



# INTERVENTION BRIEF

Supporting Postsecondary Success



## Accelerated Study in Associate Programs (ASAP)

Enrolling in college and completing a degree or certificate is one of the primary pathways to economic success. In 2017, median weekly earnings of full-time workers with an associate degree was 17 percent higher than full-time workers with a high school diploma only.<sup>1</sup> Despite the economic advantages of educational attainment, only 32 percent of students enrolled in two-year institutions complete their programs within three years. The first year of college is critical, as 38 percent of first-time, full-time students in 2-year institutions fail to return to the same institution for their second year.<sup>2</sup> As a result, several programs have been designed to support student retention and degree completion among college students. One example is the City University of New York's (CUNY's) *Accelerated Study in Associate Programs (ASAP)*.

*ASAP* is a three-year program that is designed to remove barriers to college success and completion for students seeking associate degrees. *ASAP* offers students financial supports (tuition waivers, free use of textbooks, free public transportation), academic supports (tutoring, early registration), and personal supports (advisors, seminars, blocked or linked courses). *ASAP* students are required to enroll full time and are encouraged to take any required developmental education courses in the first semester.

This What Works Clearinghouse (WWC) report, part of the WWC's Supporting Postsecondary Success topic area, explores the effects of *ASAP* on enrollment, credit accumulation, and graduation rates. The WWC identified eight studies of *ASAP*, two of which met WWC standards.<sup>3</sup> The evidence presented in this report includes studies of the impacts of *ASAP* on community college students, including students who were White, Black, Hispanic, and Asian or Pacific Islander.

### What Happens When Students Participate in *ASAP*?

The evidence indicates that implementing *ASAP*:

- will likely increase student graduation rates
- will likely increase student enrollment rates
- will likely increase student credit accumulation and persistence rates

Findings on *ASAP* from two studies that meet WWC standards are shown in Table 1. For each outcome reviewed by the WWC, an effectiveness rating, the improvement index, and the number of studies and students that contributed to the findings is presented. The improvement index is a measure of the intervention's effect on an outcome. It can be interpreted as the expected change in percentile rank for an average comparison group student if that student had received the intervention. All findings are based on two studies with 2,397 students. See Box 1 for a description of WWC effectiveness ratings.

**Table 1. Summary of findings on *ASAP* from studies that meet WWC Standards<sup>4</sup>**

Outcome	Study findings		Evidence meeting WWC standards (version 3.0)	
	Effectiveness rating	Improvement index (percentile points)	Number of studies	Number of students
Attainment	Positive effects	+17	2	2,397
Access and enrollment	Positive effects	+13	2	2,397
Credit accumulation and persistence	Positive effects	+10	2	2,397

Table Note: The improvement index is a measure of the effect of the intervention. The improvement index can be interpreted as the expected change in percentile rank for an average comparison group student if that student had received the intervention. For example, an improvement index of +17 means that the expected percentile rank of the average comparison group student would increase by 17 points if they received *ASAP*. The improvement index values are generated by averaging findings from the outcome analyses that meet WWC standards, as reported by Scrivener et al. (2015) and Sommo et al. (2018). Attainment outcomes include completion of a degree, certificate, or program. Access and enrollment outcomes include enrollment in college the first semester after graduating high school and enrollment in a four-year college. Credit accumulation and persistence outcomes include the number of college-level credits earned, number of sessions enrolled, enrollment in the fourth semester, and enrollment at any college in the sixth semester. The effects of *ASAP* are not known for other outcomes within the Supporting Postsecondary Success topic area, including college attendance, academic achievement, and labor market outcomes.

## BOX 1. HOW THE WWC REVIEWS AND DESCRIBES EVIDENCE

The WWC evaluates evidence based on the quality and results of reviewed studies. The criteria that the WWC uses for evaluating evidence are defined in the [Procedures and Standards Handbooks](#) and the [Review Protocols](#). The studies summarized in this report were reviewed under WWC Standards (version 3.0) and the Supporting Postsecondary Success topic area protocol (version 3.0).

