



Prioritizing College Completion In and Around Chicago

Prepared for
Forefront's College and Career Access, Persistence and Success
(CCAPS) Group

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It is Time to Prioritize College Completion

More than ever before, full participation in social, political and economic life requires that all Americans be educated well. A study by Georgetown University's Center on Education and the Workforce suggests that "by 2020, 65 percent of all jobs in the economy will require postsecondary education and training beyond high school."¹ In the Chicago region, however, degree attainment stands at 44.59% for residents ages 25-65.²

For the Chicago region to progress, we need the talents and skills of all people to be available to our communities, our workforce and our democracy. There has been noticeable progress in this regard thanks to the hard work of many. Over the last 10 years, graduation rates for Chicago Public School (CPS) students have been increasing. According to CPS data, as of 2014, about 66% of CPS students graduate from high school, and GPA and ACT scores are also rising.³ In addition, the UChicago Consortium on School Research reports that since 2006 there has been a moderate increase in four-year college enrollment rates. Of the almost 70% of CPS students who graduate from high school, 40% enroll in a four-year degree program. While there is room for improvement, the numbers for CPS are now comparable to the national average.

What is concerning is that while we have seen remarkable increases in high school graduation rates and student qualifications, four-year college graduation rates are stagnant. Currently, the Chicago Degree Attainment Index notes that 14% of CPS 9th grade students will graduate with a 4-year degree within six years of high school graduation. Yet, annually, 75% of CPS students say they want to earn a 4-year degree⁴ and nationally 80% of students report a similar desire.⁵

An ongoing and persistent challenge for the Chicago region is that it remains racially and economically segregated, and the systems that are in place can limit postsecondary opportunities for low-income, first-generation students. To increase postsecondary degree attainment for Chicago-area students, we must identify, study and remove the obstacles that are preventing students from succeeding in college. Once these barriers are replaced with new approaches, we must ensure that opportunities are fairly distributed across places, races and other lines.

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Our regional economy needs more college-educated workers than ever

before, and both K-12 and higher education institutions are critical to ensuring that the current and next generation of students are equipped with the knowledge and skills to meet future workforce demands. Research has clearly established that educational attainment is an important resource in building physical, social and civic well-being. College completion makes it more likely that people will vote and be civically involved, and is associated with better health outcomes and even a longer life expectancy. Higher rates of college completion in a region mean greater numbers of higher-income earners, which translates into greater revenue for public budgets and an increased ability to support the kinds of public social and civic resources that contribute to vibrant, thriving communities.⁶

There is increased national and state interest in graduating more students from college and there is an opportunity to leverage, align and expand current local efforts focused on improving student persistence and college completion – see Appendix A: The Case for Taking Action (p. 7). **Now is the time to put in place the leadership and infrastructure needed to champion targeted strategies and approaches to increase college access and completion rates for the Chicago region.**

1 Recovery: Job Growth and Education Requirements through 2020, 2013.

2 College attainment in the 25 most populous metropolitan regions in the continental U.S., 2015.

3 Chicago Public Schools School Data

4 Consortium on School Research analysis of 2013 My Voice, My School student survey, 2013.

5 The Condition of College and Career Readiness, 2013.

6 Education Pays: The Benefits of Higher Education for Individuals and Society, 2013.

Accelerating College Completion In and Around Chicago

To accelerate college completion in the Chicago area, strong consideration should be given to launching The Partnership for College Completion. The proposed vision, mission and approach are as follows:

Mission: To catalyze and champion policies, systems and practices that ensure all students in and around Chicago - particularly low-income, first-generation students - graduate from college and achieve their career aspirations.

Vision: The Chicago region graduates significantly more students from college prepared for meaningful careers and civic leadership and is a model of postsecondary degree attainment for the nation.

Approach: The Partnership for College Completion will be a leading voice for college success in the Chicago region. It will work to build relationships with 2- and 4- year colleges and universities in and around Chicago and it will partner with other stakeholders to advance strategies that support student success in college and beyond. Based on priorities identified through previous planning phases and information gathered from leaders of similar initiatives nationally, we believe that The Partnership for College Completion should:

- Develop and promote **regional strategies** to increase college completion that align with national, statewide and local initiatives.
- Champion college access and completion **advocacy**.
- Initiate, support and share **research and best practices** to deepen understanding about regional college completion efforts and workforce trends.
- **Build awareness** and encourage a wide range of stakeholders to prioritize college completion, including higher education institutions, business leaders, students and families.
- **Incentivize, support and celebrate** ambitious action by higher education institutions to improve systems and supports that ensure undergraduate success for all students.

