



Community College Interventions for Low-Wage Workers: Lessons from the Opening Doors Demonstration

Recovery and Reemployment Research Conference
September 15, 2009

Thomas Brock

Director, Young Adults and Postsecondary Education

www.mdrc.org

Why Focus on Community Colleges?

The Benefits:

- Adults with some college or an A.A. degree earn 12 percent more than high school graduates and 66 percent more than high school dropouts.
- Adults with an A.A. less likely to be unemployed or in poverty.
- Better health, greater civic participation, children better prepared for school.

The Problem: Many Students Do Not Persist

- Nearly half of all students who begin at community college do not complete a degree or transfer within 6 years.

Major obstacles:

- Competing work and/or family obligations
- Not academically prepared
- Affordability (both real and perceived)

Opening Doors: A Demonstration Project of Strategies to Help Community College Students Succeed

Three broad strategies:

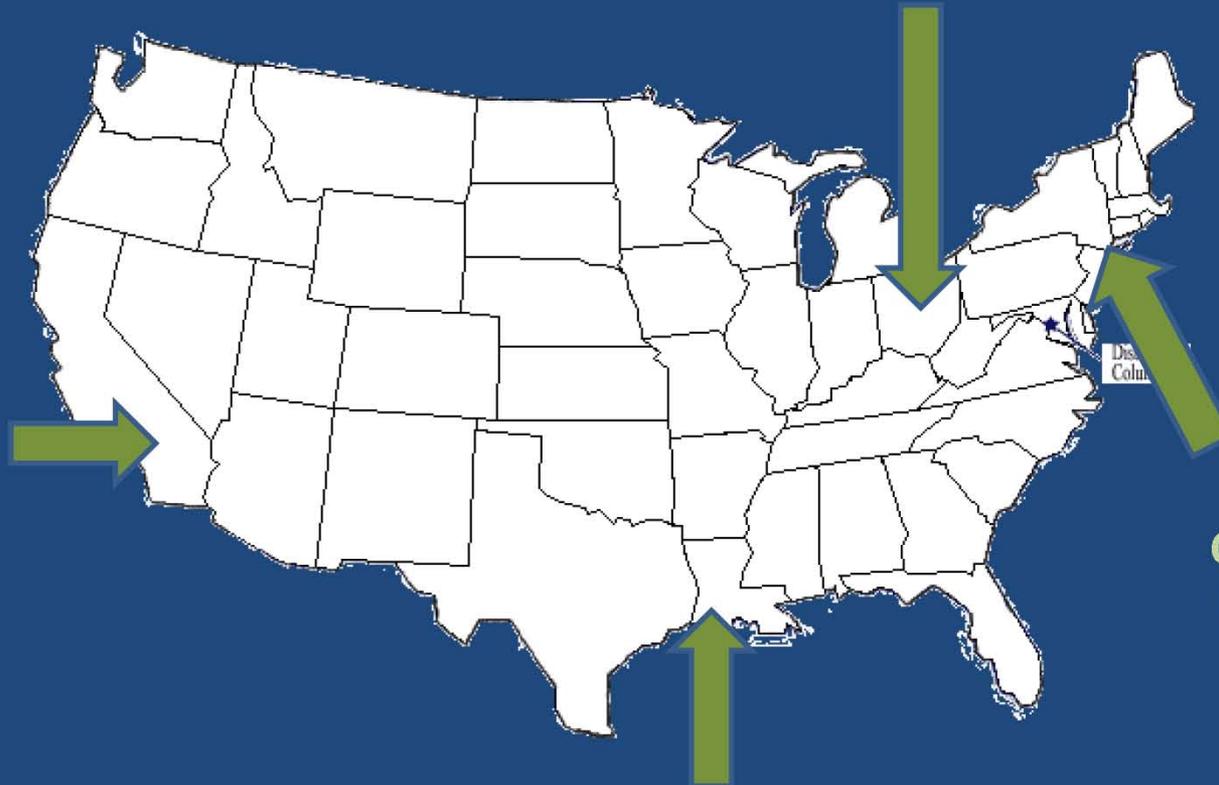
- Instructional reforms
- Enhanced student services
- Increased financial support

Desired outcomes:

- Improved academic performance
- Increased persistence
- Higher rates of certificate and degree completion
- Improved employment outcomes

Opening Doors Sites and Program Strategies

Enhanced Student Services: Lorain County and Owens Community Colleges (OH)

