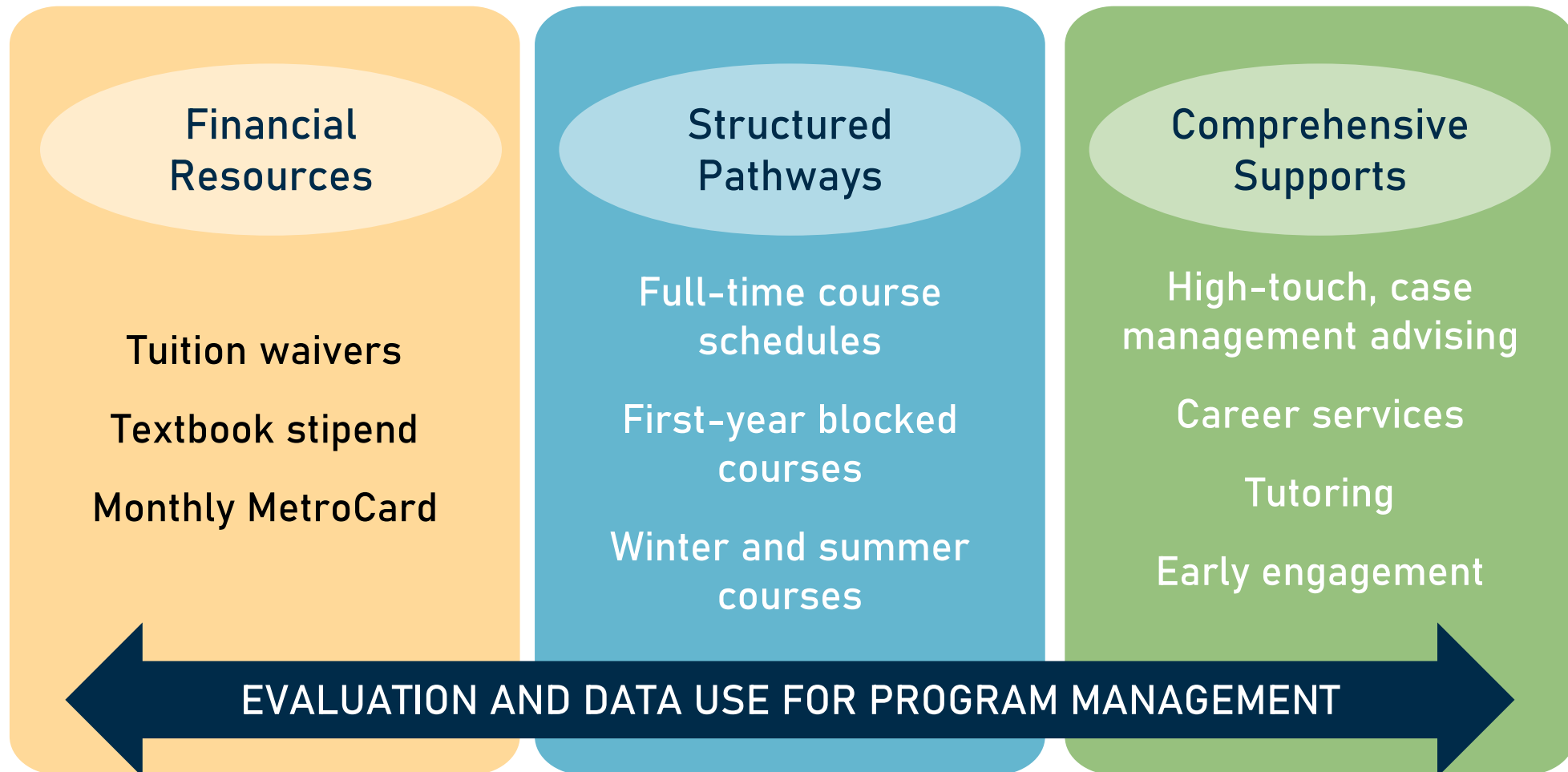
Big Picture: What Works

- **Short-term** interventions designed to address one or two barriers can lead to positive, but modest, effects on persistence and completion.
- **Comprehensive programs** that integrate different strategies and are **sustained over time** are more likely to produce long-term impacts on student success.