To be effective, The Partnership for College Completion will need to possess expert knowledge of the issues and opportunities related to college access, persistence and completion for Chicago-area students, particularly for low-income, first-generation students. It will need to develop a deep understanding of regional efforts to increase completion rates and figure out how to leverage and promote successful endeavors. In addition, The Partnership will need to develop a trusting relationship with K-12 and higher education leaders, deeply engage parents, policymakers and business and community leaders and partner closely with state and local nonprofit operators. Together, bold solutions to address the barriers to student success in college will need to be developed. **Indeed, the scope of work will need to be continuously informed and improved through the contributions of many education, civic and social organizations in the Chicago area.**

The Role of The Partnership for College Completion

Informed by many leaders who are deeply committed to student success, the Stakeholder Feedback and Recommendations for Advancing Chicago's Postsecondary Access and Success Report (Stakeholder Feedback report) identified two key areas that require attention in order to advance the postsecondary access and success landscape: 1) Progressive Postsecondary Pathways and 2) College Access and Success. Given the broad scope of recommendations and the types of leadership and skills required to execute the different scopes of work, we envision The Partnership for College Completion focusing its efforts on a portion of the College Access and Success work. The Chicagoland Workforce Funder Alliance has quickly stepped up to take the lead with the support of other College and Career Access, Persistence and Success (CCAPS) funders to advance some of the Pathways priorities.

Of the College Access and Success priorities identified in the Stakeholder Feedback report, it is recommended that The Partnership for College Completion take the lead on addressing two of the priorities: **Elevate the Role of Higher Education and Establish a Stronger Advocacy Presence**. In addition, it should partner with other organizations to address the remaining priorities identified in the Stakeholder Feedback report, including: Building Capacity Within K-12 Schools and Districts, Developing Benchmarks and Quality Indicators, Developing a College Access and Success Data Strategy and Centralizing Resources and Information (see The Need for Partnership section on p. 5).

Scope of Work: Further conversation is required to define a precise scope of work for The Partnership for College Completion and we believe that a future Executive Director who possesses a deep understanding of the challenges and barriers students face as they pursue a college degree will be best positioned to lead that process. However, we believe some actions The Partnership for College Completion could take to advance its mission include:

- Identify priority strategies, key systems and institutional changes needed to increase college completion in and around Chicago and advocate for necessary reforms.
- Partner with existing organizations and initiatives, including To&Through, the Illinois Longitudinal Data System, FAFSA Data Initiative and regional collective impact initiatives (such as Thrive Chicago) to generate regional data that captures the key metrics necessary to provide a comprehensive view of Chicago-area students' progress through postsecondary education.
- Synthesize existing evidence; identify gaps where more research is needed; work with higher education and others to conduct necessary research and develop solutions; and ensure that advocacy efforts and policy recommendations are informed by the most current research.
- Bring colleges together for joint learning, problem solving and reforms and provide training for the boards, leadership and key staff around best-practice undergraduate success strategies.
- Proactively engage with business leaders to ensure stakeholders operating in the postsecondary access and success space understand current and future employment needs and to ensure college and career pathways are aligned.
- Inform local and national media, policymakers, students and families of issues and opportunities related to undergraduate access, persistence, and success.
- Optimize resources and help align and support college access and completion initiatives regionally; serve as a thought partner to stakeholders regionally and nationally; and disseminate knowledge and information widely.

Potential Impact: As a result of The Partnership for College Completion's efforts and improved coordination with other partners we believe the following outcomes are possible:

- There is greater understanding of the challenges and barriers that students face as they consider and pursue college, and innovative strategies for addressing those challenges are developed and widely communicated.
 - Colleges share information and conduct research that build understanding about persistence and success.
 - Best practices are identified, documented and shared with stakeholders.
 - New research is available to inform stakeholders about the policies, systems and practices needed to support student success.
 - Parents and families have access to the information and resources they need to help students achieve their college and career aspirations.
- Undergraduate success becomes a priority issue that civic leaders, policy makers, the media and K-12 and higher education administrators foster and promote.
 - Civic and higher education leaders come together to develop and advance a regional undergraduate success agenda.
 - Board and senior-level administrative champions for undergraduate success are identified from regional colleges and those colleges adopt new strategies to ensure students persist and graduate with the skills and knowledge needed to succeed in their chosen profession.
 - There is increased media coverage about postsecondary access and success.
 - Institutional data about college enrollment, persistence and graduation rates (as well as other important indicators) are easily accessible and broadly communicated.
- College enrollment, persistence and graduation rates in two- and four-year colleges and universities in and around Chicago dramatically increase without changes to access (i.e. recruiting higher qualified students).
 - The number of institutions with both overall graduation rates and low-income, first-generation graduation rates above 60% dramatically increases.
 - Postsecondary enrollment, persistence and graduation rates increase without the introduction of more restrictive recruitment policies and practices.
 - The proportion of the Chicagoland population with a postsecondary credential increases.

