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Closing the College
Graduation Gap

2018 National College Access and Success Benchmarking Report

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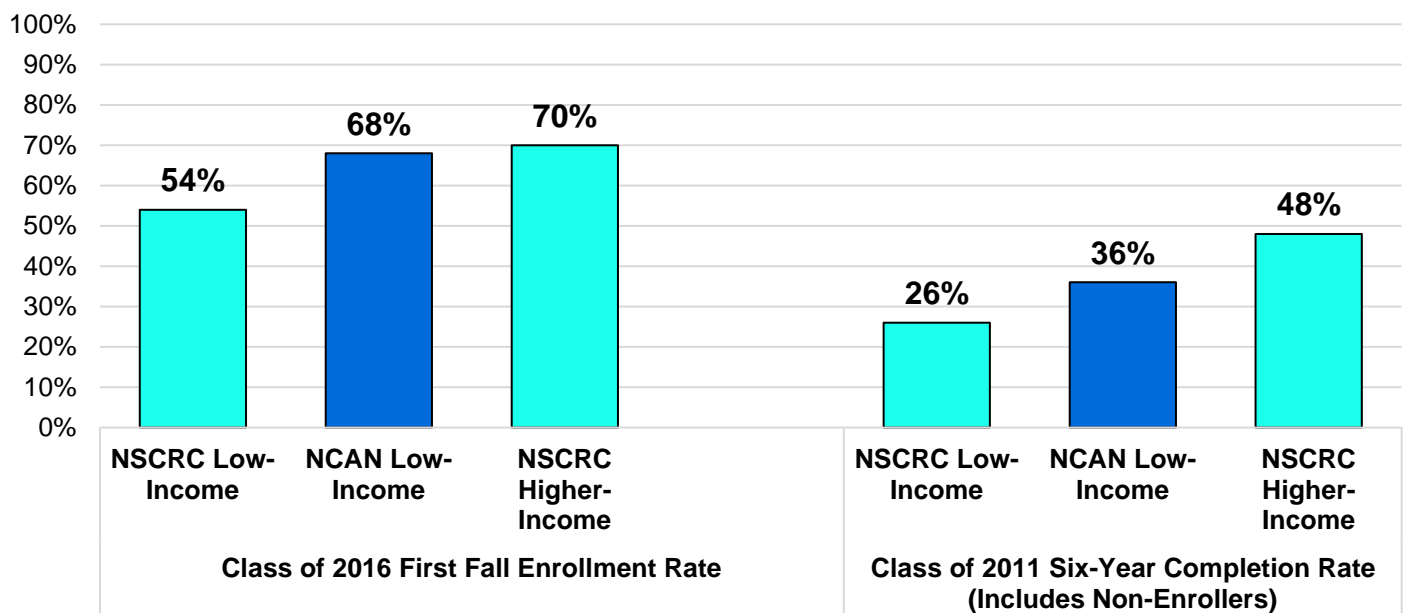
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Introduction and Summary of Findings

Five years ago, NCAN embarked on an effort with our members to examine how college access and success services affect the postsecondary outcomes of traditionally underserved students. By examining the outcomes of students served by NCAN members, the Benchmarking Project produced enrollment, persistence, and completion rate benchmarks that we place alongside national comparisons. The first four reports in this series consistently suggested two findings:

- Students served by NCAN members enroll at rates exceeding not only their low-income, first-generation peers but also at rates exceeding or approaching those of students from better-resourced communities traditionally more familiar with the college-going process.
- Along with these favorable enrollment rates, member-served students' six-year completion rate outcomes significantly exceed national college completion benchmarks that control for high school-level characteristics (Figure i). Member-served students do continue to trail overall national college completion benchmarks for all students.

Figure i. NCAN Member Students' Postsecondary Enrollment and Completion Rates Compared to Low-Income and Higher-Income National Student Clearinghouse Research Center (NSCRC) Benchmarks by High School Type



In short, through the Benchmarking Project, NCAN members have demonstrated success in helping students start the college journey, and students who receive member services complete at rates higher than their peers. But member-served students still face significant challenges in finishing that journey compared to overall postsecondary outcomes nationwide for all students.

This report, documenting the fifth round of the Benchmarking Project, further supports the same findings. The first fall enrollment rate for member-served students from the high school class of 2016 is 68 percent; that number climbs to 74 percent in the first full year following high school graduation.

Overall, 76 percent of member-served students from the class of 2016 enrolled at some point within the six-year period after high school graduation.

In order to examine member-served students' persistence and completion rates, we examine data from the high school class of 2011. The second- and third-year persistence rates for member-served students who enrolled in the first fall following graduation were 89 percent and 81 percent, respectively. Within that same class, the six-year completion rate for students who enrolled in the first fall following high school graduation was 52.4 percent. The six-year completion rate for first year enrollers from that class was 50.4 percent. Overall, 39 percent of all member-served students from the class of 2011 had a certificate, associate degree, or bachelor's degree by the end of the 2016-17 academic year. Put in context against peer high schools, these outcomes demonstrate members' success in helping students achieve their postsecondary goals. But compared to the national benchmark for all students, they reveal there is still significant work to do in order to reach parity on degree attainment.

Although this report's findings broadly reflect those of its predecessors, this report goes further in suggesting that the fourth, fifth, and sixth years of college following high school graduation are particularly perilous for member-served students. It is in these years that the pathway to completion detours toward stopping out (having enrollment lapse but later returning) or dropping out (having enrollment lapse and never returning). This contributes greatly to the completion rate disparities we identify, which in turn suggests the college success-related work that engages some NCAN members and interests even more of them is critical for students' outcomes. The college success activities measured by this study, though limited in granularity, are associated with increased rates of postsecondary completion. We anticipate this report's results leading to new areas of examination for NCAN and our members regarding what contributes to students' postsecondary success.

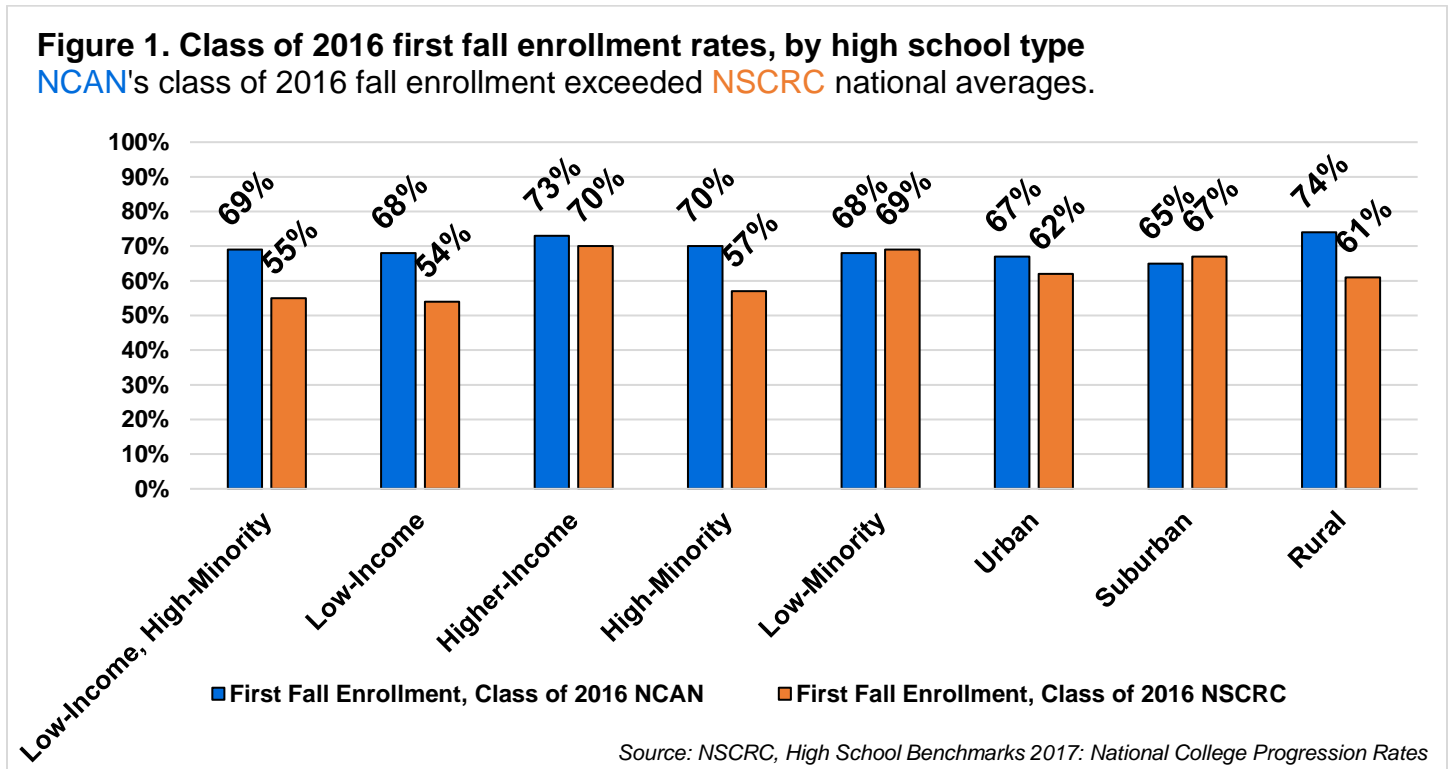
Results

Enrollment

Across multiple comparisons, the enrollment outcomes of students served by NCAN members compare positively to national benchmarks by high school type. The National Student Clearinghouse Research Center's (NSCRC) High School Benchmarks report provides enrollment rate estimates disaggregated by family income levels, minority student concentrations, and geographic locations of high schools participating in its StudentTracker for High Schools service.¹ NCAN member-served students largely outperform these benchmarks.