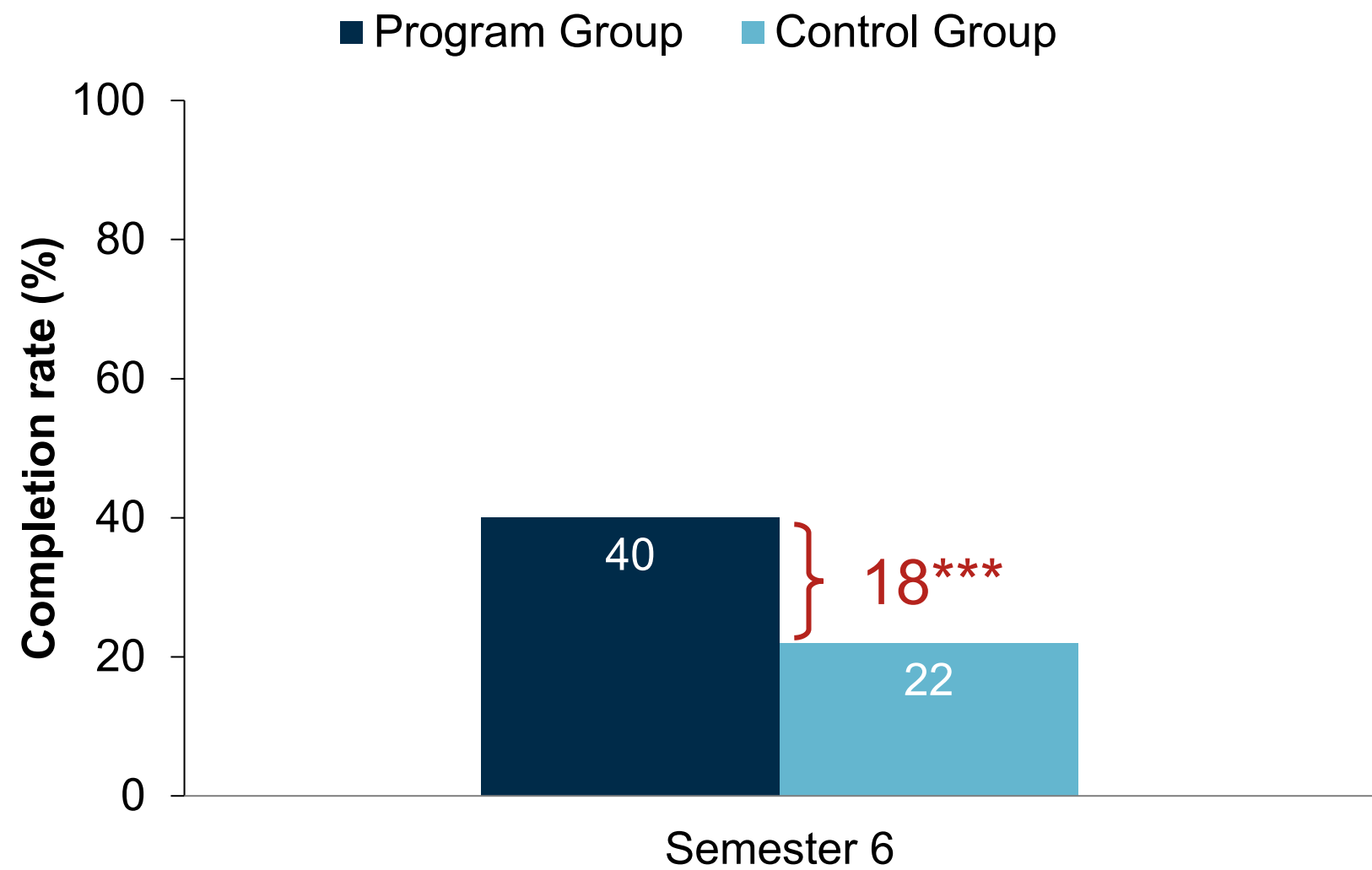
Why Do Multifaceted Interventions Work Better?

