

Success Boston Coaching

Intervention Brief | Supporting Postsecondary Success

WHAT WORKS CLEARINGHOUSE™

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Enrolling in college and earning a degree or certificate is one of the primary pathways to economic success; however, many students who begin a college education fail to complete it. 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.¹ Despite the economic advantages of educational attainment, only 32 percent of students enrolled in two-year institutions complete their programs within three years, while 60 percent of students enrolled in four-year institutions complete their programs within six years. The first year of college is critical, as 38 percent and 19 percent of first-time, full-time students in two-year and four-year institutions, respectively, fail to return to the same institution for their second year.² As a result, several interventions have been designed to support student retention and degree completion among college students. One example is *Success Boston Coaching*.

Success Boston Coaching is a coaching intervention for students who are traditionally underrepresented in college to help them transition from high school to college and progress in college. Students are paired with a dedicated coach

starting as early as the spring of their senior year of high school and receive coaching through their first two years in college. As Boston’s citywide college completion initiative, *Success Boston* partners with existing nonprofit organizations focused on coaching and mentoring to deliver these one-on-one coaching services. Nonprofit coaching partners may also provide students with other direct services such as tutoring and career readiness support, and financial support that includes scholarships, transportation subsidies, and funding for school-related materials and supplies.

This What Works Clearinghouse (WWC) report, part of the WWC’s Supporting Postsecondary Success topic area, explores the effects of *Success Boston Coaching* on progressing in college and academic achievement. The WWC identified seven studies of *Success Boston Coaching*. Two of these studies meet WWC standards.³ The evidence presented in this report is from studies of the impact of *Success Boston Coaching* on high school and postsecondary students—including Asian, African-American, Hispanic, and White students—in a variety of school settings, including urban and suburban areas.

What Happens When Students Participate in *Success Boston Coaching*?

The evidence indicates that implementing *Success Boston Coaching*:

- may increase progression in college
- may increase academic achievement

Findings on *Success Boston Coaching* from two studies that meet WWC standards are shown in Table 1. The table

reports an effectiveness rating, the improvement index, and the number of studies that contributed to the findings. 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.

Table 1. Summary of findings on *Success Boston Coaching* from studies that meet WWC Standards

Outcome domain	Effectiveness rating	Study findings	Evidence meeting WWC standards (version 4.0)	
		Improvement index (percentile points)	Number of studies	Number of students
Progressing in college	Potentially positive effects	+9	2	8,375
Academic achievement	Potentially positive effects	+4	2	5,543

Note: 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 +4 means that the expected percentile rank of the average comparison group student would increase by 4 points if the student received *Success Boston Coaching*. The improvement index values are generated by averaging findings from the outcome analyses that meet WWC standards, as reported by Linkow et al. (2017) and Linkow et al. (2019). A positive improvement index does not necessarily mean the estimated effect is statistically significant. Progressing in college outcomes reported in these studies include college persistence to the second year of higher education. Academic achievement outcomes reported in these studies include cumulative grade point average. The effects of *Success Boston Coaching* are not known for other outcomes within the Supporting Postsecondary Success topic area, including college enrollment, college attendance, postsecondary degree attainment, credential attainment, employment, and earnings.

BOX 1. HOW THE WWC REVIEWS AND DESCRIBES EVIDENCE

The WWC evaluates evidence based on the quality and results of reviewed studies. The criteria 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 4.0) and the Supporting Postsecondary Success topic area protocol (version 4.0).

To determine the effectiveness rating, the WWC considers what methods each study used, the direction of the effects, and the number of studies that 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 explains the relationship 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</i> to change an outcome	Strong evidence of a positive effect, with no overriding contrary evidence
Potentially positive (or negative) effects	The intervention <i>may</i> change 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 *Success Boston Coaching* Implemented?

The following section provides details of how *Success Boston Coaching* was implemented. This information can help educators identify the requirements for implementing *Success Boston Coaching* and determine whether implementing this intervention would be feasible in their districts or schools. Information on *Success Boston Coaching* presented in this section comes from the studies that meet WWC standards (Linkow et al., 2017; Linkow et al., 2019), *Success Boston's* website, and from correspondence with the developer.