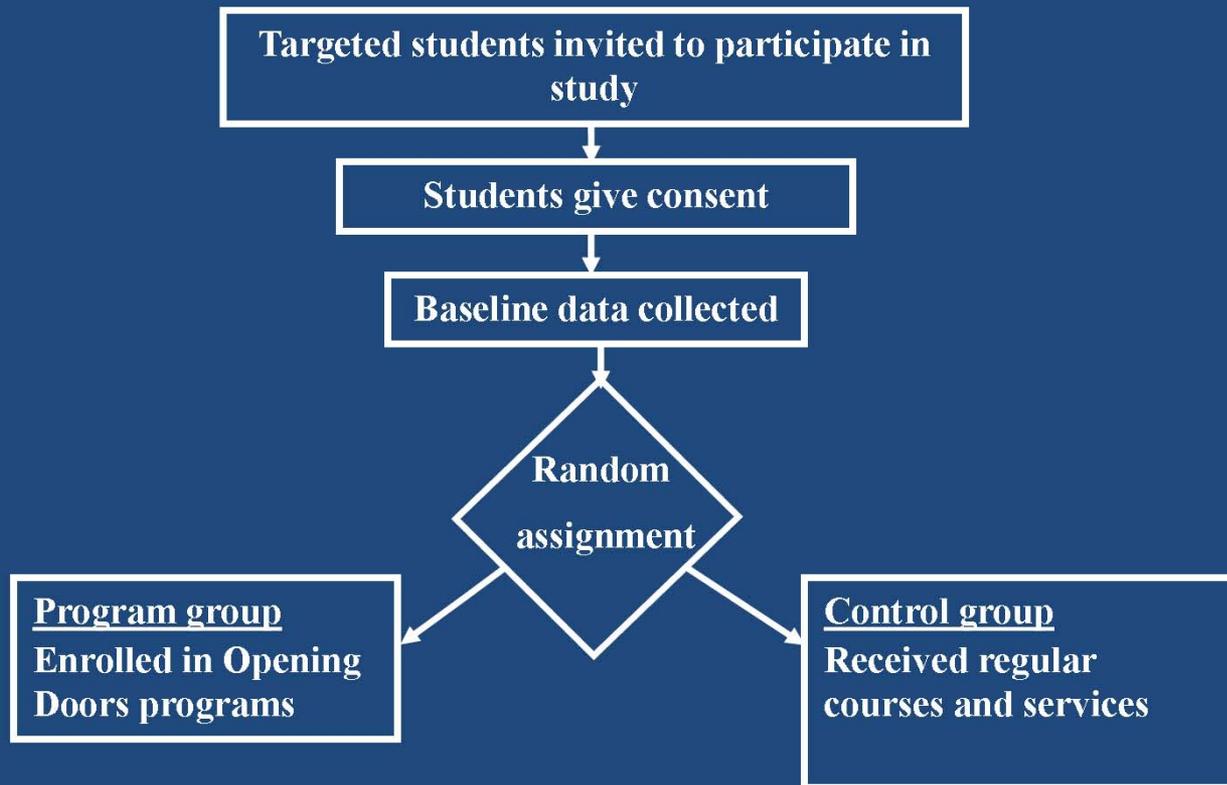


Student Success Course and Basic Skills Instruction:
Chaffey College (CA)

Performance-Based Scholarship:
Delgado Community College and Louisiana Technical College – West Jefferson (LA)

Learning Communities:
Kingsborough Community College (NY)

Random Assignment Used to Measure Program Effects



Ohio: Enhanced Student Services

- Students assigned to a program counselor who served as their advocate and advisor
 - Low caseloads: maximum of 185 students (vs. 1,000 for control group) college
 - Stipends of \$150 offered for each of two semesters, paid after meetings with counselor
- Proactive, team-oriented approach:
 - Referrals to and follow-up with other student services staff, including financial aid staff.
- Program delivered services as intended:
 - On average, program group had 9 contacts with counselor during two-semester program.
 - 90 percent of program group received stipend payments, half received full \$300.

