



COLLEGE ACCESS AND SUCCESS

HOW TO USE THIS REPORT

Social Impact Research (SIR) reports are a resource for social impact investors to learn about a variety of social problems affecting at-risk populations, as well as to learn about nonprofit organizations addressing those problems. While these reports can be valuable to any social impact investor, they are written to help individual philanthropists and small foundations identify issues and organizations in which to invest.

This social issue report provides background and context on the status of college access and success, recommends an approach to investing in college access, and includes specific recommendations for taking action. It is designed to be read in conjunction with the state report and organization reports. The state report provides investors with context on how the issue of college access and success is being addressed in their state. The organization reports highlight high-performing nonprofits working on the issue in one of the state's metropolitan areas.

SOCIAL ISSUE REPORT SUMMARY

Social Impact Research (SIR) believes high-quality college access and success programs that serve at-risk¹ youth, including youth from low-income families, present a significant opportunity for impact:

- In 2007, 76% of students from high-income families obtained a bachelor's degree by age 24, compared with only 10% of students from low-income families. **For more reasons why college access and success matters, see page 3.**
- High-performing initiatives use a holistic approach in order to provide at-risk students with foundational knowledge, skills, abilities, and personal resources for academic success. **For more information on approaches to college access, see page 5.**
- The mean annual earnings of a bachelor's degree holder are \$27,400 higher than those of a high school graduate. **For more information on return on investment, see page 6.**

DEFINITION: COLLEGE ACCESS AND SUCCESS

College Access and Success refers to the field occupied by organizations working to ensure that all students graduate from high school with the ability to enter college and successfully obtain a degree. By working with students and their families, college access programs address academic preparedness, college aspiration and knowledge, and financial barriers.

INVESTMENT RECOMMENDATION

For social impact investors interested in ensuring that all students have the opportunity to go to and succeed in college, SIR recommends supporting programs that focus on the population least likely to have the opportunity for college success: low-income, minority, and first generation college students. Because of the variety of risk factors that these students face, organizations that provide comprehensive services starting in 8th or 9th grade, at the latest, offer the greatest opportunity for success.

When supporting direct-service organizations dedicated to college access and success, SIR recommends organizations that provide students with comprehensive services that incorporate the following components:

- **Academic Preparation and Enrichment** – strengthening students' college eligibility and ability to persist in college once enrolled
- **College Aspiration and Knowledge** – broadening students' understanding of the opportunities available to them, and helping students' in building self-esteem, developing confidence, and acquiring the tools needed to succeed in their academic careers
- **Financial Aid and Planning** – supporting students in identifying, applying for, and maximizing financial aid from all sources

In addition to the three core services above, SIR considers the organizations' broader activities aimed at advancing the field of college access and creating systemic change. Some systemic change activities that investors might look for in direct-service college access organization include: working with public schools to improve the ability of teachers and administrators to influence students' college aspiration; assisting public schools with academic support programs for their students; increasing public awareness of both the barriers that at-risk students face and the most effective practices available, in order to inform policy makers and other programs in the field; taking a leadership role on boards, committees or professional associations working to advance the field of college access and success.

TAKE ACTION

This section provides social impact investors with some specific ways to become involved with organizations that both prepare at-risk students for college access and success through direct service as well as engage in activities to create change on a systemic level.

- Read the SIR organization reports and visit the SIR recommended organizations that interest you or find another organization in your community that uses the SIR recommended approach
- Get to know the organization and its staff, ask for information about the organization's outputs and outcomes, and use this report as a guide to assess the organization's effectiveness and impact
- Discuss opportunities for investment with selected organizations, and trust that the management team will use your investment effectively. Organizations may apply invested funds to:
 - Implement their growth plans (e.g., serve more students, replicate to another location)
 - Improve service quality through increasing staff knowledge and capacity, adding new programs, purchasing supplies, increasing the duration of the program, etc.
 - Implement a more rigorous data-tracking methodology to promote program effectiveness and efficiency
 - Publicize the organization's best practices and successful outcomes to promote knowledge sharing in the field
 - Support other college access organizations and/or schools in developing their capacity
 - Increase capacity to participate in college access advocacy efforts
- Volunteer at an organization as a mentor, teacher, or a board or planning committee member
- Provide internship opportunities for the organization's students at your place of business
- Improve your understanding of the challenges that at-risk students face, through your direct involvement with a college access organization, and discuss the importance of college access and the opportunities for involvement with your friends and family