¹ The NSCRC categorizes students' high schools in a variety of ways. Low-income high schools have a proportion of students on free or reduced-price lunch that is 50 percent or greater. Higher-income schools' proportion of students on free or reduced-price lunch is less than 50 percent. High-poverty schools have a proportion of students on free or reduced-price lunch that is 75 percent or greater. Low-poverty schools' proportion of students on free or reduced-price is 25 percent or less. High-minority schools have student populations that are 40 percent or greater Black or Hispanic. The National Center for Education Statistics defines high schools' locales. Citation: National Student Clearinghouse Research Center (2017). High School Benchmarks 2017: National College Progression Rates. Retrieved from <https://nscresearchcenter.org/high-school-benchmarks-2017-national-college-progression-rates/>

Figures 1 and 2 compare NCAN and NSCRC first fall enrollment rate benchmarks for the high school class of 2016 and first year enrollment rate benchmarks for the high school class of 2015.² The first fall enrollment rate comparison for students from low-income, high-minority high schools for the class of 2016, where member-served students outperform the national average by 14 percentage points, supports the conclusion that NCAN members succeed in promoting college access for the most traditionally underserved students. Across the other benchmarks, member-served students out-enroll their peers in a number of high school categories.

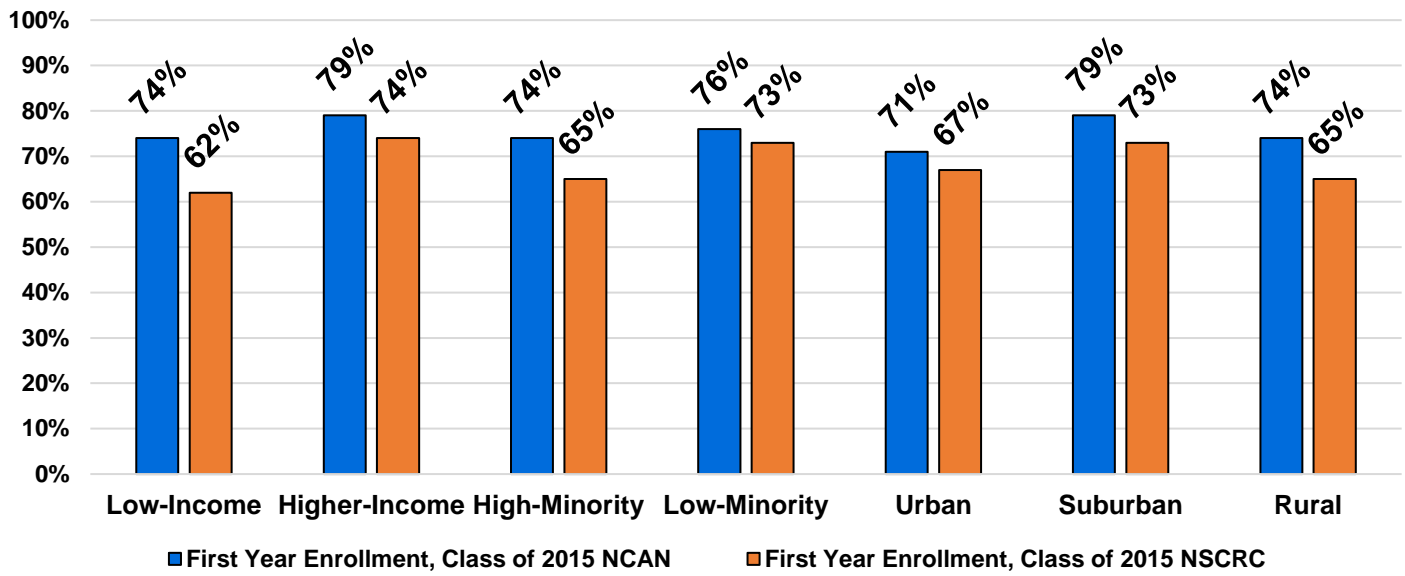


The trends in Figure 1 above also largely appear in Figure 2 below. Notably, given a full year after high school graduation to enroll, NCAN member-served students did enroll at higher rates than their suburban peers. Overall, NCAN member-served students enroll at higher rates across each high school benchmark.

² First-year comparisons for the high school class of 2016 were not available at the time of this report's publication, but NCAN will update this report upon their release.

Figure 2. Class of 2015 first year enrollment rates, by high school type

NCAN's class of 2015 first year enrollment exceeded NSCRC national averages for all students.



Source: NSCRC, High School Benchmarks 2016: National College Progression Rates

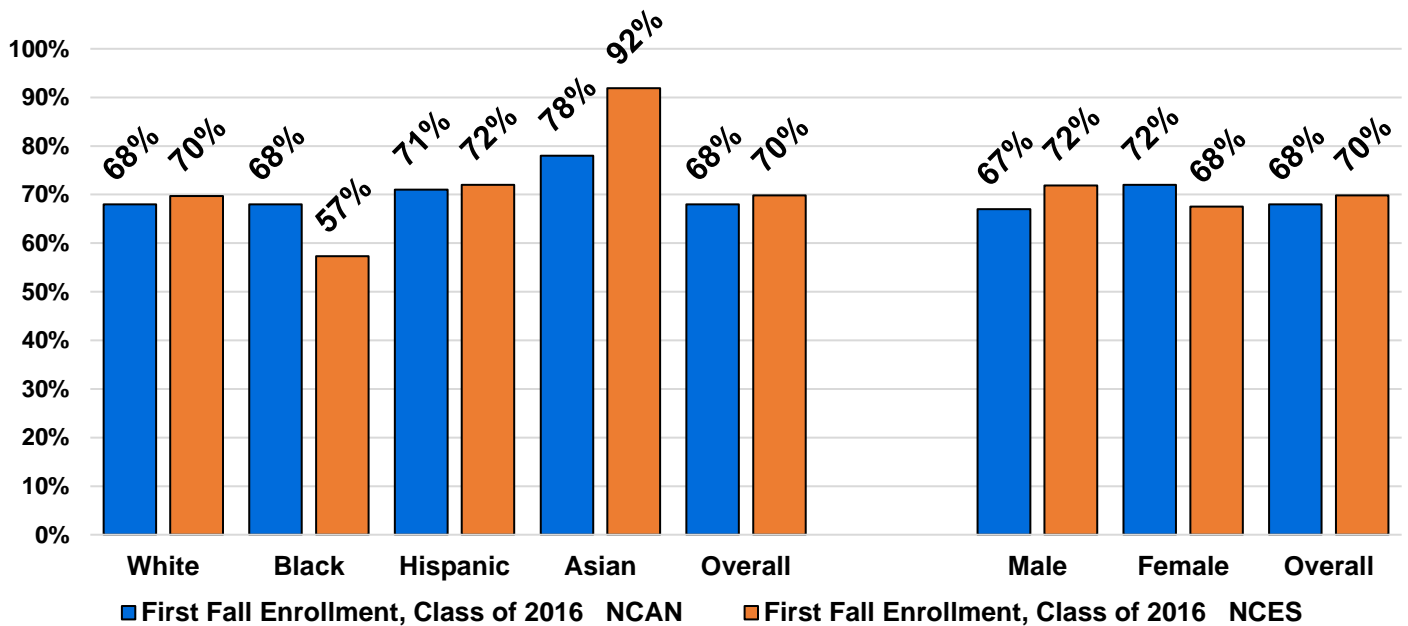
The National Center for Education Statistics also provides national first fall enrollment rate benchmarks for all students and disaggregates these data by race/ethnicity and gender. Figure 3 compares NCAN’s class of 2016 first fall enrollment outcomes against these benchmarks. Black member-served students exceed the national benchmark for all Black students by 11 percentage points.³ However, White, Hispanic, and Asian students’ enrollment rates trail their respective benchmarks, as does the overall enrollment rate of member-served students. Considering gender, member-served female students outpace the national benchmark for all female students by four percentage points, while male students trail it by five.⁴ A future analysis considering gender by race/ethnicity outcomes may yield additional insights.

³ National Center for Education Statistics (2017). Digest of Education Statistics: Percentage of recent high school completers enrolled in college, by race/ethnicity: 1960 through 2016. Retrieved from https://nces.ed.gov/programs/digest/d17/tables/dt17_302.20.asp

⁴ National Center for Education Statistics (2017). Digest of Education Statistics: Recent high school completers and their enrollment in college, by sex and level of institution: 1960 through 2016. Retrieved from https://nces.ed.gov/programs/digest/d17/tables/dt17_302.10.asp

Figure 3. Class of 2016 first fall enrollment rates, by race/ethnicity and by gender

NCAN members' Black students and female students exceeded an NCES benchmark.



Source: NCES, Digest of Education Statistics

The benchmark comparisons in this section demonstrate that NCAN members are largely succeeding in producing a relative advantage for the students they serve when it comes to enrolling in higher education. The next section considers whether students maintain that advantage as they progress through their postsecondary pathway.

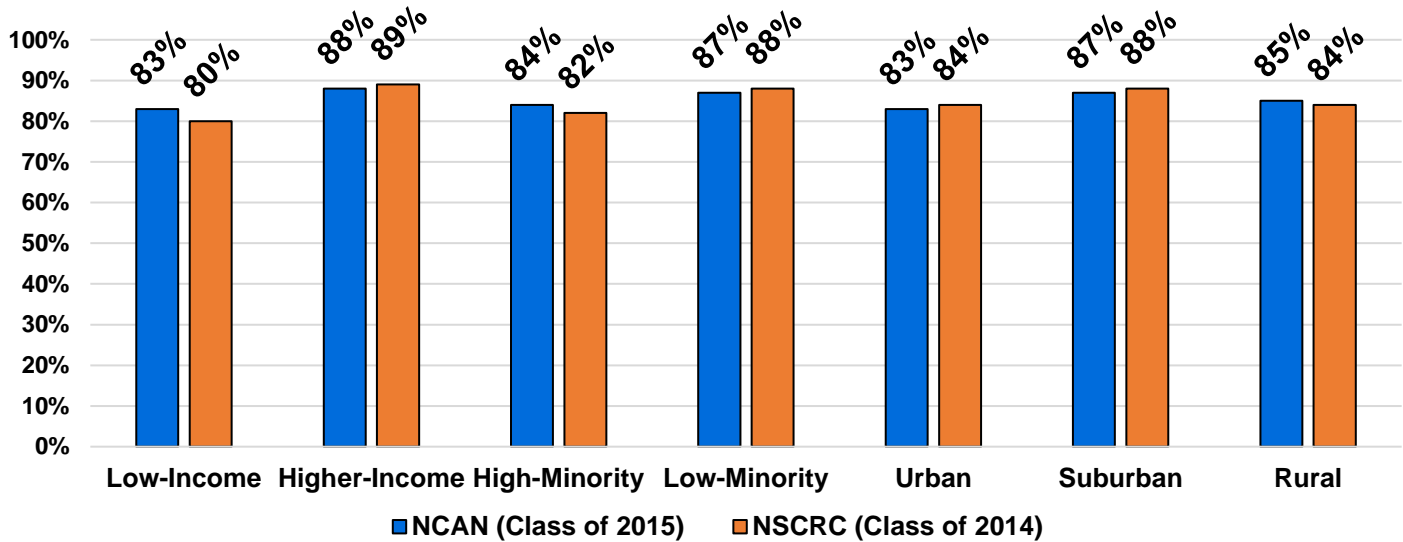
Persistence

While the successful enrollment of students in postsecondary pathways is a critical step for college access programs, it is a first step. Students persisting into subsequent academic years is also critical. Figure 4 considers second-year persistence rates of students from the NCAN class of 2015 and the NSCRC class of 2014.⁵ We disaggregate these second-year persistence rates by high school categories, and Figure 4 shows member-served students exceeding or nearly matching their peers in each high school category. While this is encouraging, it is also notable that in their second year, member-served students give back many of the gains and advantages they have in terms of initial enrollment; that is to say that member-served students are only approximately as likely to persist into their second postsecondary year as students in national comparison groups by high school type.