The Need for Partnership

The vision is ambitious: *The Chicago region graduates significantly more students from college prepared for meaningful careers and civic leadership and is a model of postsecondary degree attainment for the nation. The vision will only be achieved if leaders collaborate and agree to tackle the multiple complex issues that affect college access and completion for Chicago-area students.*

There are priorities outlined in the Stakeholder Feedback report that are beyond the scope of work envisioned for The Partnership for College Completion. These priorities require further attention and increased support from those committed to improving postsecondary access and degree completion. Below are some of the actions and strategies that stakeholders identified as a priority, which will not be undertaken by The Partnership for College Completion, but that require ongoing attention and support.

- Advocating for improved college readiness, including issues such as enhancements to curricula and teacher and principal preparation and evaluation
- Building nonprofit capacity
- Building the capacity of schools to prepare all students for college
- Collecting and analyzing data on K-12 students
- Coordinating the distribution of nonprofit services
- Developing college and career pathways curricula
- Direct service supports for students
- Engaging and training college and career counselors, postsecondary leadership teams, principals and other K-12 leaders
- Updating prior initiatives to map the landscape of student services and supports

In addition to the strategies mentioned above, it is important to note that Chicago is rich with organizations and individuals that play an important role in helping students achieve their postsecondary goals. These organizations are constantly evolving to meet the needs of students and require continued support to meet the ongoing needs of students.

Leadership, Governance and Community Engagement

Leaders drive success.

Leaders define vision and strategy, set goals and monitor results, scan the external environment, design organizational functions, develop people and build culture. Based on the feedback from multiple key stakeholders, hiring a well-qualified Executive Director to oversee and guide The Partnership for College Completion should be prioritized.

Some of the qualities that stakeholders believe an ideal Executive Director will possess include:

- A demonstrated commitment to the mission of undergraduate access, persistence and completion.
- An understanding and thoughtfulness of the historical context of racial and class disparities in undergraduate access and completion and a firmly held belief that all students have the capacity to succeed in college.
- Experience leading and inspiring change across large, diverse, cross-sector organizations and constituencies.
- Experience developing systems of communication and decision-making that encourage participation, transparency and innovation.
- Well-honed ability to anticipate and analyze challenges, define problems and objectives, recognize options and opportunities and formulate rapid solutions with a clear understanding of inherent risks and implications.
- Proven orientation to innovation and a willingness to take risks, as well as curiosity and courage to seek out new ideas, approaches and perspectives.

Beyond the Executive Director, we recommend that a small, dynamic leadership team be hired to carry out the work. Based on a review of other national efforts, expertise will likely be needed in the areas of advocacy, communications, research and community engagement. Office management and fundraising positions will also have to be considered.

Short- and Long-term Governance

In order to launch The Partnership, an Investors Committee whose membership includes individuals and representatives of foundations and corporations planning to provide the initial seed funding should be established. The Investors Committee should help identify and negotiate the terms of a fiscal sponsor arrangement, manage the Executive Director search process and develop an initial governance structure. Given the importance of the governance structure, it is recommended that the Investor Committee immediately form a Governance Committee and identify a chairperson.

To inform the work of the Investor Committee, a small, temporary Advisory Committee, whose membership includes key stakeholders and community leaders from the field, higher education and K-12 leaders, non-profit operators and partner organizations, should be formed. The Advisory Committee should provide input on the Executive Director search process and help think through initial strategy around launching The Partnership for College Completion.

Once hired, the Executive Director, in concert with the Governance Committee, will determine the long-term infrastructure needed to ensure that the work gets started quickly and that it can be sustained. The nature and form of the infrastructure will need to be carefully considered in order to inspire confidence and ensure the support of a broad cross section of critical stakeholders. The Executive Director will also be responsible for all other hiring decisions related to The Partnership for College Completion. Finally, he/she, along with members of the Governance Committee, will be responsible for recruiting additional members for the Governance Committee, developing the necessary operating documents and maintaining the accountability of The Partnership for College Completion.