FACTS: COLLEGE ACCESS AND SUCCESS

73%

2005 data

The average cost of attending a four-year university as a % of annual family income for students from the lowest income quartile²

33%

2007-2008 data

% of all first year college students, nationally, that took at least one remedial course³

BA Attainment Rates by Race

2009 data

Hispanic (at-risk)	Black (at-risk)	White (comparison group)
12%	19%	37%

Note: BA Attainment Rates of Young Adults Ages 25-29 by Race⁴

\$1 million

2004 data

The estimated gap in lifetime earnings between high school graduates and college graduates with a BA⁵

SOCIAL ISSUE INDICATORS

SIR regards the following as the most important indicators in assessing the short-and long-term progress towards closing the gap in high educational attainment for at-risk students. **High school graduation** refers to the percentage of students graduating from high school annually. **College enrollment** refers to the percentage of students enrolling in college within 12 months of completing high school. **College graduation** refers to the percentage of students completing a 4-year college degree program within years of enrollment.

	High School Graduation ⁶	College Enrollment ⁷	College Graduation ⁸
At-Risk Population			
Bottom Income Quartile	65%	57%	10%
Comparison Group			
Top Income Quartile	92%	82%	76%

SOCIAL ISSUE OVERVIEW: WHY COLLEGE ACCESS AND SUCCESS MATTERS

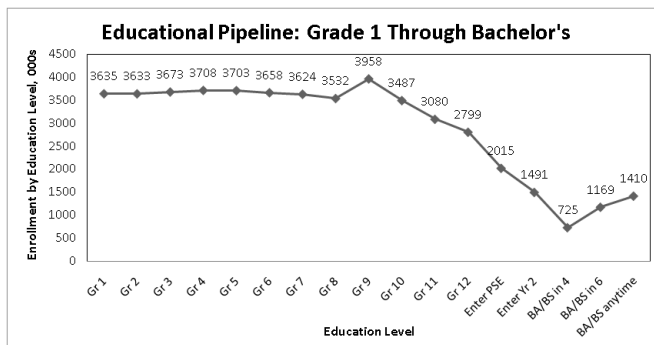
College enrollment and completion rates in the United States have been flat for the past ten years.⁹ While the U.S. still ranks second among developed nations in proportion of workers over the age of 55 with an associate's degree or higher, it drops down to 11th place when looking at the percentage of young workers, aged 25 – 34, that are college-educated.

The combination of substantial increases in the segment of America's young population with the lowest level of education and the coming retirement of the baby boomers (the most highly educated generation in U.S. history) is projected to lead to a further drop in the average level of education of the U.S. workforce over the next two decades. According to a study done by Achieve, nearly eight in ten future job openings in the next decade in the U.S. will require postsecondary education or training.¹⁰ The United States will not have enough college educated workers to fill this 80% of future job openings, unless it increases the educational level of all racial/ethnic and socioeconomic groups.

Education is crucial for wealth creation and poverty eradication. Studies have shown poverty to have adverse effects on many facets of life including employment, health and criminal behavior.¹¹ Higher educational

attainment means better individual opportunity and social cohesion, and more democratic participation. Given the changing demography of the United States, achieving such outcomes will require increases in college success among young people who traditionally have been inadequately represented on the American campuses -- low-income students, students who are the first generation in their families to go to college, and underrepresented minorities.¹² Over the next two decades, the majority of the projected growth in the U.S. population will come from minority groups, primarily Hispanics.¹³ To increase the educational attainment of its population, and thereby its comparative standing internationally, the United States must address disparities in postsecondary educational opportunity and achievement among Americans. These persistent gaps must be closed if the United States is to meet its workforce needs and compete globally.¹⁴

THE ACHIEVEMENT GAP FOR AT-RISK STUDENTS



Source: The College Board, *Coming to Our Senses: Education and the American Future*, The College Board Advocacy & Policy Center, (2008):1.