To determine the effectiveness rating, the WWC considers what methods each study used, the direction of the effects, and how many studies tested the intervention. The higher the effectiveness rating, the more certain the WWC is about the reported results and about what will happen if the same intervention is implemented again. The following key provides a link between effectiveness ratings and the statements used in this report:

Effectiveness Rating	Rating Interpretation	Description of the Evidence
Positive (or Negative) Effects	The intervention is <i>likely to change</i> an outcome	Strong evidence of a positive effect, with no overriding contrary evidence
Potentially Positive (or Negative) Effects	The intervention <i>may change</i> an outcome	Evidence of a positive effect with no overriding contrary evidence
No Discernible Effects	The intervention <i>may result in little to no change</i> in an outcome	No affirmative evidence of effects
Mixed Effects	The intervention <i>has inconsistent effects</i> on an outcome	Evidence includes studies in at least two of these categories: studies with positive effects, studies with negative effects, or more studies with indeterminate effects than with positive or negative effects

## How is ASAP Implemented?

The following section provides details of how *ASAP* was implemented. This information can help educators identify the requirements for implementing *ASAP*, and determine whether those implementation requirements would be feasible at their institutions. Information on *ASAP* presented in this section comes from the two studies that meet WWC evidence standards (Scrivener et al., 2015; Sommo et al., 2018), from CUNY's *ASAP* website, and from correspondence with the developer.

- **Goal:** *ASAP* aims to help students earn associate degrees within three years by providing a range of financial, academic, and personal supports to remove barriers to college success and completion.
- **Target Population:** *ASAP* is broadly targeted to low-income, full-time students in need of developmental coursework. Students admitted to CUNY colleges that offer *ASAP* can participate in the program provided they: (1) complete the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA), the New York State Tuition Assistance Program (TAP), and all admissions requirements; (2) need to take no more than two developmental courses; (3) enroll full-time; (4) complete a mandatory summer institute before enrolling; and (5) sign a contract agreeing to the *ASAP* terms of participation upon completion of the institute. Continuing or transfer students are eligible if they have GPAs of at least 2.0 and have accumulated no more than 15 college credits. To remain eligible, students must renew their FAFSA and TAP annually, maintain full-time status and be in good academic standing, enroll in all developmental courses within the first year, and meet regularly with their advisor, career specialist, and tutors as well as attend required program enrichment activities.
- **Method of Delivery:** *ASAP* students receive mentoring and guidance from an experienced advisor. The advisor provides comprehensive academic, social, and interpersonal supports. In addition to an advisor, *ASAP* facilitates relationship building among students through advising groups, a one or two-day required summer institute, and blocked courses in which students take classes with other *ASAP* students in a cohort model. Students can also be connected to tutors, career development specialists, and other campus-based supports, as needed.
- **Frequency and Duration of Service:** Students meet with *ASAP* advisors at least twice per month in their first semester. After the first semester, students meet with their advisors on a regular basis depending on their need level, from once every two months for students in the low-need group to twice per month for students in the high-need group. Students participate in *ASAP* for three years.
- **Intervention Components:** The *ASAP* model includes three key components, which are noted in Table 2.

**Comparison Group:** In the two studies that contributed to the findings, comparison group students received the usual college advising services provided by their institutions.

**Table 2. Components of ASAP**

Key component	ASAP
Financial supports	Eligible students receive supports to address financial barriers to degree completion. These supports include tuition waivers to cover any gap in need between financial aid and the cost of tuition and fees; textbook assistance to offset the cost of books (on average students receive \$500 annually); and support with summer and winter tuition to facilitate continuous enrollment. CUNY students receive a semester MetroCard to ensure they have transportation to campus.
Academic supports	<p>ASAPs academic supports are based on a structured pathways model. Students begin by enrolling full-time in a major that can be completed in no more than three years (most majors except nursing and allied health meet this criterion). They work with an academic advisor to develop a schedule that allows them to complete courses in a prescribed sequence with a cohort of other students in the program. ASAP advisors encourage students to take courses in winter and summer terms (continuous enrollment). ASAP staff coordinate with campus colleagues to provide ASAP students opportunities for early registration.</p> <p>Students must complete assigned developmental coursework in their first year. Students needing two developmental courses must take at least one of those courses in the summer prior to their first year. Advisors reserve spaces in developmental courses for ASAP students.</p>
Personal supports	<p>Students meet with an assigned advisor regularly at intervals determined based on student needs. Advisors maintain average caseloads of 150 students so they can provide personalized, consistent, and comprehensive support to each student.</p> <p>In addition to providing an advisor, ASAP facilitates relationship building among students through advising groups, a required one or two-day summer institute, and blocked courses in which students take classes with other ASAP students.</p> <p>Students are also connected to tutors, career development specialists, and other campus-based supports, as needed. ASAP provides additional services to support transfer, career readiness skill-building, and leadership development opportunities through participation in ASAP Student Leader and Peer Mentor programs.</p>

## What Does ASAP Cost?

The cost of ASAP is reported in one study reviewed. Scrivener et al. (2015) calculated the direct cost per ASAP student at \$14,029 over a three-year period (\$4,676 per year). The cost breakdown below is not designed to be exhaustive; rather, it is designed to provide educators an overview of the kinds of resources needed to implement ASAP.