Community Engagement

It is highly recommended that the Executive Director, once in place, immediately meet with key stakeholders to cultivate a better understanding of the roles and contributions of the multitude of important organizations, agencies and institutions that will need to be involved across the region. The Executive Director will need to learn about the nuances and complexity of the issues and systems that will affect The Partnership for College Completion's work. Engaging direct service providers who have a track record of success with historically under-represented students and their families should be prioritized.

Based on the study of other models and input from stakeholders, it is recommended that three key advisory groups be formed to help set priorities and provide ongoing guidance.

- Leadership Council - composed of elected officials, school superintendents, business, nonprofit and philanthropy leaders and higher education presidents.
- Higher Education Advisory Council – composed of higher education provosts and vice-provosts who will inform all aspects of the work including research, advocacy and strategy.
- Undergraduate Student Advisory Council – composed of the target student populations that The Partnership is serving.

Beyond the advisory groups, we envision The Partnership for College Completion working closely with collective impact efforts in and around Chicago to tap into the knowledge and expertise of network stakeholders. Whenever possible, The Partnership should rely on partnering organizations to convene stakeholders.

Proposed Budget

Given the scope of work, the experience level needed for the Executive Director and leadership team and start-up budgets of similar efforts launched in Chicago and other areas of the country, \$800K should be secured to launch The Partnership for College Completion. This budget takes into account a small leadership team as well as back office expenses. To ensure top executive leadership is attracted to the opportunity and that The Partnership for College Completion is well positioned to achieve some quick wins, it is recommended that three years of funding at \$800K per year be committed at the time of the launch. As The Partnership for College Completion becomes more established and the scope of work is clearly defined, a more accurate budget should be developed and additional fundraising may be needed.

Appendix A - The Case for Taking Action

The contents of this paper have been informed by information gathered from stakeholders as well as research on state and national postsecondary access and success initiatives. Below we have highlighted some of the key arguments for putting in place new leadership and infrastructure that focuses on accelerating postsecondary access and degree completion in and around Chicago.

Growing Interest Nationally

There is growing interest in ensuring that we prepare the next generation for the demands of today's economy and the jobs of tomorrow. In addition, better research and innovative practices are available to guide this work. As a result, there are a number of national and statewide initiatives focused on improving student persistence and college completion.

A 2011 review of U.S. College Completion Initiatives found that there are over a dozen national or regional initiatives that have adopted an undergraduate success agenda aimed at increasing the number of youth and adults who earn a degree. The report suggests that the increased national attention on college completion has been spurred by President Barack Obama, new federal grant programs to improve completion rates and interest from major national foundations such as the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation and the Lumina Foundation. It also suggests that to significantly increase educational attainment rates and bring about needed institutional change, ongoing, cross-sector coordination is required, as well as deeper engagement of higher education institutions, new financing and accountability systems and increased public support.⁷

Promising Efforts and Pressing Need in Illinois

There are a number of Illinois initiatives underway that focus on increasing college access and completion. A widely adopted goal is for 60% of all adults in Illinois to have a college or career credential by 2025.

The Illinois Board of Higher Education is championing the Illinois Public Agenda for College and Career Success, a blueprint to direct state policies and resources to the higher education and career needs of Illinois residents. The report includes useful statewide data and articulates several goals, including that:

- Illinois will be among the leaders in the proportion of its population with college credentials.
- Illinois will rank among the top states in the number of adult learners with college credentials.
- Illinois will increase college attainment for persons of color and those with disabilities.

Along with the Illinois Board of Higher Education, organizations and agencies such as Advance Illinois, the Education Systems Center, the Illinois Student Assistance Commission, the P-20 Council and the Illinois Community College Board are leading the way by coordinating statewide efforts that focus on building awareness, improving public policies and developing and tracking key undergraduate access and success measures. Recent efforts have led to several new legislative actions (HB 3196 and HR 477) that have the potential to improve student transitions from high school to postsecondary education and careers, including expanding the use of personalized learning plans, increasing opportunities for early college credit, ensuring that expectations for high school graduation signify readiness for college and career and augmenting career exploration and work-based learning options.

The work that is happening in the state, along with national efforts such as Complete College America's Game Changers, provides a reason to be optimistic. But as indicated on Complete College America's website "Game changers don't spontaneously happen: They are caused by people who act boldly and decisively in response to challenges."