⁵ NCAN does not have a class with second-year postsecondary outcomes that matches with a year reported by the NSCRC at this time. "Persistence rate is the percentage of students who returned to college (anywhere) at any time in the second year out of all students from the high school graduating class who enrolled at any time in the first year." National Student Clearinghouse Research Center (2017). High School Benchmarks 2017: National College Progression Rates. Retrieved from <https://nscresearchcenter.org/high-school-benchmarks-2017-national-college-progression-rates/>

Figure 4. Second year postsecondary persistence rates, by high school type, after immediate enrollment following high school

Member-served students' second-year persistence exceeded or nearly matched national averages by high school type.

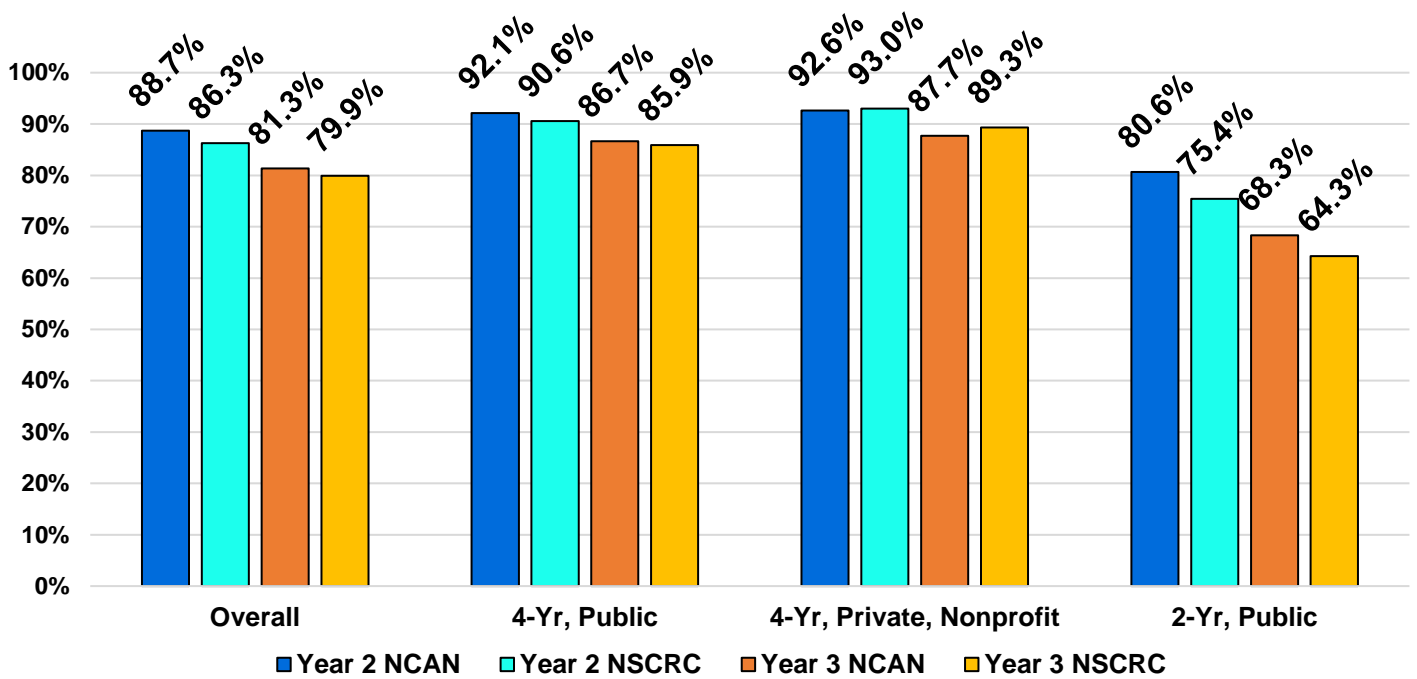


Source: NSCRC, *High School Benchmarks 2017: National College Progression Rates*

Figure 5 below compares the NCAN and NSCRC class of 2011 first fall enrollment samples on their combined persistence and completion rates by starting institution type for years 2 and 3 following enrollment.⁶ The chart shows that after two years, member-served students' outcomes slightly exceed those of the national benchmark for all students. This trend continues after three years of enrollment, where member-served students mostly exceed the national benchmark. Notably, among students who first enrolled at a four-year, private nonprofit institution, member-served students trailed the national benchmark for all such students, while among students who first enrolled in a community college, member-served students' outcomes were better after year 3 by three percentage points. This is encouraging and appears to show NCAN member-served students largely keeping pace with their peers.

⁶ Shapiro, D., Dundar, A., Huie, F., Wakhungu, P.K., Yuan, X., Nathan, A. & Bhimdiwali, A. (2017, December). *Completing College: A National View of Student Completion Rates – Fall 2011 Cohort (Signature Report No. 14)*. Herndon, VA: National Student Clearinghouse Research Center. Retrieved from <https://nscresearchcenter.org/signaturereport14/>

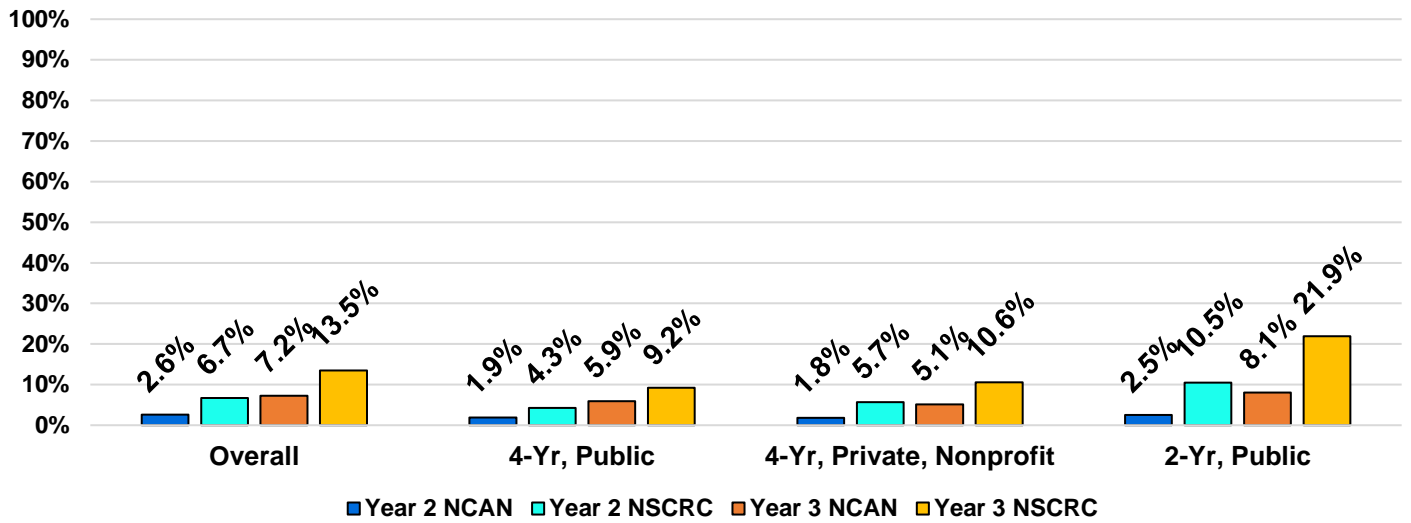
Figure 5. Combined second and third year persistence and completion rates, by starting institution type, after immediate enrollment following high school (class of 2011)



What Figure 5 above masks that Figure 6 below makes clear is that by the end of the third year following postsecondary enrollment, member-served students are trailing the NSCRC’s national benchmarks for all students in terms of completion. While it is true that 75 percent of time is an unconventional period at which to compare completion outcomes, this represents a more traditional 150 percent period for two-year institutions.

Figure 6. Second and third year completion rates, by starting institution type, after immediate enrollment following high school (class of 2011)

A completion gap appears between member-served students and NSCRC's national average after students' third postsecondary year.



Source: NSCRC, Shapiro, et al. Signature Report 14

Among students who started at two-year public institutions, member-served students are less than a third as likely to have completed by the end of year 3 as students in the NSCRC's benchmark. Even at four-year institutions, Figure 6 shows preliminary completion gaps. Unfortunately, as the next section demonstrates, those completion gaps grow after the third year.

Completion

Our level of optimism about member-served students' postsecondary completion outcomes depends on the lens through which we view them.

The National Student Clearinghouse Research Center offers two key comparison points for completion rates, the High School Benchmarks Report series and the Signature Report Series. The High School Benchmarks Report series examines the outcomes of all students from a graduating high school class for all of the schools participating in the StudentTracker for High Schools service. This series reports six-year completion rates categorized by high schools' family income levels, minority student concentrations, and geographic locales.

