# **Program's Extra Support for Community-College Students Is Paying Off**

By Katherine Mangan February 26, 2015

A program at City University of New York that surrounds full-time students with intensive financial, academic, and career support has nearly doubled the three-year graduation rate for community-college students who start out in remedial classes, according to a study released on Wednesday.

The [Accelerated Study in Associate Programs,](http://chronicle.com/article/How-CUNY-Is-Producing-More/143755/) or ASAP, also increased college enrollment and credits earned, lowered the cost per degree, and raised the number of students transferring to four-year colleges, says a 129-page [report](http://www.mdrc.org/publication/doubling-graduation-rates) on the study, which was released by MDRC, a nonprofit education- and social-policy research group.

The study focused on low-income students needing one or two remedial courses at three CUNY colleges: Borough of Manhattan, Kingsborough, and LaGuardia.

Forty percent of the students in the study graduated within three years, compared with 22 percent in the control group. Nationwide, only about 15 percent of community-college students who start out in remedial education earn a degree or certificate within three years, the report notes.

The City University and MDRC are working to replicate the model elsewhere around the country, starting with three two-year colleges in Ohio. And while President Obama [promoted the ASAP project](http://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2015/01/09/fact-sheet-white-house-unveils-america-s-college-promise-proposal-tuitio) during his [free-community-college](http://chronicle.com/article/Obama-Proposes-Free-Community/151097/) pitch last month, the program’s high cost could prove a deterrent in many states where community-college support has been slashed. Over three years, CUNY spent about $16,300 more per ASAP student than it did on those in the general population. That’s an increase of 63 percent.

But because it significantly increased graduation rates, the program ended up costing less per graduate, at least at the three-year mark, the researchers concluded. The findings are "by far the most encouraging results of any community-college reform that MDRC has yet evaluated," the report says.

**Success Hardly Surprising**

ASAP [began in 2007](http://chronicle.com/article/CUNY-Starts-Pilot-Program-to/122789) with financial support from the New York City Center for Economic Opportunity. The program requires students to attend college full time and encourages them to take remedial, or developmental, courses early on and to graduate within three years.

It provides them with three years of academic and financial assistance, including a tuition waiver that covers any gap between a student’s financial aid and tuition and fees, use of free textbooks, and a MetroCard for public transportation. Students who ditch their tutoring sessions lose their bus passes.

They are required to meet frequently with advisers whose initial caseloads (60 to 80 students per adviser) are much smaller than the typical caseload of 600 to 1,500 students at CUNY’s two-year institutions. The program also includes mandatory tutoring, career advising, and seminars on topics like study skills and goal setting. Students can register for courses early, which helps them get into classes they need to graduate on time, and they can enroll in blocked or linked classes with other ASAP students in their first year.

With so much intensive support, some say it’s hardly surprising that success rates would soar.

**'Bombarded With Requests'**

But Donna Linderman, who oversees the ASAP program as university dean for student-success initiatives at CUNY, said her office had been "bombarded with requests for information from all over the country."

The results of the MDRC study are "dramatic and encouraging," said David S. Baime, senior vice president for government relations and research at the American Association of Community Colleges.

"Clearly the results show what can be done," he said, "when more-adequate funding is provided for programs at community colleges."

The approach won’t work for all students, though, he and other educators cautioned. Most students in the evaluation sample were relatively young, lived at home with their parents, were unmarried, and did not have children. Even with such support, the millions of older, married, and working community-college students would probably struggle to commit to a full-time schedule. About 40 percent of community-college students attend full time.

Leaders of the National Association for Developmental Education, meeting this week for their annual convention, called the program promising but questioned how widely replicable it might be, given its cost.

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