Stakeholders Eager for Progress

Our education system overall works much like an orchestra, with many sections of specialized players. Within this complex, multi-section system, there are several entities whose work touches on and impacts college completion rates. Chicago is resource rich in terms of social capital; cross-sector leaders are committed to increasing college access and completion, and numerous partners are pulling toward a shared goal. Stakeholders, including K-12 and higher education leaders and practitioners, nonprofit operators and philanthropic leaders, understand how critically important and timely it is to work together to increase college access and completion rates.

Higher education institutions are especially important players to get in tune with the rest of the educational orchestra. Currently, there are efforts to engage higher education institutions in addressing the persistently low rates of college attainment for low-income, first-generation students, but they are fragmented. The current budget impasse in Illinois and its impact on higher education funding, as well as MAP grants, provides clear evidence of the absence of a strong, harmonized effort.

Local and national stakeholders have consistently indicated that a strong, credible leadership team is needed to accelerate change and that finding the right leader should be prioritized. Strategic leadership is needed to develop and promote equity-focused policies and practices. Leadership is also needed to apply the necessary pressure to ensure bold, student-centered action is taken and to implement targeted strategies, in partnership with nonprofit operators and leaders in higher education and K-12, so that long-standing educational attainment gaps are addressed and all students in the region can achieve their postsecondary aspirations.

Appendix B - Frequently Asked Questions

Many important questions have been raised and need to be addressed before action can be taken. Some of the most frequently asked questions are noted below along with our recommendations, which have been informed by the input we have received from stakeholders and the information gathered throughout this process.

1. Could The Partnership for College Completion be part of an existing organization?

Before reaching a conclusion about what shape this initiative should take, we explored the following question: What leadership and infrastructure is needed and will be best equipped to accelerate postsecondary degree attainment in Chicago and the region? Strong consideration was given to whether there was an existing organization that could take on the work or whether the work could be carried out without a formal structure, such as through a staffed committee. Consideration was also given to launching an RFP process and allowing interested individuals and organizations to respond. There is a great deal of debate still underway about this and it is unlikely that there will ever be consensus.

Based on the information we have gathered from other models and the advice we have received, it is recommended that to position this effort for success the proposed work should be led by a qualified Executive Director of an independent initiative that will be responsible for carrying out the work. Some specific reasons for this recommendation include:

Independent Advocacy Voice for Students - Institutional change and reform requires ongoing thought leadership and external demand. Given the breadth and depth of challenges and opportunities in the space, an independent entity with a dedicated staff and a governing board that will champion the cause is best positioned to provide strong, consistent and relentless advocacy focused squarely on undergraduate student success. An independent entity will likely be able to more flexibly and directly advocate for necessary reforms.

Prioritizing College Access and Completion - Local, statewide and national leaders have suggested that if the undergraduate access and success work is embedded within an organization with a broader mission, it may not become a high-level priority or get the attention it needs to have impact. Without a clearly articulated college access and completion mission, we risk stakeholders continuing to focus on what is currently being done (for example, increasing rigor in K-12) and not giving enough attention to what needs to happen (focus on higher education).

Attracting Top Leadership - In order to be credible and effective in the higher education space, a high-caliber leader with credibility in both K-12 and higher education is needed. The type of leader we envision will likely want autonomy. We have received feedback from stakeholders and individuals who might be viewed as potential candidates that the position is significantly less attractive within an existing organization.

2. Why should The Partnership for College Completion be regionally focused?

While not originally expected, feedback from stakeholders, including higher education leaders and leaders of similar efforts throughout the country, suggested that the scope of work should be regional. Some arguments for a regional focus include:

- Higher education institutions are regionally oriented.
- Many Chicago students go to two- and four-year colleges outside of the city boundaries or transfer from institutions beyond the city borders.
- Issues affecting undergraduate success for low-income, first-generation students in or outside of the city are not all that different.
- College completion is not only a Chicago issue; focusing on Chicago and the surrounding area may garner broader support for an undergraduate success agenda.
- There is an opportunity to align with statewide initiatives; some statewide leaders have indicated that a regional partner focused on college access, completion and success in and around Chicago could significantly benefit statewide efforts.

There is strong support from stakeholders for the work to be regional. We also recognize that given the research and thought leadership at the UChicago Consortium on School Research, the historic and current leadership at major institutions, including CPS and the City Colleges of Chicago and the rich work of the Chicago non-profit operators, at least initially, a large portion of the work will be concentrated within the city. We recommend that the Executive Director develop a better understanding of the region, including gathering data and information and better understanding the roles of the multitude of organizations, agencies and institutions that will need to be involved, and then define what regional means.

3. Should The Partnership for College Completion Focus on first-time students on campus as well adults with some or no college degree?

