Increase the percent of SFUSD Graduates who complete a Post-Secondary Degree within 6 years

High School Graduates who Enroll in College and Complete within Six Years

Source: National Student Clearinghouse
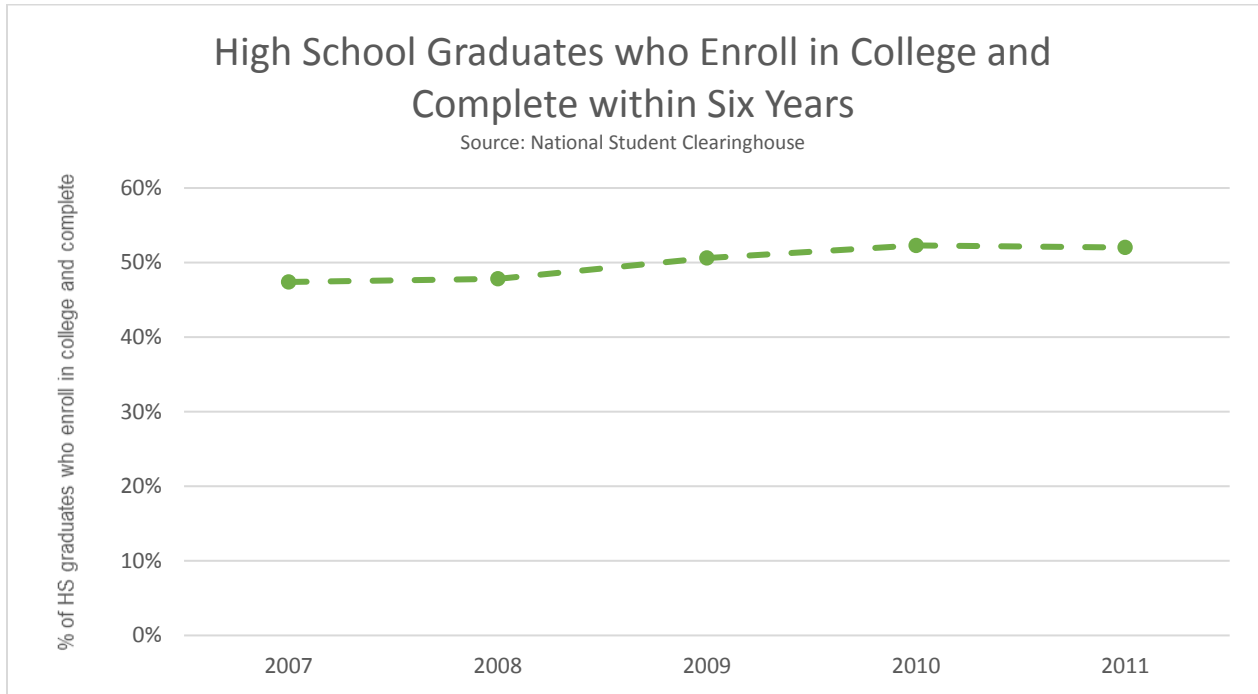
The above chart shows the percentage of SFUSD students who graduated between 2007 and 2011 who completed a post-secondary degree within six years of graduating from high school.

Data Definition & the San Francisco Trend line

The chart above shows the percentage of San Francisco Unified School District (SFUSD) graduates that completed degrees at two and four-year institutions within six years of graduation. Each year on the chart represents the year in which a group of SFUSD students graduated from high school. For each year, the number of SFUSD graduates that enrolled in and completed a degree within six years is shown as a percentage of total SFUSD graduates from that year. For example, the last data point on the chart shows that 52% of the 3,885 students graduating from SFUSD high schools in 2011 completed either an Associate's, Bachelor's or advanced degree by 2017. Certificate programs are not included in the dataset.

The percent of students who complete a post-secondary degree within six years is calculated using a service provided by the National Student Clearinghouse, StudentTracker. It is important to note that data for approximately 10% of each graduating cohort in not available through the National Student Clearing House. SFUSD uses StudentTracker to identify its graduates at U.S. colleges and universities.