The U.S. educational pipeline leaks badly, starting in 9th grade and continuing through college. Based on 2002 data, The Center for Public Policy and Higher Education estimates that only 18% of ninth graders will earn a college degree.^{15,16} Minority and low-income students predominate among those being lost along the educational pipeline,¹⁷ both in terms of going to college and in completing degree programs. The boxes below show the risk factors for the two main steps towards college completion – admittance and graduation. In both cases, the risk factors disproportionately affect low income and minority students. The risk factors for college success are often a result of the risk factors for college access.

RISK FACTORS - COLLEGE ACCESS¹⁸

- Poverty
- First generation college student²⁰
- Minority
- No parent fluent in English
- Older siblings dropped out of high school
- Repeated a grade between 1st and 8th
- Inadequate academic preparation

RISK FACTORS - COLLEGE SUCCESS¹⁹

- Taking remedial classes
- Part-time enrollment
- Delayed entry into postsecondary education
- Completion of high school by GED
- Being a parent
- Working full time while enrolled

DISPARITIES IN HIGH SCHOOL GRADUATION

The large disparities in high school graduation rates decrease the pool of potential college applicants.

- More than 90% of students from the top two income quartiles graduate from high school and subsequently have the opportunity to apply to college, compared to 65% of those from the bottom quartile.²¹
- In 2002, 72% of white students graduated from high school compared to 51% of black and 52% of Hispanic students.²²

DISPARITIES IN COLLEGE ENROLLMENT

The disparity in high school graduation rates does not convey the full extent of the problem.

- More than half of the students who graduate from high school do not satisfy the minimal requirements needed to apply to a four-year college or university because they lack basic skills and have not taken coursework required for college admission.²³
- In 2008, 72% of white high school graduates entered college compared to 56% of African-American and 64% of Hispanic high school graduates.²⁴

DISPARITIES IN DEGREE ATTAINMENT

The degree attainment gaps are further widened by disproportionate numbers of at-risk students who enroll in college and complete their studies.

- In 2007, 76% of students from high-income families obtained a Bachelor's degree by age of 24, compared to 10% of students from low-income families.²⁵
- In 2009, 37% of young white adults, ages 25-29, had a bachelor's degree or higher, compared to 19% of African American and 12% of Hispanic young adults.²⁶

MAJOR BARRIERS TO COLLEGE ACCESS AND SUCCESS

Why are low-income and minority students much less likely to enroll in college and further, once in college, even less likely to graduate? SIR has identified three major factors that lead to the low college enrollment and graduation rates of at-risk students.

LOW ACADEMIC PREPAREDNESS

The preparation students receive in high school has been found to be the greatest predictor of bachelor's degree attainment.²⁷ A strong high school curriculum includes four years of challenging mathematics — ending with at least an Algebra II level coursework — and four years of grade-level English. Underserved students have the least access to strong academic programs and are less likely to be on a college-preparatory track.²⁸ The K-12 system fails to adequately prepare students for college; there is a lack of curriculum alignment between high school and post-secondary institutions and there are quality disparities in K-12 teaching between schools. In many states, there is a significant gap in per-student funding between school districts with the highest poverty rates, which are usually also districts with the highest number of minority students, and school districts with the lowest poverty rates. There is not enough state funding to compensate for the lower school revenue from local property taxes in high poverty districts.²⁹ The funding gap often translates into lower teacher salaries, higher teacher turnover, less qualified teachers, and limited numbers of guidance counselors, making it more difficult for at-risk students to navigate the path to college. Further, because of the lack of societal expectations for the academic attainment of at-risk students, state funding is often not applied equitably towards the necessary academic support programs that ensure those students' success. Even when students facing such challenges enroll in college, they often need to take multiple remedial classes. Doing so prolongs the time to graduation, adds to the total cost of a degree, and decreases motivation.