- Students face **many barriers** to success.
- Programs that simultaneously address **multiple barriers** can more effectively improve student success rates.
- Examples of intervention components:
 - Financial aid/textbooks
 - Transportation expenses
 - Academic preparation/support
 - Cohorted courses
 - Coaching/advising
 - Summer engagement
 - Job programs on- or off-campus
 - Outreach + communication

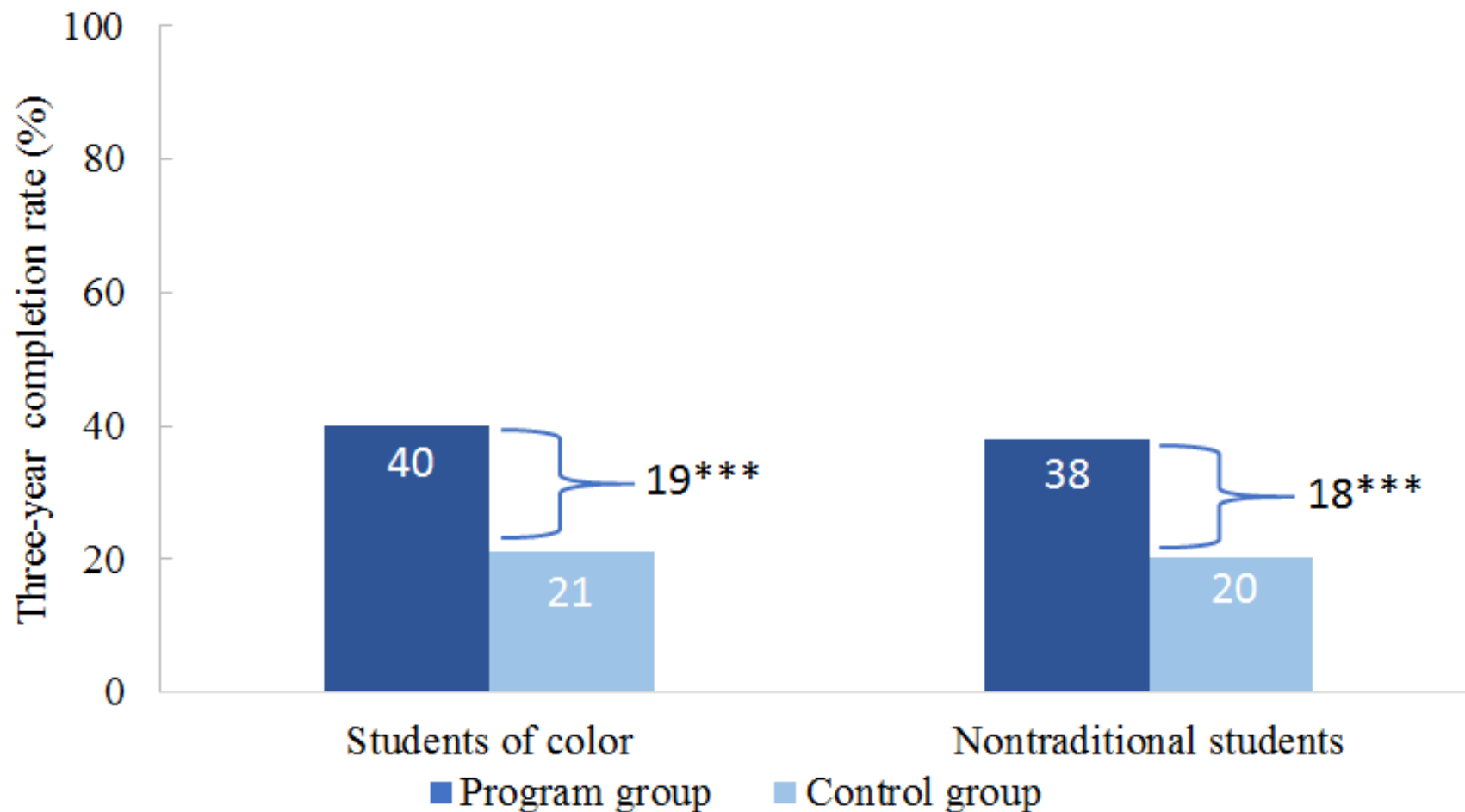
CUNY ASAP Program Model



CUNY ASAP Increases Graduation Rates



CUNY ASAP Increases Graduation Rates for Students of Color and Nontraditional Students