Ohio: Sample Characteristics (n = 2139)

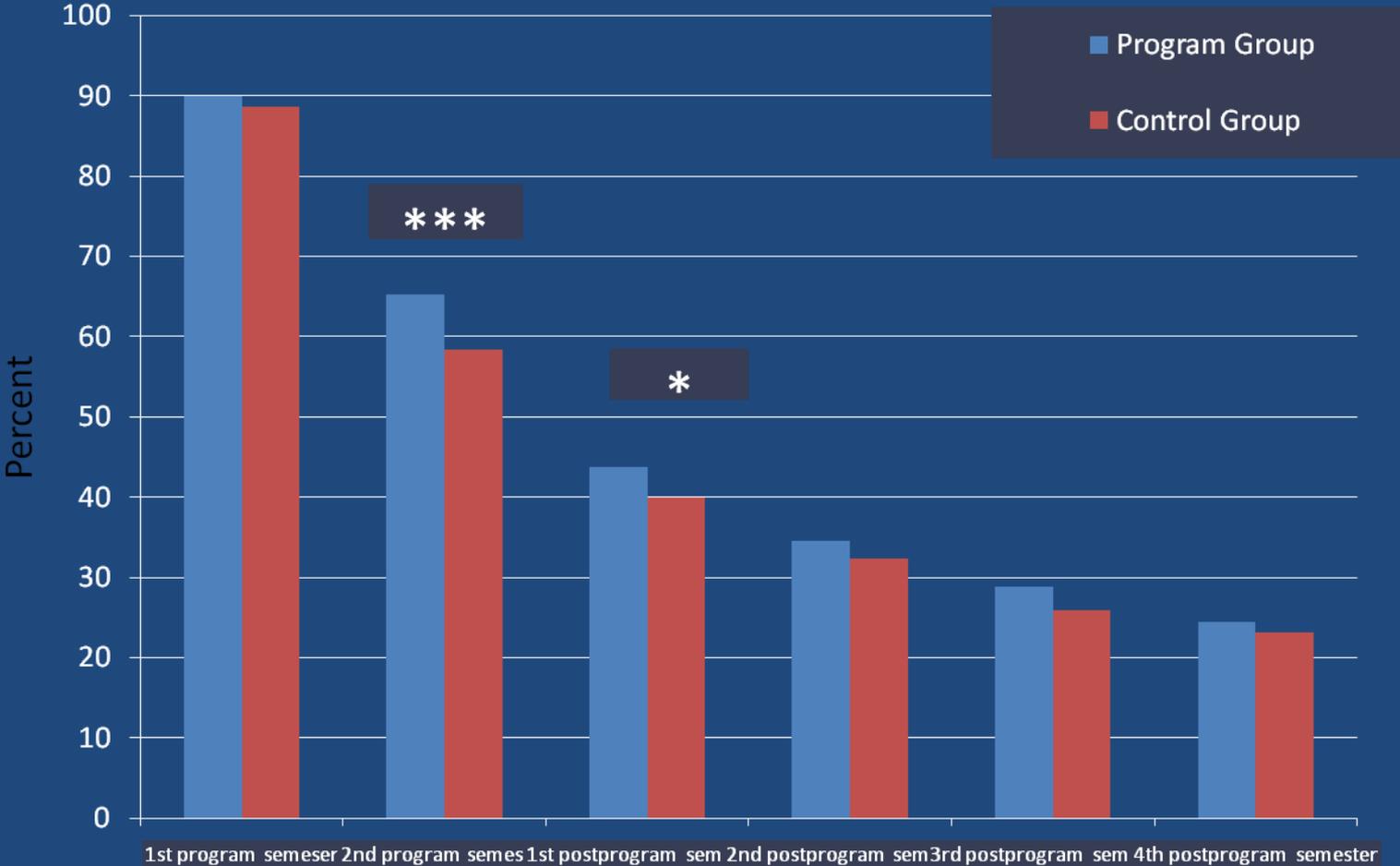
Target group:

- Incoming freshmen and continuing students who completed fewer than 13 credits, and had history of academic difficulties
- Family income below 250 percent of federal poverty level

Key Characteristics:

- Women: 75%
- Average age: 24
- Race/Ethnicity
 - White: 54%
 - Black and Hispanic: 41%
- Employed at baseline: 56%
- Receiving any public benefits: 48%

Ohio: Positive Effects on College Enrollment while Enhanced Services Were Delivered, but No Enduring Effect



Louisiana: Performance-Based Scholarships

- Students received \$1,000 for two semesters (\$2,000 total) on two conditions:
 - Enroll at least half-time
 - Maintain “C” or better average
- Scholarship paid in increments:
 - \$250 on enrollment
 - \$250 on passing midterms
 - \$500 on passing courses
- Program counselors monitored academic progress and disbursed payments
- Program delivered scholarships as intended:
 - 90 percent of program group received at least one scholarship payment
 - Average amount received: \$1,133

Louisiana: Participating Students (n = 1019)