LACK OF COLLEGE KNOWLEDGE

All middle and high schools need a robust college counseling program to build students' college-going aspirations.³⁰ Planning for college must begin early to raise student and family awareness, expectations, and aspirations for college. Many middle school students do not understand that the courses they take in school are determining their chances to get into college. The chances for college access and success for minority and low-income students are further diminished by lack of quality counseling. Because of limited resources in many low-income urban and rural areas and the insufficient number of counselors, low-income and minority students are not well informed about the college admission process and requirements. As a result, these students are less likely than others to explore an array of college options, to take college admission tests, or to complete admission procedures—even if they are well qualified for college. As a result, college planning for these students begins too late and they are less likely to fulfill their postsecondary plans.³¹

RISING COST OF COLLEGE, SHRINKING AVAILABLE AID, AND LACK OF AWARENESS

Even if they are qualified for college, students of limited means encounter yet another barrier to college entry — financial affordability. In recent years, college affordability has become a much greater problem for low-income families.³² At public four-year institutions, tuition and fees that averaged 57% of family income for low-income families in 1992 had jumped to 73% of their income by 2005.³³ Financial aid has not kept pace with increasing college costs: the average federal need-based Pell grant now covers only 25% of total costs at public four-year colleges — down from 47% in 1975 — and only 10% of private college costs — down from 24% in 1975. The burden of paying for college is shifted to students and their families, which often forces low-income students to work more than half time and live away from campus, both risk factors that further decrease their chances of academic attainment. In addition, first generation college-goers are often unaware of all available options to pay for college. Private universities, for example, often offer performance-based full tuition reimbursement. Because many students and their families are uninformed of the potentially available funding, they often don't consider college to be an option.

APPROACHES TO COLLEGE ACCESS AND SUCCESS

College access programs vary — they may be offered in or out of school and are often initiated through partnerships among nonprofit organizations, higher education institutions, government agencies, community-based organizations, and/or K–12 schools.³⁴ There are two distinct program models — the cohort model and the individual student model — which are exemplified by the government sponsored GEAR UP and Upward Bound programs. These are well-established programs that have undergone evaluations and collect high-quality data that are used as benchmarks for best practices.

- **Cohort Model (GEAR UP)** Using a model targeting an entire cohort of students in a particular school, GEAR UP operates in secondary school systems to expose every child to a pre-college curriculum. The GEAR UP grantee schools are expected to serve and track a cohort of middle school students through high school graduation.³⁵ GEAR UP, initially funded in 1999, and the few other existing cohort model programs are relatively new and consequently have few quantifiable outcomes. However, by providing earlier intervention to a wider audience, they represent an important evolution in determining the most successful strategies for building college aspirations and skills for success.
- **Individual Student Model (Upward Bound)** The individual student model is exemplified by the Upward Bound program, which was established as part of the Economic Opportunity Act of 1964. There is a wide agreement among researchers, policymakers, and practitioners that the Upward Bound model of intervention provides the conceptual framework for the majority of the existing college access programs. While the programs vary in how they deliver services and in what components they emphasize, all of the programs focus on providing comprehensive services to individual students.

CHARACTERISTICS OF AN EFFECTIVE COLLEGE ACCESS AND SUCCESS PROGRAM

SIR has conducted a comprehensive literature review of academic, government, and practitioner sources and collected input from ten experts representing government, academia, practitioners, and funders to determine the best practices for improving college enrollment and success of at-risk students.³⁶ Based on the information collected, SIR has identified three essential program components that comprise the comprehensive service model and address each of the barriers to college access, regardless of the model of intervention that a program may choose.

High-performing initiatives incorporate Academic Preparation and Enrichment, College Aspiration and Knowledge, and Financial Aid and Planning in their programs in order to provide at-risk students with foundational knowledge, skills, abilities, and personal resources for academic success.