- **Goal:** *Success Boston Coaching* aims to improve the college completion rates of Boston-area high school graduates by providing one-on-one transition coaching to students starting as early as their senior year in high school through their first two years in college.
- **Target population:** *Success Boston Coaching* is designed for high school seniors in transition to attending two- and four-year colleges in the Greater Boston area who are traditionally underrepresented in college, such as low-income students, first-generation students, and students of color. Students are eligible to participate in *Success Boston Coaching* as early as the spring of their senior year of high school.
- **Method of delivery:** *Success Boston Coaching* provides one-on-one transition coaching through nonprofit coaching partners that have included the Boston Private Industry Council, Bottom Line, College Bound Dorchester, Freedom House, Hyde Square Task Force, Sociedad Latina, The Steppingstone Foundation, West End House Boys & Girls Club, and uAspire. These partners range from national college access and success organizations to local community-based organizations that serve populations traditionally underrepresented in college. Through in-person, phone, email, social media, and text communications, students receive sustained and proactive support from coaches staffed by the partner organizations.
- **Frequency and duration of service:** Students can receive coaching as early as the spring of their senior year of high school and coaching can continue through their first two years in college. Students' one-on-one interactions with their coaches may range from three to 15 times per year and last between 25 and 40 minutes.
- **Intervention components:** *Success Boston Coaching* is comprised of the following key components: one-on-one transition coaching, financial aid information and nudges, other direct services, financial support, and professional development for coaches. Refer to Table 2 for additional details.

Comparison group: In the two studies that contribute to this intervention report, students in the comparison group received traditional counseling supports provided by their high school and college.

Table 2. Components of Success Boston Coaching

Key component	Description
One-on-one transition coaching	Students receive one-on-one transition coaching starting as early as the spring of their senior year in high school and coaching can continue through their first two years in college. Coaching is primarily conducted in-person, but students may reach their coaches via phone, email, text message, or social media. Coaches meet with students as frequently as needed throughout their participation. As of the 2019–20 academic year, students meet with their coaches at least two times per month. Topics addressed during coaching sessions include academics, financial aid, career planning, and managing life responsibilities. Depending on the nonprofit coaching partner, coach caseloads range from 12 to 65 students; in the 2015–16 academic year, students' one-on-one interactions with their coaches ranged from three to 15 per year and lasted between 25 and 40 minutes.
Financial aid information and nudges	<i>Success Boston Coaching</i> partners with uAspire, a national nonprofit organization focused on increasing students' knowledge of financial information and resources available to help make college affordable for students. uAspire supports students in completing financial aid forms. Additionally, uAspire administers a text messaging program for students during their first year of college to remind them of important financial aid deadlines and provide financial aid-related information and resources. Students can text back to the messages to receive help from uAspire staff. Students receive, on average, eight messages during their first year of college through the following summer.
Other direct services	Coaching partners may offer tutoring for students. They may also host special events for students, such as career night presentations or mock job interviews with volunteer professionals from the community.
Financial support	Coaching partners may offer scholarships, transportation subsidies, or financial support for school-related materials, such as supplies.
Professional development for coaches	Coaching partners provide their coaches with training. The content and duration of the trainings vary based on organization. Coaches participate in <i>Success Boston Coaching</i> network-wide monthly meetings for continuing professional development and coaches can request specific training topics for these meetings. Example topics include: financial aid and financial literacy, coaching styles, building relationships with students, and bolstering student engagement. In addition, uAspire provides professional development for coaches on financial aid topics and processes. Some colleges hold ongoing monthly or biweekly meetings for all coaches on their campuses.

What Does Success Boston Coaching Cost?

The WWC identified a number of cost components from the most recent study reviewed (Linkow et al., 2019) and the Success Boston website. This preliminary list of costs is not designed to be exhaustive; rather, it provides educators an overview of the major resources needed to implement *Success Boston Coaching*. The intervention costs described in Table 3 are based on the information available as of March 2020.