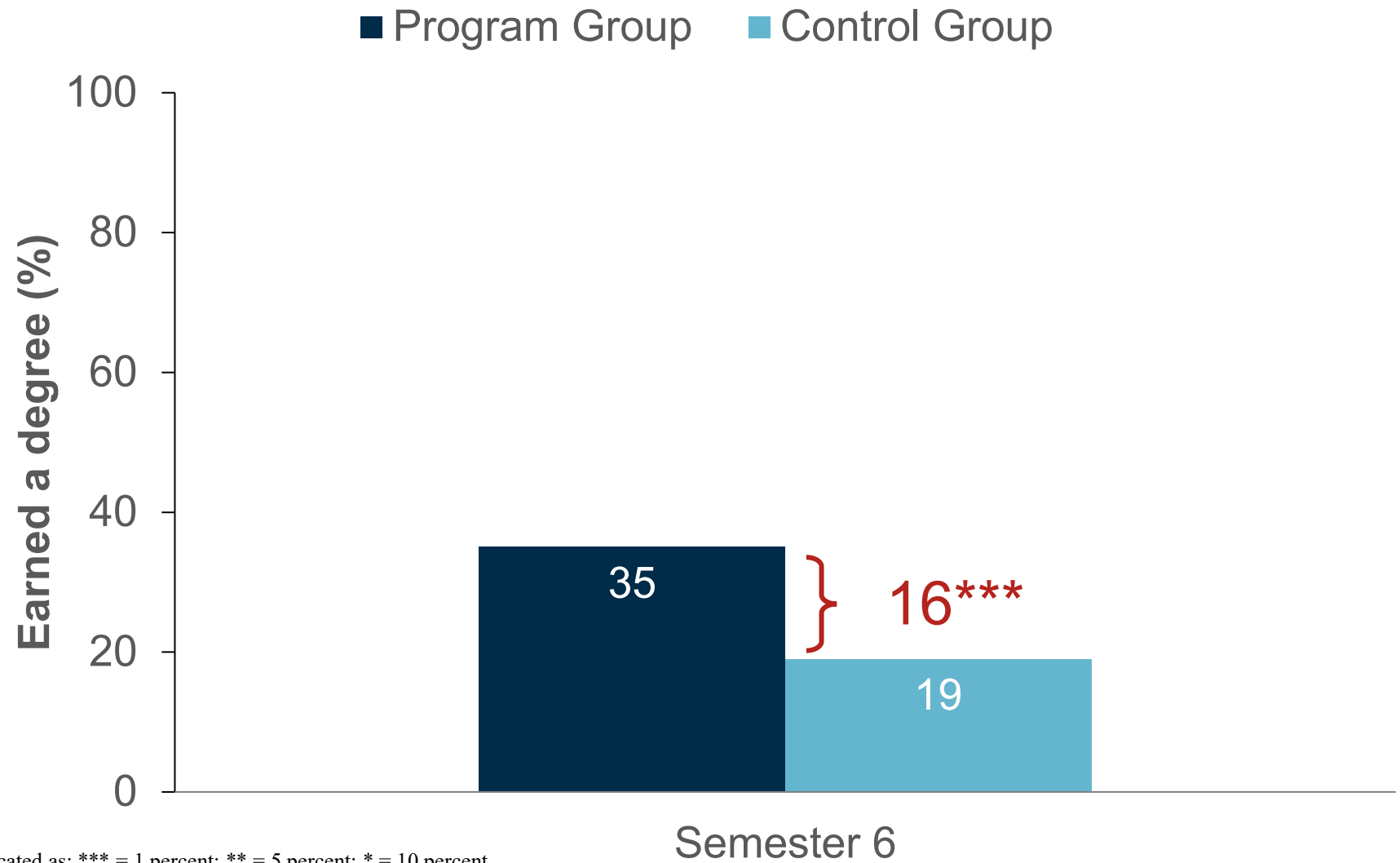
ASAP Replications

MDRC ran two randomized controlled trials evaluating replications of the ASAP model:

- **Ohio**: three community colleges, study launched in 2015
- **WCC**: one community college, study launched in 2019

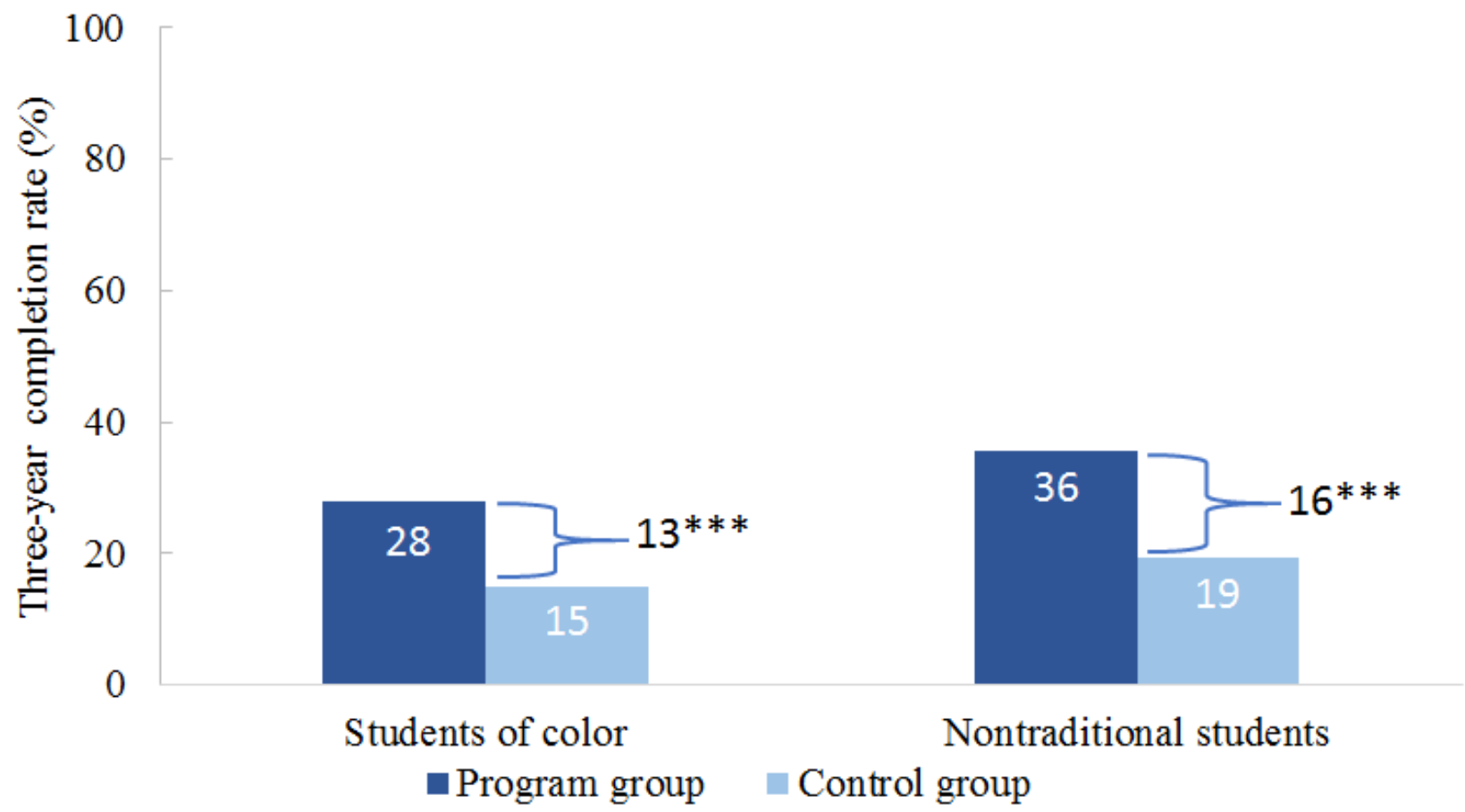


Ohio Programs Almost Double Graduation Rates



Statistical significance levels are indicated as: *** = 1 percent; ** = 5 percent; * = 10 percent