Figures 7 and 8 show the six-year completion rates of member-served students against these NSCRC benchmarks for the classes of 2010 and 2011. Notably, the denominator for the values in these charts includes all students in the high school graduating class, and these completion rates are not contingent on students ever having a postsecondary enrollment. This accounts for lower-than-expected completion rates.

Figure 7. Six-year postsecondary completion rates, by high school type (class of 2010)
 NCAN-served students from low-income, high-minority schools exceeded NSCRC completion rate comparisons. The samples here include all students from the class of 2010, not just enrollers.

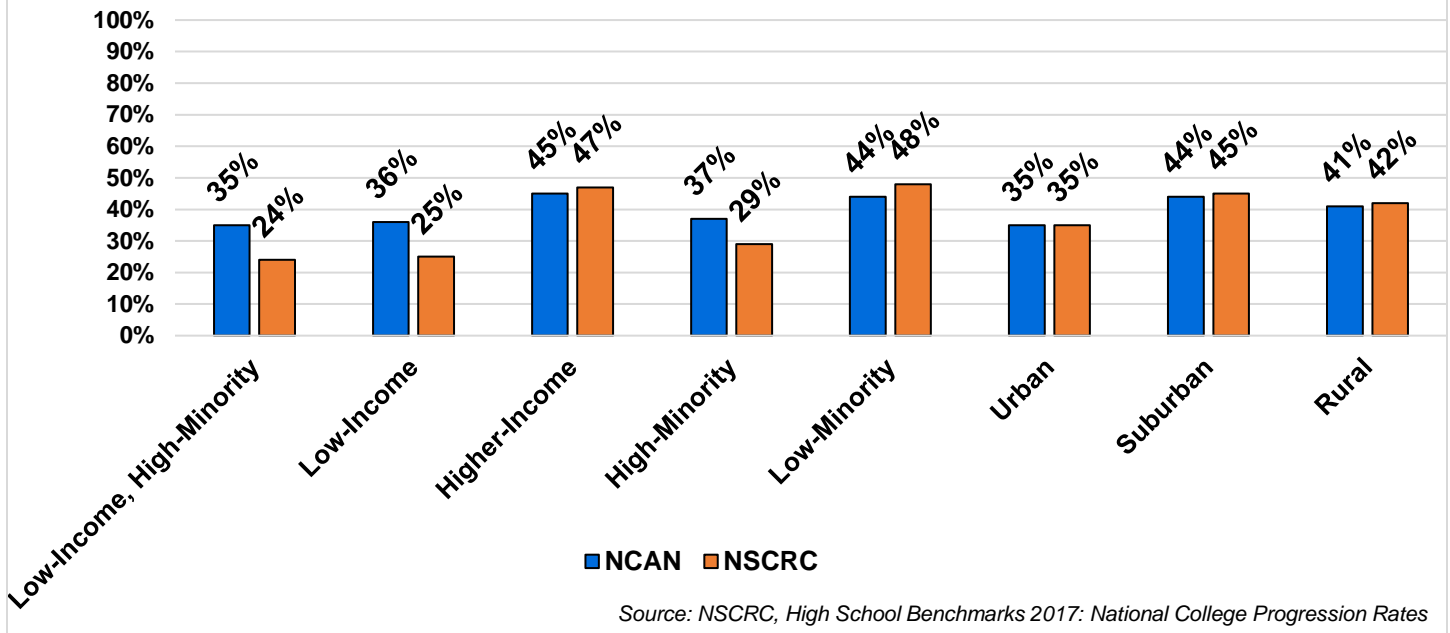
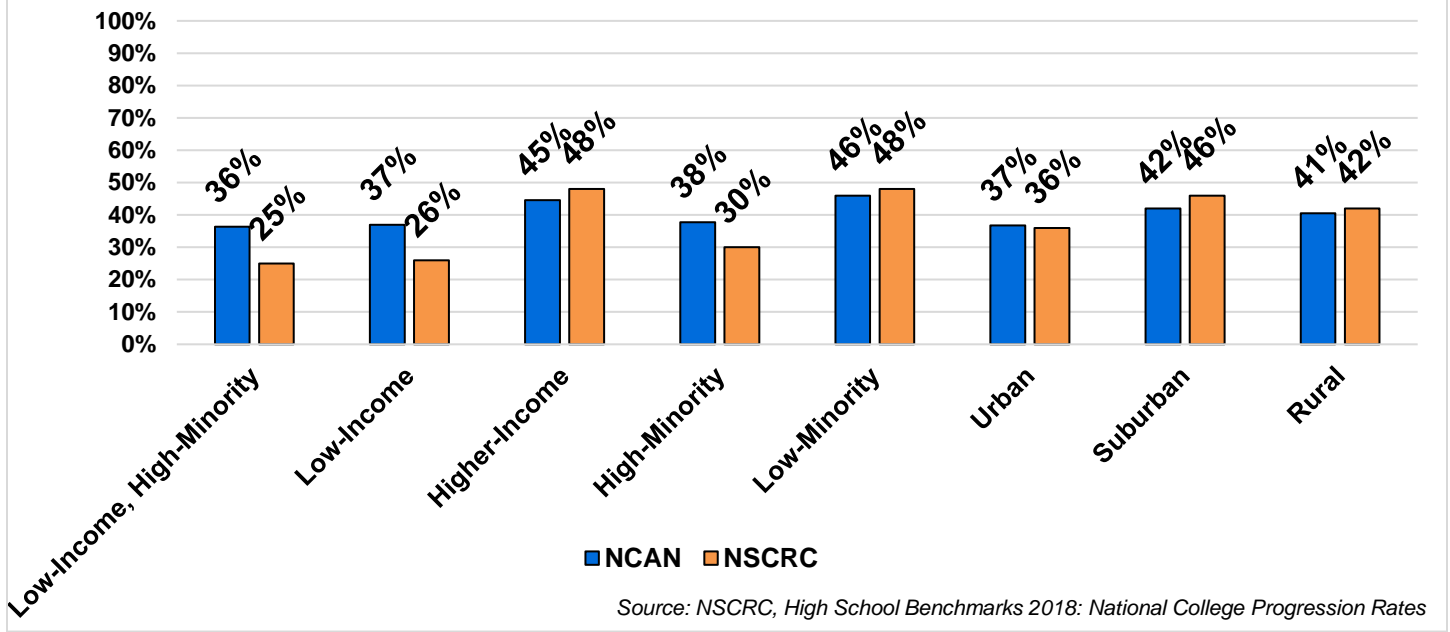


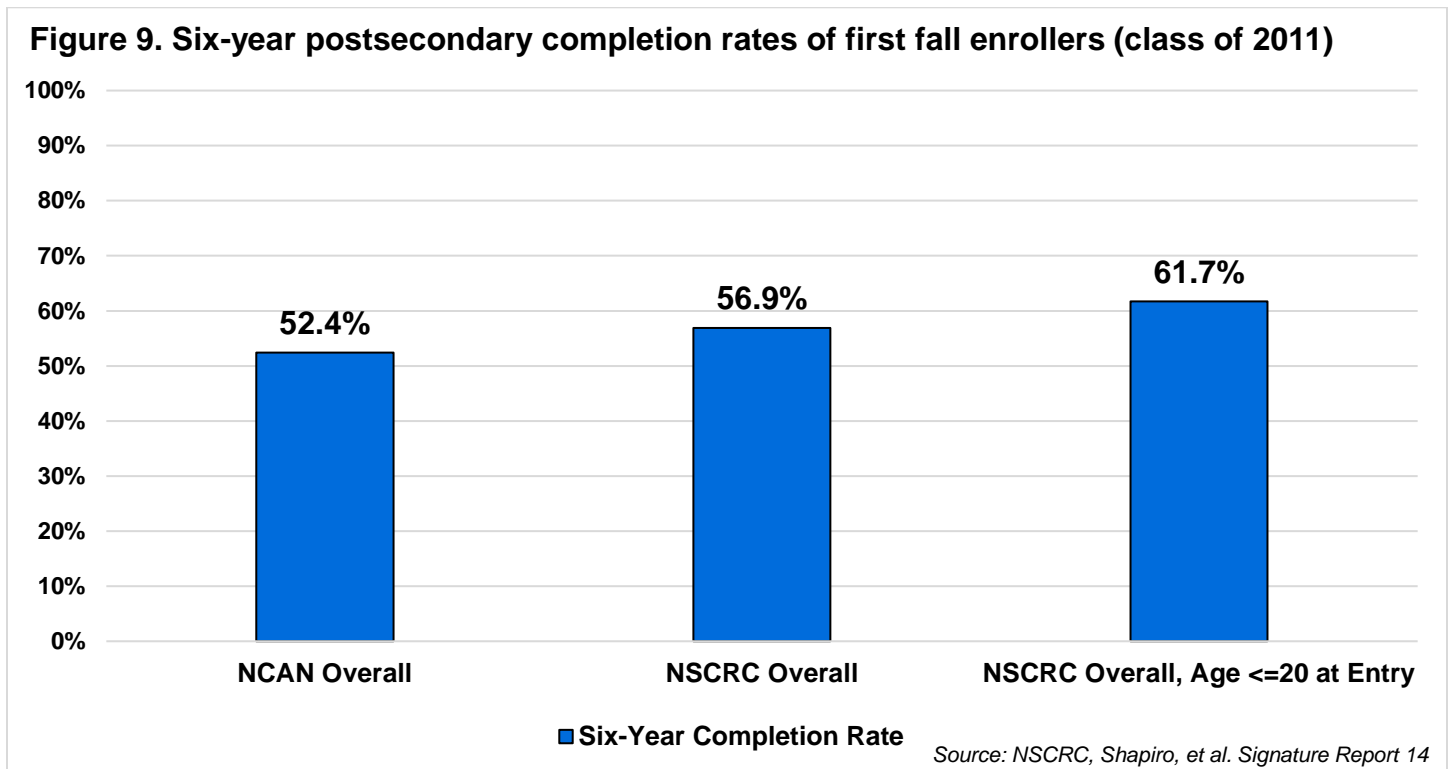
Figure 8. Six-year postsecondary completion rates, by high school type (class of 2011)
 NCAN-served students from low-income, high-minority schools again exceeded NSCRC completion rate comparisons. The samples here include all students from the class of 2011, not just enrollers.