The percent of SFUSD students who graduated from a post-secondary institution within six years increased slightly across the three years for which we have data. For the cohort of students who graduated from high school in 2007, 47% completed post-secondary within six years, as compared to 52% for the class of 2011. While data by race/ethnicity is not available, it is important to consider the

racial/ethnic disparities, especially for African American and Hispanic/Latino youth, which exist in similar indicators (high school graduation and the percent of 18-24 years old in school or working).

Story Behind the Curve

Completing a post-secondary degree within six years is difficult for many students. College readiness is a result of many years of successful achievements in progressively more demanding educational experiences. There is no single explanation for why students do or do not complete post-secondary education within six years. Factors that have been shown to impact post-secondary completion include: challenges with the mental and emotional leap from high school to post-secondary settings and expectations; increasingly high costs of attending college; challenges obtaining proper supports through family and/or financial resources; challenges testing into and enrolling in the proper required courses; and lack of "college going" culture.[i],[ii] This section will highlight some of the barriers and initiatives specific to San Francisco that may impact this indicator.

Policy and Practice Shifts

Cost of Attendance at California's public colleges and universities. Increases in tuition across California's public four-year universities have increased concerns about the affordability of a college education, especially for those with the lowest incomes. In-state full tuition at the University of California (UC) and California State University (CSU) has risen more dramatically than at other public universities in other states over the past decade. During this same period, the federal, state and institutional grant and scholarship programs that help make college affordable for students from lower- and middle-income families have expanded. This helped lower-income families keep up with rising tuition, but the full price of college beyond tuition can still be a relatively large share of their income.[iii] From 2004 to 2018, the average tuition across UCs and CSUs more than doubled from around $4,000 to more than $9,000. However, it is important to note that the average cost of attending a UC school is more than double that of attending a CSU school.[iv] Additionally, while the cost of attending a community college in California is amongst the lowest in the nation, it increased by 20% between 2011 and 2016.[v]

City College of San Francisco Accreditation Issues. In 2012, the Accrediting Commission for Community and Junior Colleges (ACCJC) announced plans to revoke City College of San Francisco's (City College) accreditation. The resulting legal and political actions left the school's accreditation status in limbo for more than five years. Between 2012 and 2016 there was a 26% decrease in student enrollment, which resulted in a reduction of college income, cuts to faculty, classes and programs. While the accreditation issues are likely not the sole cause for reduced enrollment, it is surely a contributing factor. As of January 2017, ACCJC announced that City College would retain its accreditation for another seven years.[vi],[vii] In the 2017-18 school year, enrollment increased 15% over the previous year.[viii]

Improvements in Policies around Placement Tests at City College of San Francisco. In 2009, City College changed the wait time to retake the English and math placement tests to two weeks. This effort was coupled with increased messaging to SFUSD students to take the placement test seriously since placing well can accelerate the completion of a degree at City College. As a result, re-testing of English by SFUSD students increased from 17% in 2008 to 24% in 2011, compared to the general CCSF entering students whose rate of re-testing remained relatively steady from 2008 to 2012.[ix]

Bridge to Success. In 2010, San Francisco received a grant from the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation to increase post-secondary completion rates under their Communities Learning in Partnership strategy.

San Francisco's initiative was a partnership between the City, SFUSD and City College, which became known as Bridge to Success. Bridge to Success helped to initiate several policy changes and practices to address specific points in student's trajectories that lead them off track and facilitate a smoother transition from high school to post-secondary. Policy changes included priority enrollment for SFUSD students in City College math and English courses, better use of data, alignment of math/English coursework between SFUSD high schools and City College, a Summer Bridge Program, and supported transition to City College and San Francisco State University, among others. Although funding for this initiative has ended, SFUSD and City College continue to coordinate on policies and practices that increase enrollment and retention.[x]

Factors Related to Post-secondary Retention

The following outlines a series of factors identified by research as having a marked impact on retention, especially for students of color.[xi]

Academic Preparedness. Research shows that between 30 and 40% of all entering freshmen are unprepared for college-level reading and writing and approximately 44% of all college students who complete a two- or four year degree had enrolled in at least one remedial or developmental course in math, reading or writing.