As information was gathered from stakeholders, many talked about increasing postsecondary degree attainment for adult learners as well as students coming right out of high school. In Illinois, 21% of adults between the ages of 25-64 have completed some college but do not have a degree. In addition, 24% of individuals in the same age range have only a high school diploma.⁸

Based on feedback from stakeholders, strategies to address college access and completion of first-time students and adult learners have some similarities and some differences, but both are equally important. In order to impact educational attainment rates in and around Chicago, both will need to be addressed. However, to keep the scope of work manageable, we recommend that The Partnership for College Completion focus initially on increasing college completion for incoming freshmen and all students currently on campus. Given the significant percentage of adults with some college, but no degree, we recommend that The Partnership for College Completion partner with “back to college” or “finish up” efforts, such as Complete the Degree,⁹ to capitalize on work that has already been done in order to achieve a longer-term vision for increasing educational attainment.

4. Will The Partnership for College Completion provide services directly to students?

The Partnership for College Completion will likely provide some direct services to higher education leadership and staff in the form of educational sessions but we do not envision that The Partnership will provide direct services to students.

5. What is the relationship between The Partnership for College Completion and other initiatives or organizations?

The Chicago area has a number of thoughtful organizations and initiatives working on postsecondary access and success, many of which are considered national leaders. The Partnership for College Completion will need to partner closely with existing local and statewide organizations to effectively advance a regional undergraduate success agenda. The chart below highlights the current missions and areas of focus for some of the organizations that The Partnership for College Completion will need to work with to advance shared goals. Further discussion is needed with leaders of the various organizations listed as well as others to continue to clarify roles, responsibilities and relationships.

⁸ A Stronger Nation report – Illinois, 2015.

⁹ Complete the Degree provides guidance and support for adults looking to return to college.

Organization	Mission	Current Areas of Focus
Advance Illinois	Be an objective voice in supporting a healthy public education system that prepares all students for college, career, and democratic citizenship.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Statewide advocacy focused on early childhood to college and career success • Monitor education initiatives and report progress • Community, educator and legislator outreach
Chicagoland Alliance for Degree Completion	An organizational vehicle and expression of commitment for Governors State University and seventeen community colleges to accelerate student success and timely completion of associate and baccalaureate degrees.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Engage in collaborative efforts and activities that facilitate and enhance student success toward matriculation and degree completion, including dual admission, dual degree programs and financial aid assistance • Simplify student transfer process and align programs to ensure that students avoid unnecessary duplication or loss of credits in transfer • Share data to track student success through transfers and coordinate efforts to address obstacles
Chicago College & Career Collaborative (C4)	Develop a community of practitioners from direct service community based organizations to work in a more coordinated fashion in order to increase efficiency, impact and ultimately graduation rates and leadership opportunities for Chicagoland students.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Share data, strategies, challenges and best practices • Build partnerships at the university level • Coordinate professional development • Create a centralized information hub for students, parents, counselors and practitioners
Chicago Higher Education Compact	Work with higher education institutions to develop strategies and set goals to increase CPS student enrollment, persistence, and completion	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Collect data from 22 higher education institutions on CPS students' enrollment and persistence • Work with higher education institutions to set goals to increase CPS student enrollment
Chicagoland Workforce Funder Alliance	Collaborate with employers and other workforce stakeholders to increase employment and earnings for underprepared workers in the Chicago region.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Forming a fund that supports an education and workforce system that recognizes multiple pathways to post-secondary success • Encouraging increased investment from employers in their current and future workforce • Aligning workforce development more closely with economic development and education systems
Collaborative for Undergraduate Success	Develop a community of practice among higher education leaders interested in increasing postsecondary student success and degree completion.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Convene leaders from more than a dozen higher education institutions to share data and best practices • Identify and support institutions that are successfully serving particular groups of Chicago area students
Forefront College Access Persistence and Success group (CCAPS)	Explore how Chicago students: (i) are prepared for and able to access an appropriate college experience; (ii) persist in college and graduate; and (iii) make successful transitions to careers following school.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Build a cross-sector learning community • Determine feasibility of taking cross-sector action to help address the issues that are identified
Thrive Chicago	Prepare Chicago's youth for a vibrant future by aligning efforts and outcomes from cradle to career.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lead a cradle to career collective impact strategy • Gather relevant research and data to inform the field and determine which initiatives to focus on • Convene a wide-range of stakeholders to determine common outcomes and align efforts across multiple sectors to achieve those outcomes • Lead a College Completion Change Network that currently focuses on financing college, developing a senior seminar, and increasing access to transition coaching services
UChicago To&Through	Empower educators, students and parents with the research, data and training they need to move more students to and through high school and college.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Translate existing research on student attainment into actionable data • Train educators to use attainment research and data to improve student attainment • Conduct new research to answer emerging questions on student attainment.