- **Personnel Costs:** The three-year cost includes \$6,238 per student on administration and staffing (e.g., management, research and evaluation), \$1,558 on course enrollment (e.g., blocked or linked courses, ASAP seminar), and \$2,927 on student services (e.g., advising, tutoring, career and employment services).
- **Facilities Costs:** Beyond the facilities costs normally associated with college attendance, ASAP hosts a one or two-day summer institute for students and hosts the ASAP Student Leader and Peer Mentor programs.
- **Equipment and Materials Costs:** ASAP does not incur any equipment and materials costs beyond those normally associated with college attendance.
- **Costs Paid by Students or Parents:** There are no direct program costs billed to students or parents; however, students must pay for costs normally associated with college attendance that are not covered by the ASAP program.
- **In-Kind Supports:** The three-year cost for in-kind financial supports including MetroCards, textbooks, and tuition waivers totals \$3,305.
- **Sources of Funding:** In addition to city and state support, ASAP has received funding from a range of foundations: the Robin Hood Foundation, the Stella and Charles Guttman Foundation, the Leona M. and Harry B. Helmsley Charitable Trust, the Jewish Foundation for the Education of Women, and the Sidney and Laura Gilbert Scholarship Fund.

### For More Information:

#### About ASAP

*The City University of New York, Accelerated Study in Associate Programs*

16 Court Street, 32nd Floor, Brooklyn, NY 11241-0102

Web: <http://www1.cuny.edu/sites/asap/>

## For More Information (continued):

### About the cost of the intervention

Levin, H.M. & García, E. (2018). Accelerating community college graduation rates: A benefit–cost analysis. *The Journal of Higher Education*, 89(1), 1–27, DOI: 10.1080/00221546.2017.1313087.

Scrivener, S., Weiss, M.J., Ratledge, A., Rudd, T., Sommo, C., & Fresques, H. (2015). *Doubling graduation rates: Three-year effects of CUNY's Accelerated Study in Associate Programs (ASAP) for developmental education students*. New York: MDRC.

## In What Context Was ASAP Studied?

The following section provides information on the setting and participants involved in the two studies of ASAP that meet WWC evidence standards. This information can help educators understand the context in which the studies of ASAP were conducted so that they can better determine whether the program might be suitable for their setting.

### WHERE THE STUDY WAS CONDUCTED



2 studies, 2,397 students in 6 community colleges in **New York City** and **Ohio**

#### RACE



#### ETHNICITY



#### GENDER



#### CHILDREN



### LEARN MORE



Read more about the ASAP intervention and the studies that are summarized here on the [Intervention Report webpage](#).

### ENDNOTES

<sup>1</sup> Bureau of Labor Statistics. (2018). Measuring the value of education. Washington, DC: Author. Retrieved from <https://www.bls.gov/careeroutlook/2018/data-on-display/education-pays.htm>

<sup>2</sup> McFarland, J., Hussar, B., Zhang, J., Wang, X., Wang, K., Hein, S., Diliberti, M., Forrest Cataldi, E., Bullock Mann, F., and Barmer, A. (2019). *The Condition of Education 2019* (NCES 2019-144). U.S. Department of Education. Washington, DC: National Center for Education Statistics. Retrieved from <https://nces.ed.gov/pubsearch/pubsinfo.asp?pubid=2019144>

<sup>3</sup> The descriptive information for this intervention comes from Scrivener et al. (2015) and Sommo et al. (2018), as well as from ASAP's website. The What Works Clearinghouse (WWC) requests developers review the intervention description sections for accuracy from their perspective. The WWC provided CUNY with the intervention description in April 2019 and incorporated feedback from CUNY's response. Further verification of the accuracy of the descriptive information for this intervention is beyond the scope of this review.

<sup>4</sup> This report was revised following a routine WWC internal audit, which found that one eligible outcome was not included in the original report: Enrolled in any college, sixth semester (Scrivener et al., 2015). This reduced the improvement index in the credit accumulation and persistence domain from +11 to +10, but did not otherwise change the conclusions of the original report.