Success Boston Coaching was awarded a Social Innovation Fund (SIF) grant to scale up coaching services in the fall of

2015. For the 2015–16 academic year—the first year in which the intervention was scaled from serving about 300 students to 1,000 students per cohort annually—the estimated total cost was \$5,762 per student, which accounts for both the scale-up expenses and the administrative costs to fulfill Social Innovation Fund (SIF) grant reporting requirements. Without the additional administrative costs associated with program scale-up, in the 2016–17 academic year, the cost per student decreased to \$3,037. Costs may vary depending on the size and type of organization delivering the coaching.

Table 3. Cost ingredients for Success Boston Coaching

Cost ingredients	Description	Source of funding
Personnel	<i>Success Boston Coaching</i> is staffed by coaches from nonprofit coaching organizations who provide direct services to students; program administrators to support the program and conduct recruitment activities; and college liaisons to coordinate campus coaching activities. <i>Success Boston Coaching</i> also contracts with uAspire to provide staff who deliver financial aid training for coaches, FAFSA completion events for students, and a text messaging program for students focused on sharing financial aid-related information and resources.	The Boston Foundation (TBF) with support from a Social Innovation Fund (SIF) grant from the Corporation for National and Community Service (CNCS); coaching partner organizations
Facilities	Facilities costs include space for administrative staff and for providing services. <i>Success Boston Coaching</i> relies on partner organizations to provide space for service delivery. Some partners rely on dedicated campus space such as cubicles, scheduled time in offices, or classrooms provided by the colleges.	Coaching partner organizations; colleges
Equipment and materials	Standard information technology (IT) equipment such as computers, phone, printers, and photocopiers for staff is required.	Coaching partner organizations; colleges
Direct assistance	Students may receive some direct cash or cash-equivalent assistance such as reduced-fare public transportation passes, scholarships, and school supplies.	Coaching partner organizations; transit authority
Other	Depending on the partner organizations, students may also receive additional supports such as tutoring, career night presentations or mock job interviews, and annual events.	Coaching partner organizations; volunteers; AmeriCorps members

Note: The Boston Foundation (TBF) provides approximately \$1 million per year to fund coaching and other activities for transition coaching, such as training and supports for coaches and program management. Between the fall of 2015 and the fall of 2019, Success Boston received funding from a Social Innovation Fund (SIF) grant from the Corporation for National and Community Service (CNCS). The SIF grant required a match from The Boston Foundation and a local match from the nonprofit coaching partners.

For More Information:

About *Success Boston Coaching*

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About the cost of the intervention

Web: www.successboston.org

About the studies reviewed

Linkow, T., Gamse, B., Unlu, F., Bumgarner, E., Didriksen, H., Furey, J., Meneses, M., Sami, M., & Nichols, A. (2017). *The power of coaching: Interim report on the impact of Success Boston's transition coaching on college success*. Cambridge, MA: Abt Associates. Retrieved from <https://www.tbf.org/-/media/tbforg/files/reports/sb-317-interim-outcomes-report-final.pdf>

Linkow, T., Bumgarner, E., Didriksen, H., Lack, K., Nichols, A., Dastrup, E., Dastrup, S., & Gamse, B. (2019). *The story of scaling up: Interim report on the impact of Success Boston's Coaching for Completion*. Cambridge, MA: Abt Associates. Retrieved from <https://eric.ed.gov/?id=ED602748>

In What Context Was *Success Boston Coaching* Studied?

The following section provides information on the setting of the two studies of *Success Boston Coaching* that meet WWC standards, and a description of the participants in the research.

This information can help educators understand the context in which the studies of *Success Boston Coaching* were conducted, and determine whether the intervention might be suitable for their setting.

WHERE THE STUDY WAS CONDUCTED



2 studies, **8,375** students in Massachusetts

Districts: Urban and suburban school districts



Free & reduced-price lunch:
77%

Special education:
11%

English learners:
11%



LEARN MORE



Read more about the *Success Boston Coaching* intervention and the studies that are summarized here in the [Intervention Report](#).

Endnotes

¹ 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>

² 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>

³ Absence of conflict of interest: This intervention report includes two studies conducted by staff from Abt Associates (Linkow et al., 2017; Linkow et al., 2019). Because Abt Associates is a contractor that administers the WWC, the studies were reviewed by staff members from a different organization.