Campus Climate. While researchers agree that "institutional fit" and campus integration are important to retaining college students to degree completion, campus climate influences an undergraduate's academic and social experiences in college. Minority students who are inadequately prepared for non-academic challenges can experience culture shock. Lack of diversity in the student population, faculty, staff and curriculum often restrict the nature and quality of minority students' interactions within and out of the classroom, threatening their academic performance and social experiences.

Financial Aid. For many low-income and minority students, enrollment and persistence decisions are driven by the availability of financial aid. Low-income and minority students who receive grants generally are more likely to persist than those who receive loans. However, given the rising costs of attending college, it is unlikely that many low-income students will be able to receive bachelor's degrees without any loan aid. At the same time, research also suggests that the shifts in aid from grants to loans and from need-based to merit-based programs adversely affects both enrollment and persistence for minority students.

Social and Academic Integration. The establishment of peer relations and the development of role models and mentors within the school setting can be important factors in student integration, both academically and socially.

What Works: A Selection of Best Practices to increase the number of SFUSD Students who complete a Post-Secondary Degree within six years

No single policy or program will ensure that all youth in San Francisco enroll in and complete post-secondary education. The following is a brief overview several components of an evidence-based framework for retaining minority students in higher education, with a particular emphasis on practices that are not at the sole discretion of the university or college. [xii]

Provide Financial Aid Resources. Financial aid is a critical component of college persistence, especially for students from low-income backgrounds. There are four categories financial aid: grants and scholarships, student loans, financial counseling, and assistantships/ work-study programs. There is research supporting all four components as important factors in student retention.

Recruitment and Admissions. An appropriate fit between a school and the students that attend that school can help student success. How students are recruited and the process of admissions should ensure that students who are admitted to the school will have the opportunity to thrive.

Academic Services. These five approaches have been shown to positively impact retention: academic advising, tutoring and mentoring, research opportunities, precollege programming, and bridging programs.

1. Effective academic advising is important to laying out an appropriate course map for students. To be effective, students should receive guidance that reflects their needs and incorporates knowledge of campus programming and bureaucratic practices. Prospective advisers need to be trained accordingly to handle a variety of issues during advising sessions.
2. Tutoring and mentoring practices form another support network for students. Colleges should make tutoring support available and affordable to students with such need. Faculty members should also make themselves available for academic assistance.
3. Students in science-based disciplines (social and physical) can benefit greatly from research opportunities. The link between classroom theory and real-world practice has positive implications for a student's retention of knowledge while also making him or her more marketable after graduation. The development of local business partnerships and encouragement of on-campus research can create excellent opportunities for students.
4. Precollege programs provide an opportunity for the campus to work actively with elementary and secondary students. Colleges can benefit greatly from the establishment of these and other programs and the ensuing partnerships with K–12 schools and community organizations.
5. Bridging programs are an offshoot of precollege programs but are more specific. Colleges can effectively use a high school student's senior year or summer before matriculation to help further develop and orient the student's knowledge and ability to meet freshman program requirements. Study skills, time management and course-related study are popular content offerings.

Student Services. The atmosphere and climate of the university, reflected by how the institution treats and supports students and by the positive nature of peer relations on campus, is important to the self-esteem and confidence a student generates. Personal, emotional and family problems, in addition to feelings of isolation and adjustment to college life, are strong barriers to retention for African American students. Therefore, the campus should focus on developing an atmosphere that is supportive, safe, and pluralistic. Five components of student services that support a strong climate include: diversity and multiculturalism through special programming and activities, flexible scheduling allowing a broader range of students to attend, career counseling, faculty-student interaction and providing comfortable and affordable room and board.

Monitoring Progress. Finally, a student monitoring system is also necessary to assess the impacts of interventions and other retention strategies. The collection of information provides the institution with a snapshot of students' progress and allows the institution to provide appropriate supports to students.

Please see the following selected references for more information on the 'Story Behind the Curve' and highlighted 'Best Practices'

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