Holding high school category constant, member-served students completed at higher rates than their peers at low-income and high-minority high schools, and they equal or approach the completion rates at higher-income and low-minority high schools and at high schools in all three types of locale.

The other NSCRC comparison point is the Signature Report series. This series examines the completion outcomes of the students who enter postsecondary education for the first time in the fall of a given academic year. These reports are disaggregated by gender, race/ethnicity, age at first entry, and starting institutional type. The most recent Signature Report considers students who began their postsecondary education in fall 2011. For the first time in the Benchmarking Project, NCAN can compare member-served students who started in the first fall of a given academic year.⁷

Figure 9 compares six-year completion rates for students entering postsecondary education in the fall of 2011. Member-served students' completion rates trail the overall NSC rate by 4.5 percentage points and the age-restricted benchmark by over 9 percentage points. This represents a persistent gap that has stubbornly refused to close.



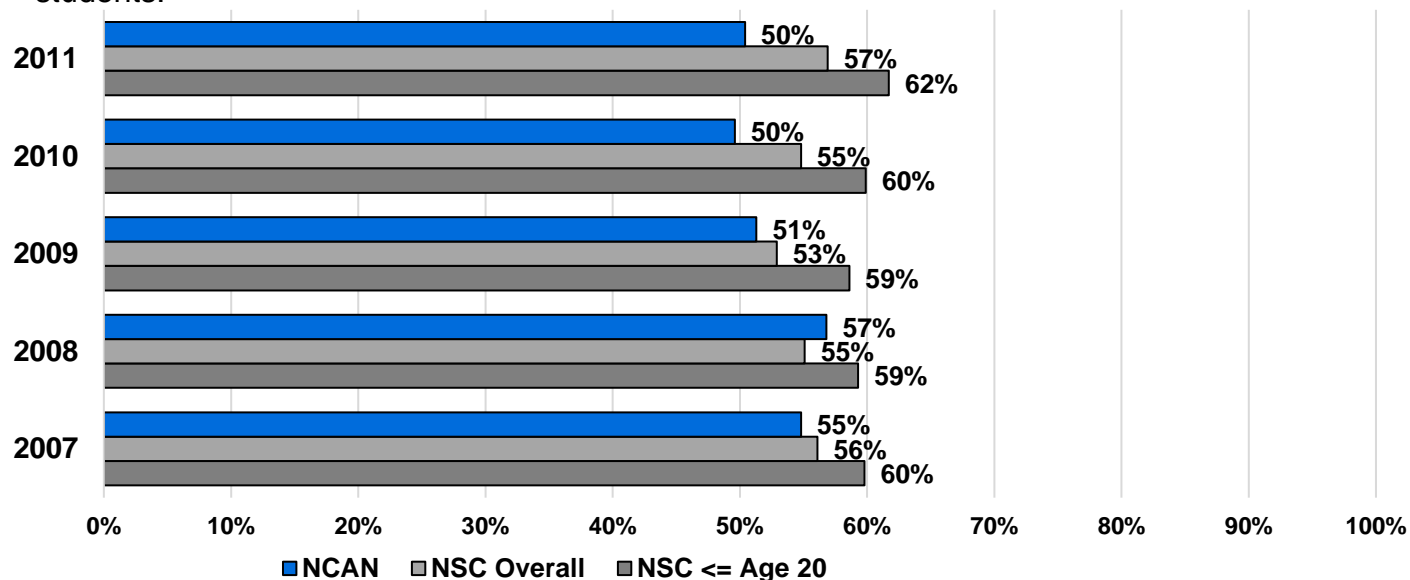
These results are similar to those of previous years. Figure 10 demonstrates that, the class of 2008 excepted, member-served students' completion rates have consistently trailed both the NSC overall and age-restricted benchmarks across five rounds of the Benchmarking Project.⁸

⁷ To improve the comparison of the Benchmarking Project data with the figures in the Signature Report series, we make two changes to our analysis. First, we restrict our analysis of completion rate outcomes to students who enrolled in the first fall following high school graduation. Previous years' reports compared member-served students who enrolled in the first year following high school to NSCRC's sample of first fall-enrolled students. Second, we examine the Signature Report series' outcomes for students who were age 20 or younger at first enrollment. This practice is consistent with past years' reports and a survey of Benchmarking Project participants, who indicated that this age group was the best reflection of the ages of the students they submitted.

⁸ These figures represent six-year completion rates of students from NSCRC's "first fall enrollment" sample. The NCAN cohorts include students who enrolled in the first year following high school graduation as "first fall" comparisons were not available for 2007-2010.

Figure 10. Six-year postsecondary completion rates of NCAN member-served students and NSCRC benchmarks (classes of 2007-2011)

NCAN member-served students' have consistently trailed NSC's national benchmarks for all students.

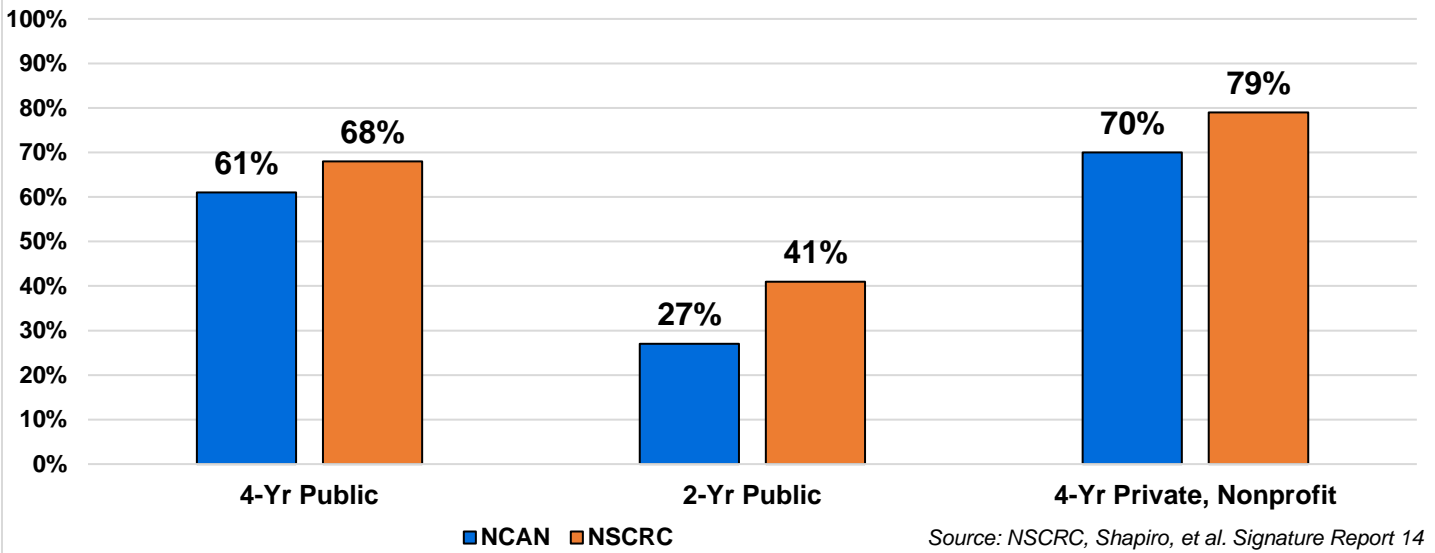


Source: NSCRC, Signature Reports 6, 8, 10, 12, 14

As noted earlier, the Signature Report series disaggregates its data by starting institution type. Figure 11 compares NCAN and NSCRC benchmarks for this breakout for the class of 2011. Nearly all students, 98 percent of the NCAN class of 2011 who immediately enrolled and 97 percent of the NSCRC sample who started in fall 2011, first attended either a two- or four-year public or four-year, private, nonprofit institution. Within each of these three starting institution types, NCAN member-served students experienced significant completion gaps. This finding is particularly stark for two-year public institutions, where students in the NSCRC sample were 64 percent more likely to have completed in the six-year window.

Figure 11. Six-year postsecondary completion rates of first fall enrollers from the class of 2011, by starting institution type (class of 2011). NSCRC benchmark for students age 20 or younger at entry.

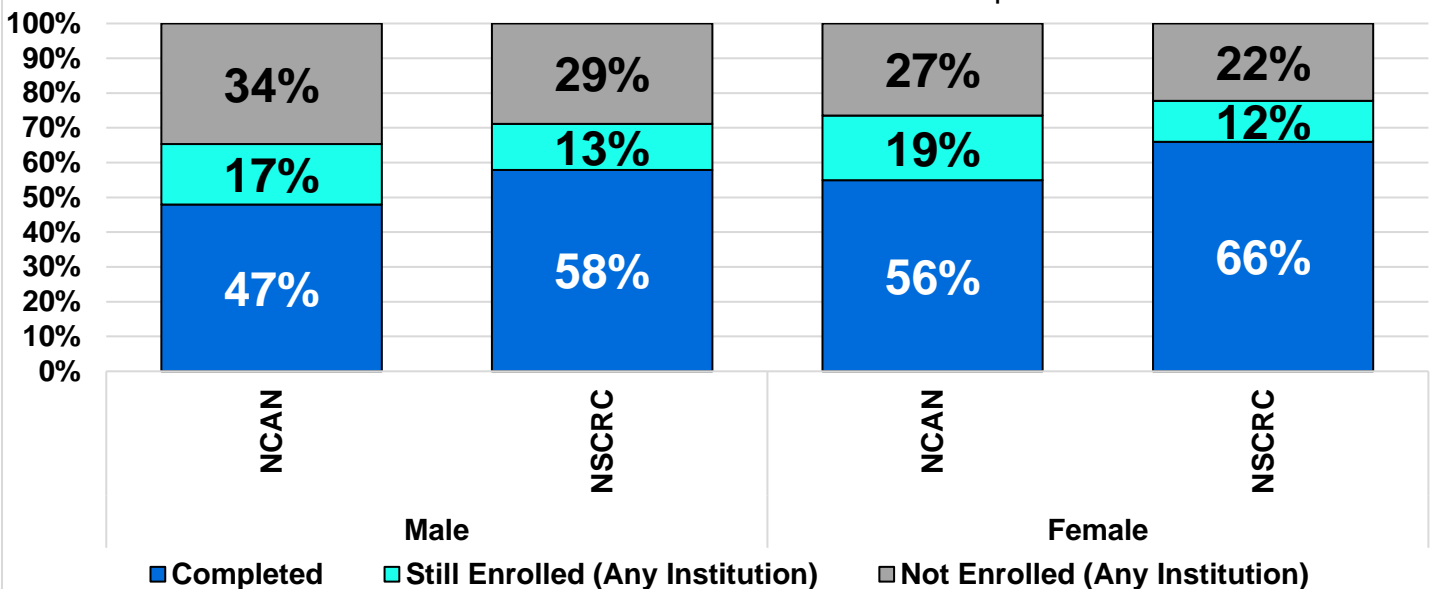
NCAN member-served students trailed NSCRC's six-year completion rates for the three types of institutions to which they most often matriculate.