Ohio Programs Almost Double Graduation Rates for Students of Color and Nontraditional Students



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Long-term Labor Market Impacts

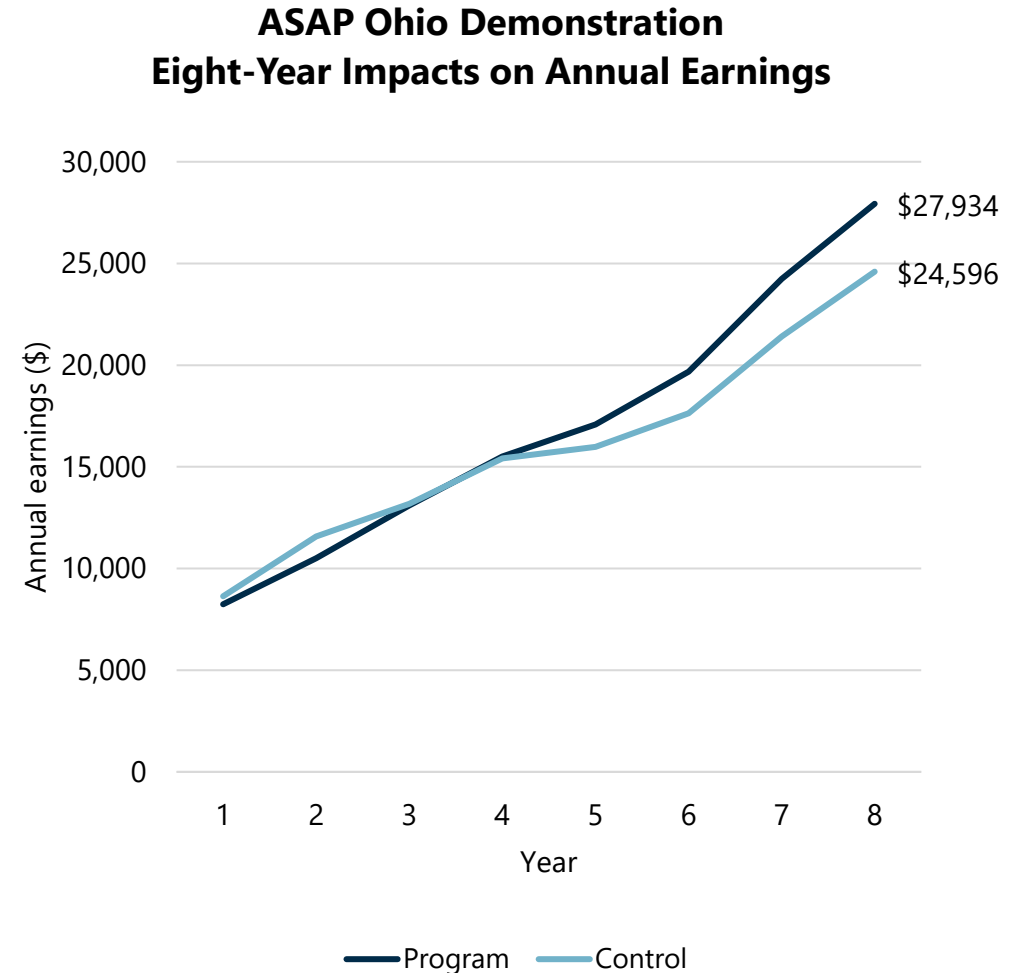
Annual Earnings

The Ohio programs **increased annual earnings in Year 8 by \$3,337, or 14 percent.**