6) What can we learn from similar initiatives?

There are several efforts underway throughout the country that are advancing a college access and success agenda. To understand the infrastructure in place and the strategies being employed, information was gathered online and interviews were conducted with key leaders from Graduate Philadelphia, Greater Cleveland Higher Education Compact, RGV Focus (Texas), Say Yes to Education, St. Louis Graduates and Success Boston. In addition, the information contained in "Removing Barriers to College Success: A Review of Ten Citywide and Regional Collaborative Efforts," a report by Tania Jarosewich, Ph.D., of the Censeo Group for the Greater Cleveland Higher Education Compact, was reviewed.

Based on the study of various regional efforts, it is clear that the leadership and infrastructure to support change varies and is dependent upon the unique characteristics of a city and the students being served. While most of the initiatives have similar origins – many were launched by a small group of concerned leaders and were/are primarily funded by private foundations – the budget, staffing and strategies being employed vary greatly.

Consistent in the models that were studied is the leadership role each was taking to move forward postsecondary access and success strategies. The organizations we studied were responsible for coordinating and implementing strategies to advance postsecondary degree attainment in a region – those strategies tended to focus on college readiness and access for first-time college goers (more than persistence and success), although many leaders who were interviewed indicated that the scope of their organization's work has evolved as a result of their participation in national initiatives. For example, some have begun to focus on adult degree completion and progressive postsecondary pathways. Most of the organizations studied are leading advocacy efforts, are responsible for collecting and reporting data and frequently convene stakeholders. Some also conduct research, incubate and develop new programs, provide wrap-around supports for students or conduct training and professional development.

The success described by leaders who were interviewed focused more on network/sector improvements over gains in specific student-level outcomes, although many indicated that the data suggests that students are benefiting (as part of this process we did not request or analyze data on college access or completion rates). The common successes leaders described include: galvanized networks, increased adaptive capacity (ability to quickly respond to change), new and increased resources to support postsecondary access and completion strategies and increased commitment from powerful civic leaders.

When asked about the key conditions for change, leaders often cited: a) leadership empowered to make decisions and guide work, b) support from influential civic leaders, c) infrastructure to support change and ongoing advocacy, d) resources to get work done (staff and funding) and e) cohesion among stakeholders - willingness to unite and work together.

The leaders we interviewed offered a range of advice. Consistent themes included:

- Finding the right leader to do the critical work should be prioritized.
- Absence of good data and ongoing management of data are common obstacles.
- Stakeholders need to be in it for the long term; change takes time and postsecondary access and success is a complicated issue.
- Losing focus, getting pulled in too many different directions and taking on too much too soon are real risks for organizations leading college access and success change efforts.
- Fully engaging higher education stakeholders is complex, and moving work forward requires a number of different strategies, often unique to a particular college or university.

Appendix C – Future Considerations

This Concept Paper offers the context, sets the conceptual stage and provides a platform for launching The Partnership for College Completion. The Paper is intended to provide a vision and level of detail that would enable an Executive Director and his/her leadership team to imagine and design an organization capable of addressing the identified issues and challenges. It intentionally avoids laying out a blueprint or a set of prescribed activities.

As The Partnership for College Completion gets launched, its leadership team will need to determine an appropriate course of action. This should be done in close consultation with stakeholders. In its first weeks and months, it will be critical for the leadership team to learn about the work that is currently being done by other organizations and initiatives, and gain an understanding of the complexity of the issues. As it determines the strategies it will undertake, consideration should be given to the following questions, which have been raised by stakeholders.

Name: What is the best name for this initiative? (The name Partnership for College Completion was selected because it encompasses stakeholders' belief that the work needs to be regionally focused, that partnership with other organizations is critical and that the core focus of the organization needs to be on increasing college completion rates. That being said, the name sounds somewhat bureaucratic and more inspiring branding could be beneficial.)

Regional Focus: What is the geographic scope of The Partnership for College Completion's work? Once determined, what data is available and what is needed to develop regional strategies? Who are potential regional partners?

Influence: What is the best way to engage and influence top education and civic leaders (university leadership, district superintendents and mayors)? Who might be helpful in getting these leaders to the table and what is their role in The Partnership's governance structure?