Disparities also appear when comparing NCAN and NSCRC six-year completion rates by gender. Figure 12 shows a large gap that exists between the completion rates of male and female students served by NCAN members compared to the NSCRC's benchmark.

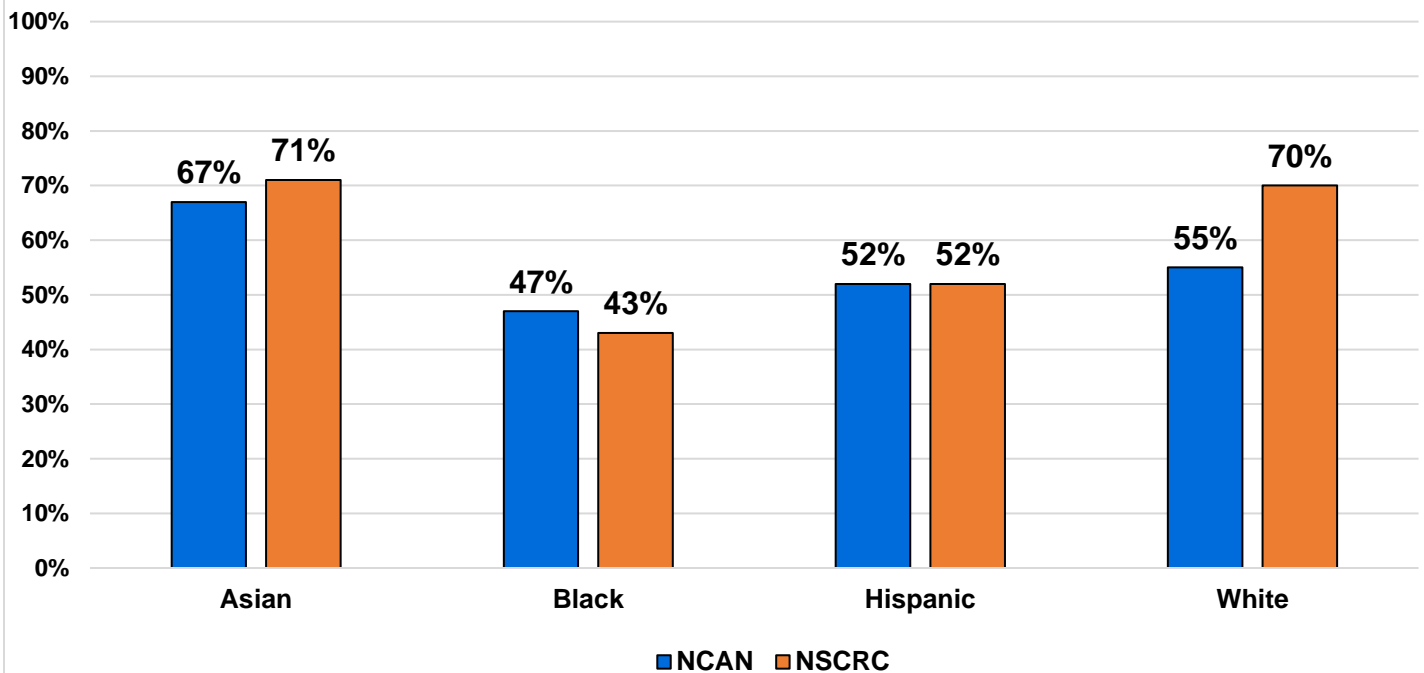
Figure 12. Six-year postsecondary continued enrollment and completion outcomes of first fall enrollers, by gender (class of 2011)

Member-served male and female students both trailed national completion rate benchmarks.



Considering completion rates by race/ethnicity offers mixed news for NCAN members. Figure 13 demonstrates that Black and Hispanic students served by NCAN members complete at rates comparable to the NSCRC’s national benchmark for all such students, but member-served Asian and White students trail the overall national rate for these groups, White students markedly so.

Figure 13. Six-year postsecondary completion rates for first fall enrollers, by selected race/ethnicity (class of 2011)



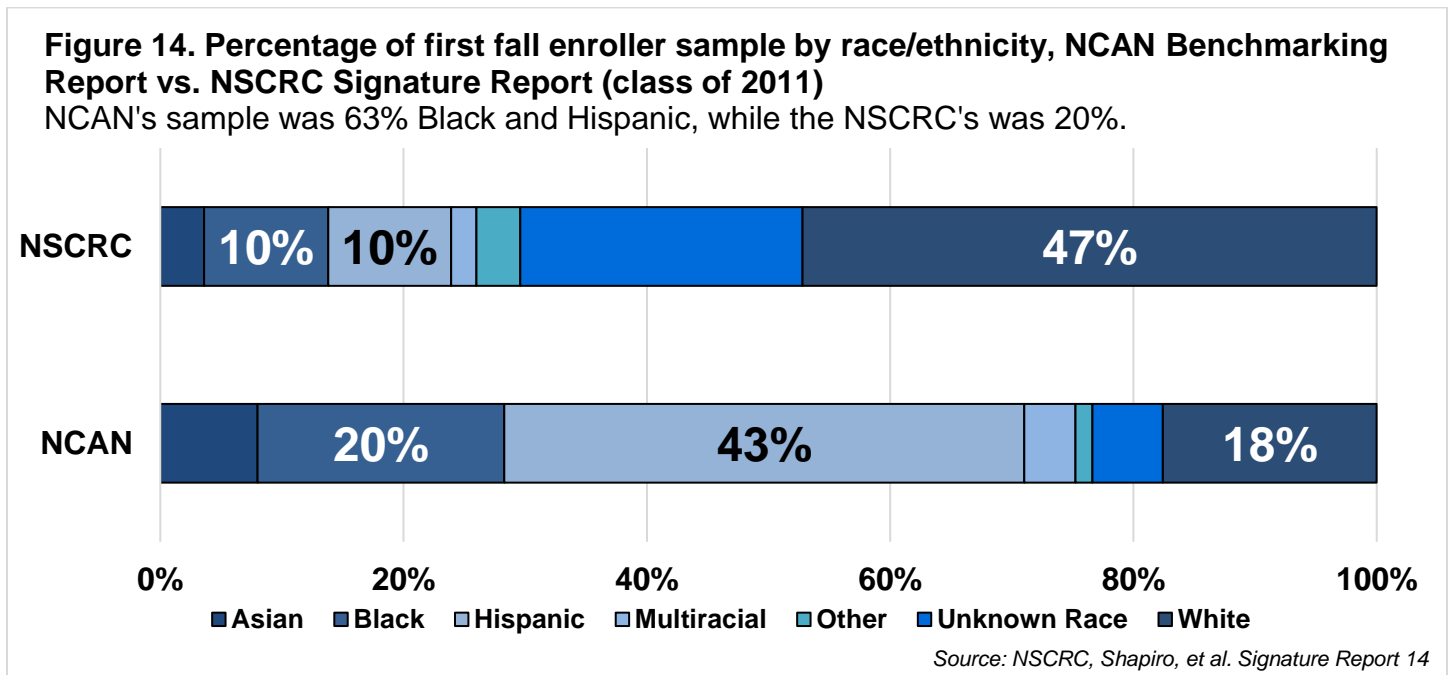
NSC comparison group is for students who were age 20 or younger at their first enrollment. Source: NSCRC, Shapiro, et al. Signature Report 14

Having both established that member-served students’ completion outcomes lag overall and disaggregated national comparisons for all students, we now turn our attention to the question of why this occurs. There are many potential explanations for this completion gap, but this report focuses on two. The first contributor to the gap is the relative composition of the two samples. The second is divergent persistence outcomes in years four through six of the postsecondary pathway following initial enrollment.

“The much larger proportion of White students completing at much higher rates could alone explain the completion gap between NCAN member-served students and the NSCRC’s national completion rate benchmark for all students.”

Most NCAN members direct their services to low-income, first-generation students, many of them students of color, in order to close the persistent completion gaps demonstrated above. It is unsurprising, then, that there are higher proportions of students from these underserved student groups in the Benchmarking Project sample as compared to the NSCRC sample group. Figure 14 shows that 63 percent of NCAN’s class of 2011 sample was Black or Hispanic, compared to 20 percent in the NSCRC’s sample; conversely, 18 percent of NCAN’s class of 2011 sample was White compared to 47 percent for the NSCRC. Given Figure 13 above and the large completion disparities

between White students in the NCAN and NSCRC samples, the much larger proportion of White students completing at much higher rates could alone explain the completion gap between NCAN member-served students and the NSCRC’s national completion rate benchmark for all students.