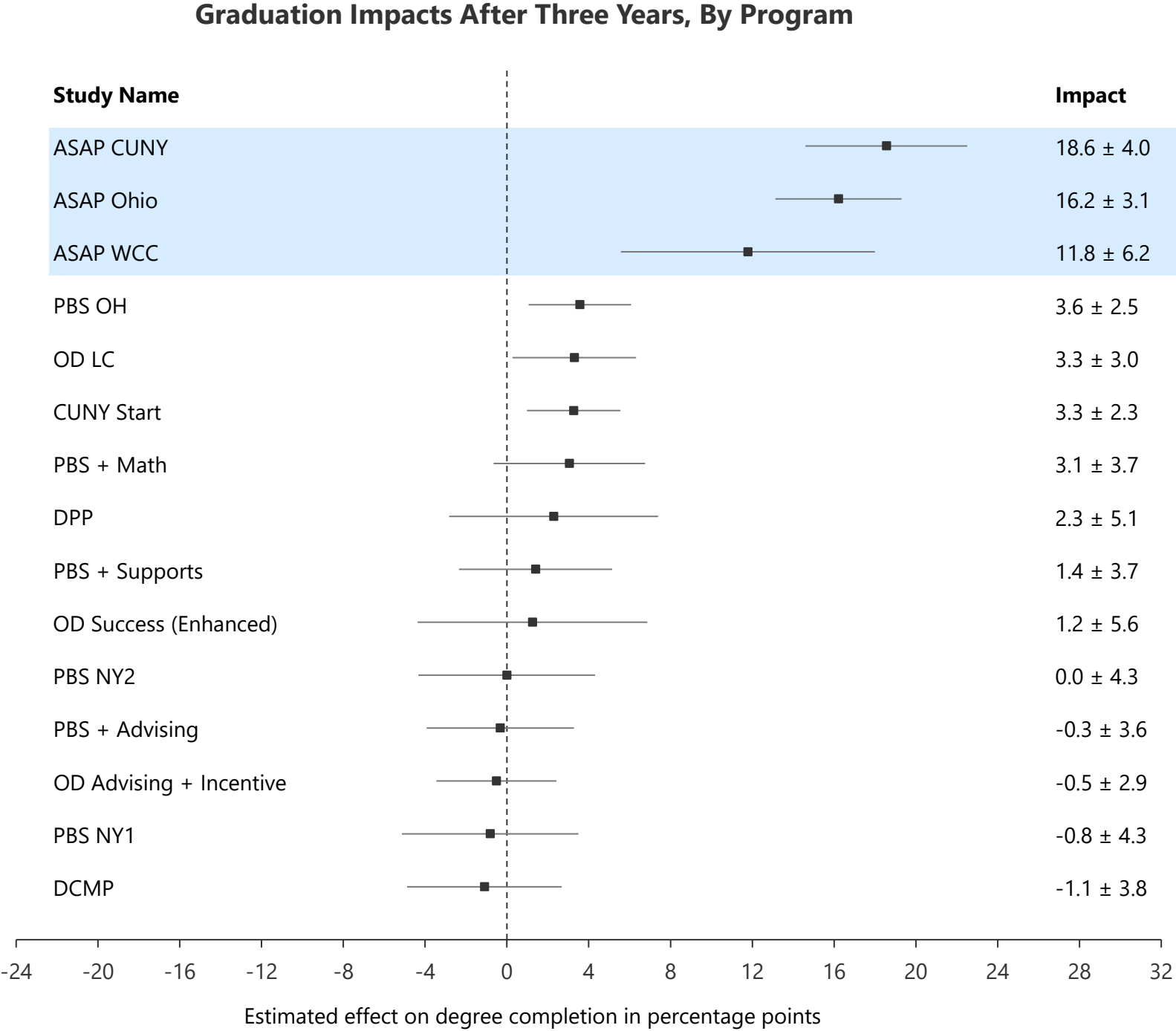
- In Year 6, the impact was \$2,045, or 12 percent.

Why do these averages look low? Students are included even if they are:

- Not employed
- Have earnings not captured by our data
- Working part-time



MDRC
RCTs
show
that...



The bottom line

- ▶ Multifaceted support programs have been rigorously evaluated and proven to work in a wide variety of institution types, sizes, and contexts, and for diverse populations of students
- ▶ While they require an upfront investment to provide students with the support they need, they are a good investment as they increase graduation



Discussion and Q&A

Thank you for having me today!
I'd love to hear from you:
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