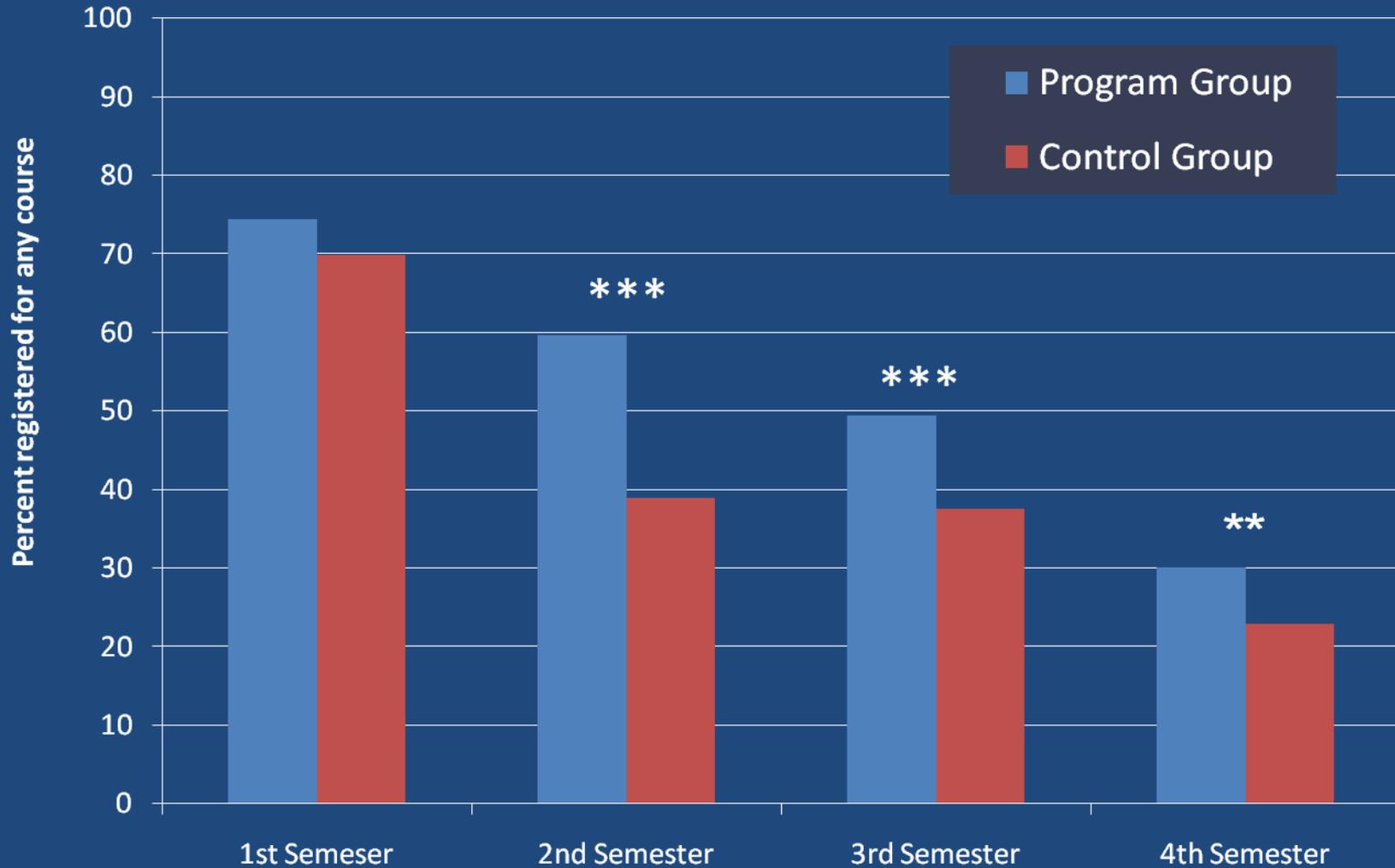
Target group:

- Low-income parents

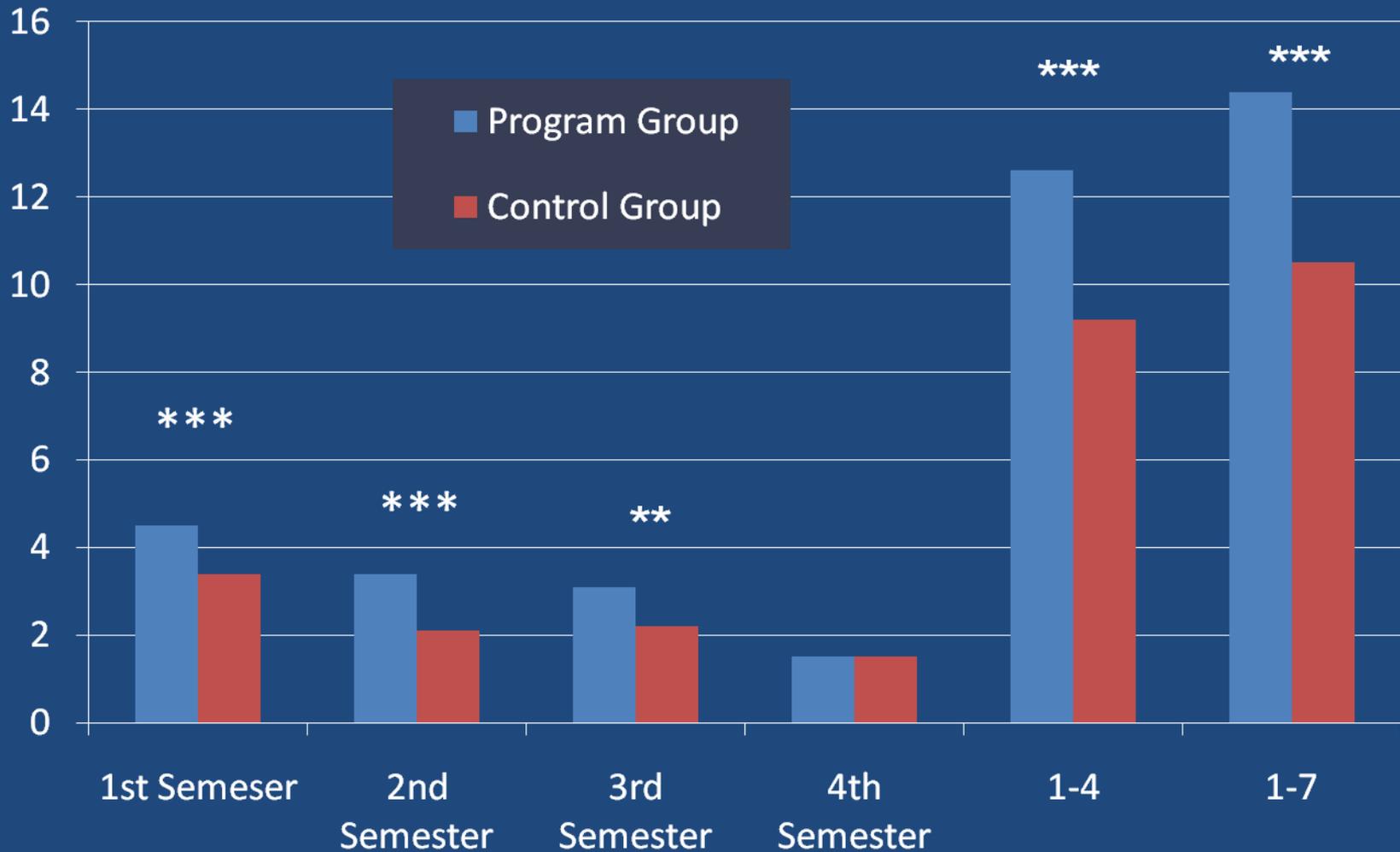
Key Characteristics:

- Women: 92%
- Average age: 25
- Race/Ethnicity
 - Black: 85%
 - White: 11%
- Employed at baseline: 52%
- Receiving any public benefits: 71%

Louisiana: Positive Effects on College Enrollment



Louisiana: Positive Effects on Credit Accumulation



Conclusions

- Interventions for low-wage workers attending community college can make a difference in academic outcomes
- Enhanced student services help, but may need to be ongoing
 - Short-term intervention yields short-term results.
- Performance-Based Scholarships appear to have a larger positive effect and make a lasting difference, even after scholarships end
- Many funding sources can be tapped to provide these supports: WIA, TANF, private sources, American Graduation Initiative (if passed by Congress)

Opening Doors Funders

U.S. Department of Labor

U.S. Department of Education

National Institutes of Health

Lumina Foundation for Education

Ford Foundation

Robin Hood Foundation

William and Flora Hewlett
Foundation

James Irvine Foundation

Knowledgeworks Foundation

MacArthur Foundation Research
Network on Socioeconomic
Status and Health

MacArthur Foundation Research
Network on Socioeconomic
Status and Health

MacArthur Foundation Research
Network on the Transitions to
Adulthood

Annie E. Casey Foundation

William T. Grant Foundation

Joyce Foundation

Charles Stewart Mott Foundation

George Gund Foundation