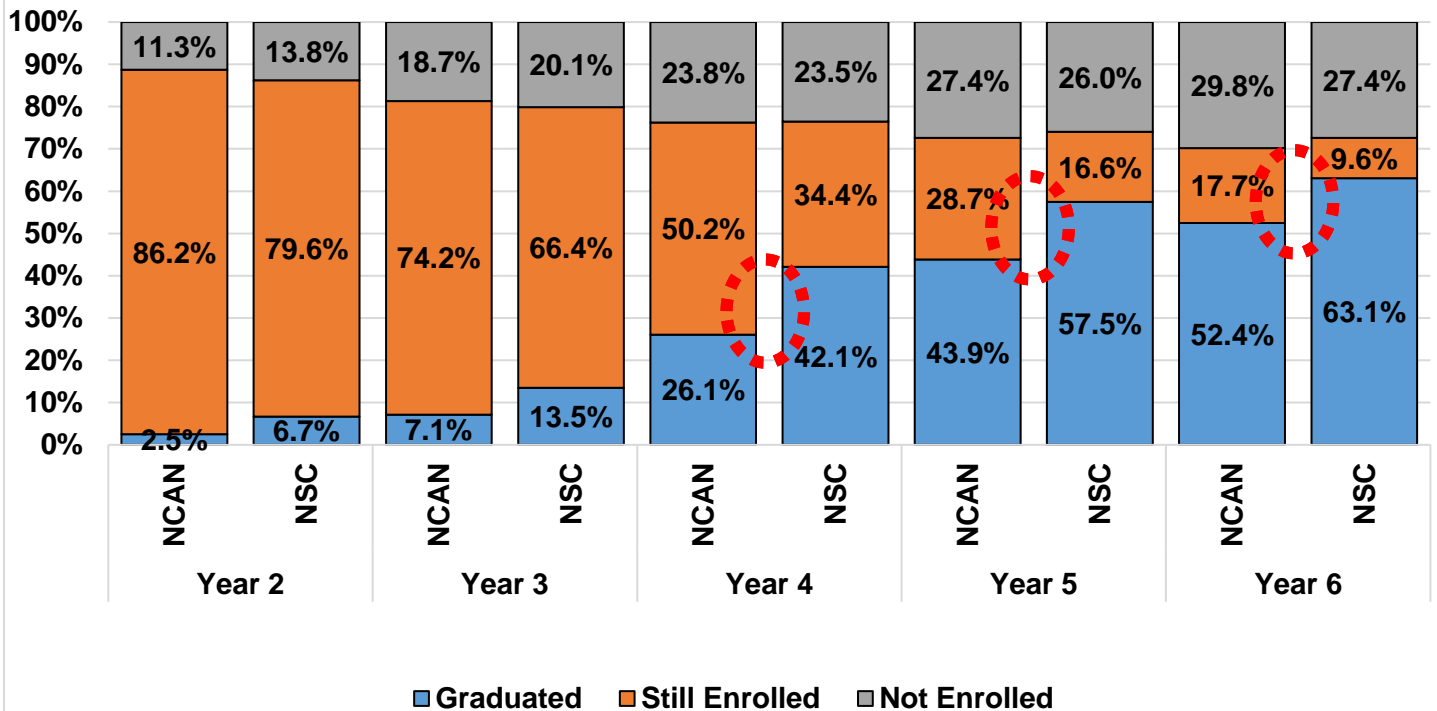
Ascribing the observed completion gap wholly to the demographic composition of the samples would be convenient but too simplistic. Analyzing the postsecondary progression for the class of 2011 reveals another important and connected finding: After the third postsecondary year, member-served students’ likelihood of stopping out increases significantly compared to the national benchmark for all students.

The NSCRC’s “Snapshot Report – Yearly Success and Progress Rates” considers the fall 2011 entering cohort and shows “persistence, stop-out, and completion rates at the end of each subsequent academic year.”⁹ We compare the results from this report to the progress rates of NCAN’s class of 2011 sample. Figure 15 shows these overall results.

⁹ National Student Clearinghouse Research Center (2018). Snapshot Report – Yearly Success and Progress Rates. Retrieved from <https://nscresearchcenter.org/snapshot-report-yearly-success-and-progress-rates/>

Figure 15. Yearly postsecondary success and progress rates for first fall enrollers (class of 2011)

Member-served students' outcomes are similar to national comparisons in years 2 and 3, but completion lags later.

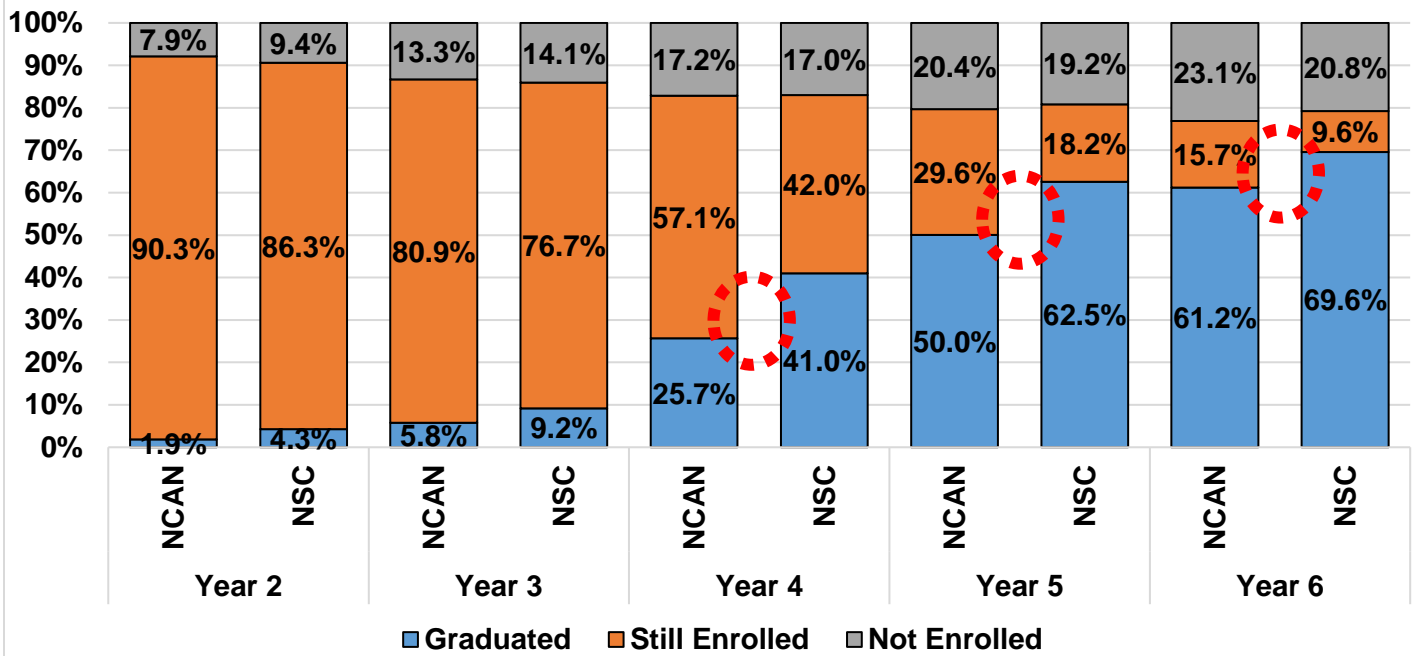


Source: NSCRC, Yearly Success and Progress Rates

In years 2 and 3, combined persistence and completion outcomes between the NCAN and NSCRC samples are comparable, but starting in year 4, these outcomes begin to diverge considerably. Among member-served students from the class of 2011 who enrolled in the first fall following high school graduation, 17 percent experience their first stopout in years 4 through 6 post-high school. Overall, students in the NSCRC sample are 66 percent more likely to have completed a degree by year 4. By year 6, the students in the NSCRC sample are just 25 percent more likely to have completed, which means that member-served students close the gap somewhat but still trail substantially. In year 6, NCAN member-served students are nearly twice as likely to still be enrolled as students are nationally. The implications of this are double-edged: We would rather have students enrolled than not enrolled at all, but we would also rather students complete their postsecondary programs within six years.

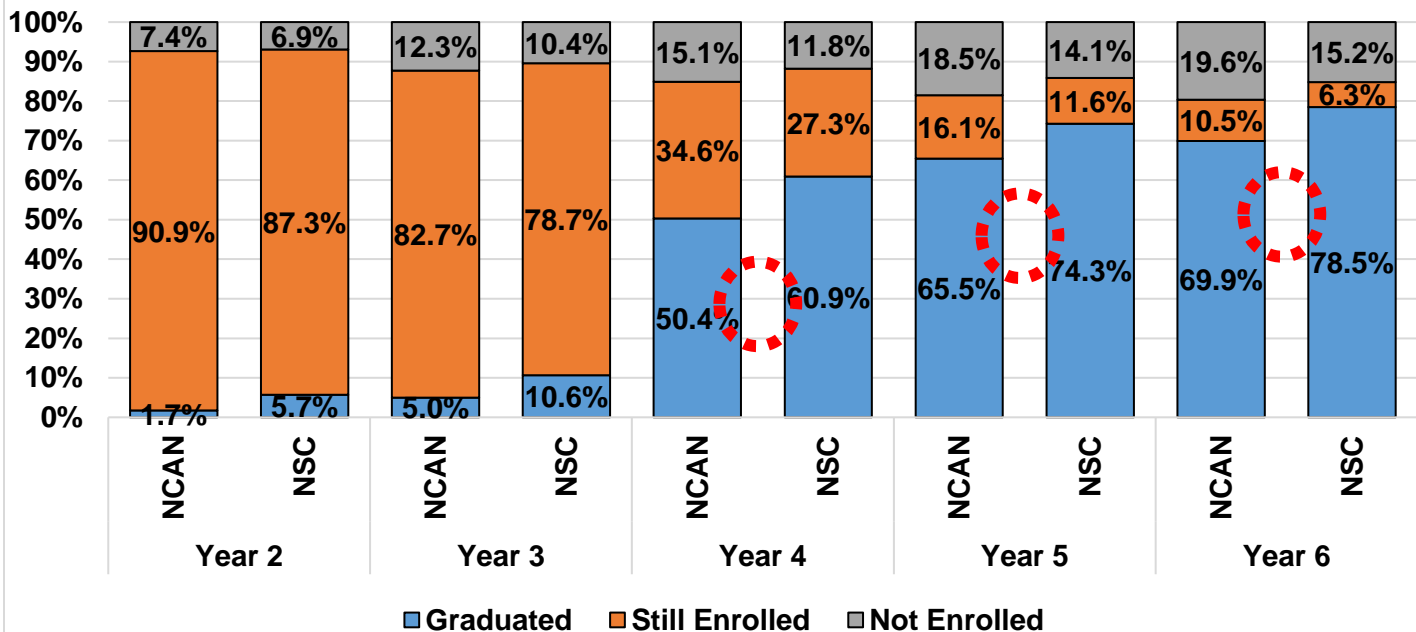
A reasonable hypothesis is that starting institution type might play a role in postsecondary progress, given differential student outcomes at different types of institutions. Unfortunately for member-served students, the same divergence in years 4 through 6 appears even after controlling for this factor as seen in Figures 16, 17, and 18. Again, race and ethnicity also play a factor because of the large proportion of students of color in the NCAN sample. These students are relatively more likely to stop out or drop out than students from other groups, which is a reality NCAN and our members are working every day to change.