Focus on Access: Access goals clearly cannot be abandoned. What is the best approach for The Partnership to take to advance access without distracting from its focus on persistence and completion?

Community Engagement: What impact might grassroots level engagement (parents, families and communities) have in spurring increased political pressures and accountability? What is an appropriate way to meaningfully engage parents and families of students for whom The Partnership is advocating?

Coordination: How might The Partnership optimize resources for the development and implementation of systems changes? What role will The Partnership play in fostering alignment of ongoing and emerging efforts?

Incentivizing Action: What financial support is needed and what is available to support institutional reforms? What role will The Partnership have in engaging local, regional and national funders to pool resources and pursue strategies that align with a shared mission?

Career Transitions and Success: How might The Partnership increase alignment and connections between college and career pathways so that students not only complete college but also find success in the world of work?

Advocacy Agenda: What are the specific policies and reforms that The Partnership will advocate for? How will The Partnership both partner with higher education and also aggressively advocate for the types of reforms that are needed?

Innovation: How might The Partnership foster novel approaches, out-of-the box ideas and forward thinking that leads to improved outcomes for students? What opportunities might The Partnership provide for individuals from partnering organizations to come together to design new, meaningful high-impact strategies (i.e., fellowships or staff-on-loan programs)?

Strong Instruction and Support: What level of outside support and training is needed to help higher education improve instruction so that students successfully learn and complete courses? What knowledge and expertise would The Partnership need in order to support university faculty?

Assessing Progress: College completion goals have been established by a number of organizations and initiatives; what specific goals will The Partnership help advance and how will progress be measured? What specific outcomes are expected in three years, five years or 10 years?

Appendix D - Recognition of Contributing Stakeholders

While perspectives vary on how to get more Chicago-area students to and through college and about the leadership and infrastructure needed to accelerate change, **one thing that is consistent is stakeholders' belief that more students should be given the opportunity and provided the support needed to succeed in college.** There is a deep commitment among stakeholders who provided input during this process to helping all students achieve their postsecondary aspirations. There is also an understanding that doing nothing more than what is currently being done is not going to lead to the type of change that is needed. **We are deeply grateful to the following people who participated in meetings or conversations that helped shape our process and the recommendations that have been included in this paper.**

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Appendix E - Background and Recognition of Funders

In 2013, the Forefront Education Funders Group created the College and Career Access, Persistence and Success group (CCAPS). The purpose of this group is to explore how well Chicago area students: (i) are prepared for and able to access an appropriate college experience; (ii) persist in college and graduate; and (iii) make successful transitions to careers following school.

In pursuit of this goal, CCAPS supported two related endeavors: a scan of the landscape and interviews with experts in the field that provided important background for this study.

Landscape Scan - In May 2014, CCAPS brought together representatives from operating nonprofits, secondary schools, higher education and foundations to conduct a first-ever scan of the services and supports that enable Chicago students to achieve postsecondary success. Kelly Sparks of Maple Grove Objective facilitated the landscape scan, which was broadly released in February 2015. The scan highlighted the deep-seated commitment of a wide range of stakeholders to college access and success, and raised new questions and heightened the desire for more information about access, distribution and quality.

Stakeholder Interviews - In March 2015, CCAPS engaged Julie Adrianopoli of JEA Consulting to solicit feedback from the field about how to advance Chicago's postsecondary access and success sector given current challenges and opportunities. Adrianopoli conducted interviews with approximately 45 local and national postsecondary access and success leaders. The feedback Adrianopoli received suggested that stakeholders are interested in accelerating change to ensure more students go to and graduate from college. Stakeholders suggested that there is a need for increased leadership and coordination, improved data and communication and greater accountability in the sector. The findings can be found in the Stakeholder Feedback report referenced on p. 2.

Recognizing the complexity of the postsecondary access and success landscape and the urgency in helping more students succeed in their postsecondary endeavors, the following seven funders generously agreed to support the interviews and research that led to the development of this Concept Paper:

Anonymous
The Brinson Foundation
Chicago Community Trust
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McDougal Family Foundation
Osa Foundation
Siragusa Foundation

The Concept Paper – combined with the earlier CCAPS reports referenced above – should be used to guide ongoing, community-wide conversations about advancing and accelerating the postsecondary access and success work already underway in Chicago. The paper does not address all of the challenges and opportunities related to postsecondary access and success in Chicago. Rather, it provides a path forward for specific priorities that have emerged and that require immediate attention to ensure more students achieve their postsecondary aspirations.

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