- **Academic Preparation and Enrichment** addresses the problem of under-preparation for college and provides services to strengthen students' college eligibility. To address the lack of rigorous curricula in schools with educationally disadvantaged students, effective college access programs provide a variety of services including academic advising and core subject tutoring as well as classes for academic enrichment, college admission test preparation, and study skills training.
- **College Aspiration and Knowledge** aims at improving students' academic aspirations, broadening their understanding of the opportunities available, and linking academic achievement and future career opportunities. Furthermore, successful college access programs provide students with the tools to adapt more easily to the college environment and help them build self-esteem and develop confidence.
- **Financial Aid and Planning** refers to the program's efforts to build awareness in students and their families about college costs. Successful programs give students extensive support in identifying, applying for, and receiving financial aid; helping students maximize aid from all sources.

In addition to providing comprehensive services that address all three of these program components, the effectiveness of college access programs is highly dependent upon the timing of their intervention as well as the quality of relationships that organizations have with high schools and universities.³⁷ To be effective, college access and success programs should begin in 8th or 9th grade at the latest. Because curricular decisions play a profound role in shaping a student's eligibility for higher education, many experts feel that college access programs work should begin in middle or even in elementary school.³⁸ Another important component that contributes to positive outcomes of a college access program is parental engagement. Involving parents more deeply in their children's lives and helping them become a positive influence improves students' ability to succeed.

Because of the multiple barriers that at-risk students face, continued support through college is critical for their ability to persist. Programs that provide continuous support build trust and are more effective in offering the greatest assistance to students throughout their whole educational career.

RETURN ON INVESTMENT

College access and success is a high impact area of investment to achieve positive outcomes for at-risk youth. Four-year degrees provide the greatest benefit; however, two-year colleges can be the right choice either for students interested in entering the work force sooner or as a stepping stone to a four-year institution. While there are no studies quantifying the advantages of investing in quality college access programs, the available data indicates significant return on investment from higher educational attainment. Furthermore, the benefits can be measured in a number of positive outcomes for society as a whole, government, and individuals:

SOCIETY:

- Increased civic participation and more tolerant and understanding citizens
- Increased participation in the democratic process
- Lower crime and related costs
- Increased employment and productivity

GOVERNMENT:

- Decreased expenditures in public assistance, public housing, and the criminal justice system: annual average cash and in-kind transfers per person are approximately \$1,800 less for a bachelor's degree holder (2004-2005)³⁹
- Higher tax revenue: a bachelor's degree holder contributes on average over \$10,000 more in annual tax payments than a high school graduate⁴⁰

INDIVIDUAL:

- Higher employment rates: from 2004-2005, 82% of bachelor's degree holders were employed, compared to 70% of high school graduates⁴¹
- Higher earnings: the mean annual earnings of a bachelor's degree holder are \$27,400 higher than those of a high school graduate⁴²
- \$310B in aggregated personal income by 2020⁴³
- Better ability of parents to assist in the education of their children

Quality college access and success programs that serve at-risk students present an investor with the opportunity to create a significant social impact. Comprehensive service programs that provide academic preparation, college aspiration and knowledge, and financial aid and planning services are well positioned to address the main barriers to higher education. These programs represent an important measure to address the gap in educational attainment for disadvantaged youth.

To learn more about what's happening in college access and success in your state, please refer to the SIR State Reports. For examples of high-performing organizations, please refer to the SIR Organization Reports.

SOURCES AND ENDNOTES

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Social Impact Research (SIR) is the independent research department of Root Cause, a research and consulting firm dedicated to mobilizing the nonprofit, public, and business sectors to work together in a new social impact market. SIR aggregates, analyzes, and disseminates information to help social impact investors identify and support the most effective, efficient, and sustainable organizations working to solve social problems. Modeled after private sector equity research firms, SIR produces research reports, analyzes philanthropic portfolios, and provides educational services for advisors to help their clients make effective and rigorous philanthropic decisions.

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