Figure 16. Yearly postsecondary success and progress rates for first fall enrollers who started at four-year public institutions (class of 2011)



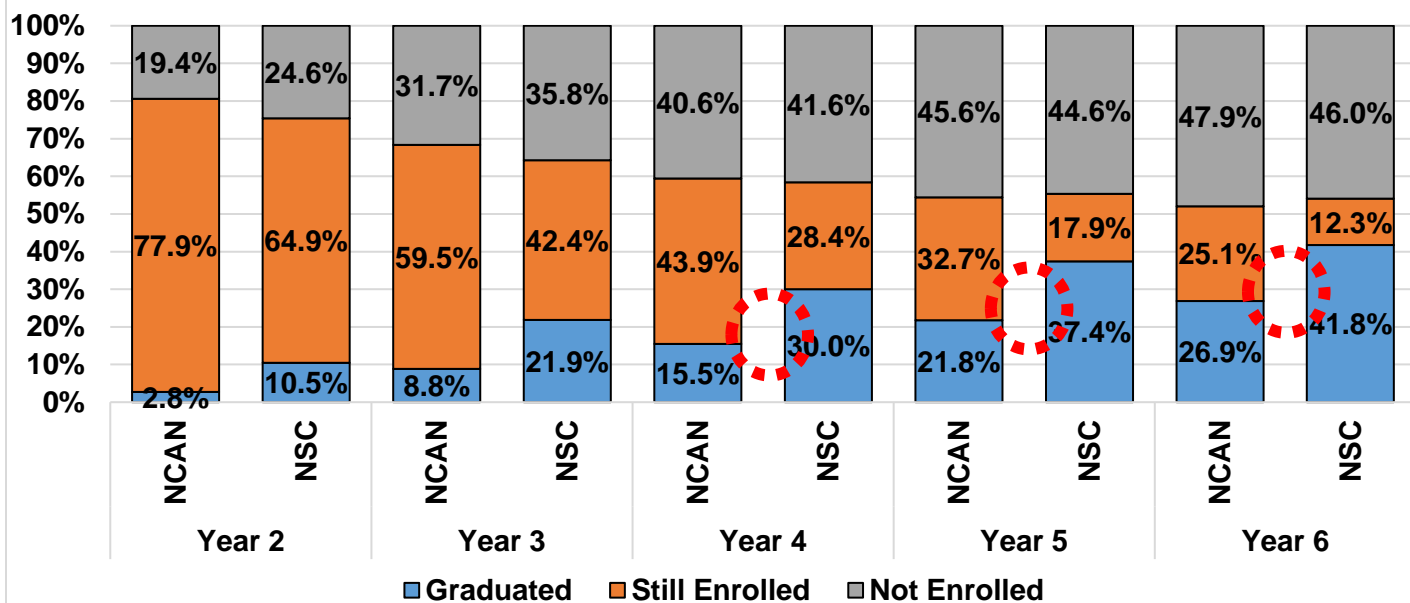
Source: NSCRC, Yearly Success and Progress Rates

Figure 17. Yearly postsecondary success and progress rates for first fall enrollers who started at four-year, private, nonprofit institutions (class of 2011)



Source: NSCRC, Yearly Success and Progress Rates

Figure 18. Yearly postsecondary success and progress rates for first fall enrollers who started at two-year public institutions (class of 2011)



Source: NSCRC, Yearly Success and Progress Rates

Although changing the composition of the Benchmarking Project sample is not a viable (or mission-consistent) approach for addressing the completion challenge, the phenomenon of students stopping out later in their postsecondary pathway is something NCAN members can address through the the number and types of services they offer . NCAN looks forward to further investigating the practices of members whose students have found success in later years of their postsecondary experience.

Success Services

NCAN members offer a wide variety of services to the students they serve. Programs deliver these services to students in myriad ways and at various times. Since the second round of the Benchmarking Project, NCAN has collected data on the services member organizations provide. These broad categories of services, listed in Table 1, are tracked for each student as “Yes,” “No,” or “Unknown.”

Table 1. Service Data Collected in the Benchmarking Project

- Assistance in completing and submitting the FAFSA
- Financial literacy/aid education
- Academic support/counseling/advising while in high school
- College admissions test prep courses and/or materials
- Postsecondary admissions counseling
- Specific curriculum and/or activities designed to encourage grit, persistence, non-cognitive, other social/emotional/life skills
- Information for parents/families
- Success/completion/retention services while in postsecondary education
- Services promoting college and career readiness, including development of workforce skills and knowledge

Given the disparities in later-year outcomes identified in the previous section that contribute to an overall completion gap, we consider whether the receipt of success services was associated with improved postsecondary outcomes. In the class of 2011 sample, 59 NCAN member programs submitted student data. Of these programs, 39 reported providing postsecondary success services to at least some of their students in this class.

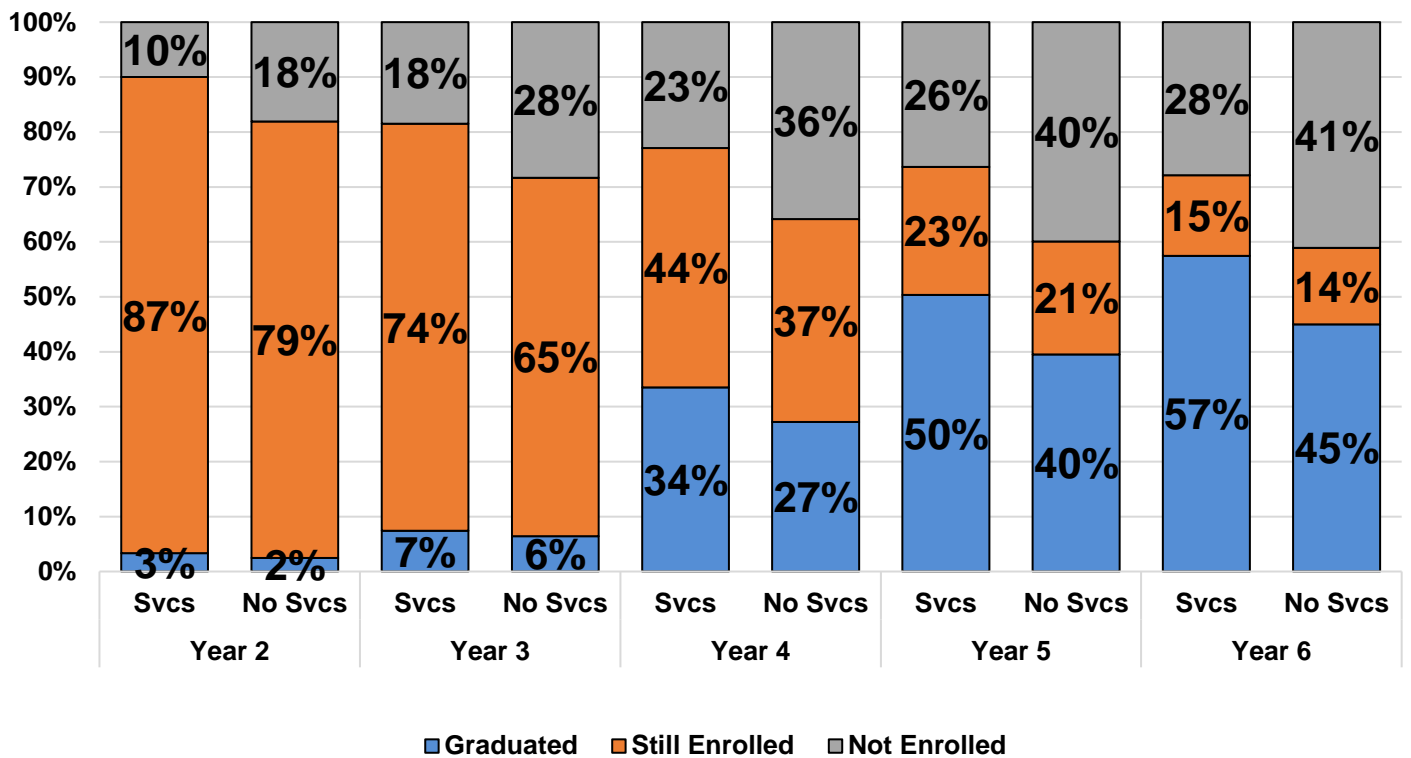
Overall, 82 percent of students in the class of 2011 (N=22,574) had unknown data for postsecondary success services. Thirteen percent of students received success services (N=3,713) and five percent (N=1,353) did not; of students with real data, 74 percent of students in the class of 2011 sample received some postsecondary success services. Figure 19 compares students in the class of 2011 who received postsecondary success services with those who did not (it does not include students with unknown service data). Students who received postsecondary success services completed within six years at a rate 12 percentage points greater than students who did not

receive these services. In years 4, 5, and 6, the completion gap between those who did and did not receive postsecondary success services grew each year.

This is an encouraging finding for NCAN members because it suggests that receiving some type of success service is associated with higher rates of completion (indeed higher than the overall national completion rate benchmark for all students of 56.9 percent). Unfortunately, because of the limitations in data collection mentioned previously, we do not know exactly which types or dosages of success services led to this positive outcome. This provides a promising direction for future research and collaboration between NCAN and its members.

Figure 19. Yearly postsecondary success and progress rates for first fall enrollers, by receipt of NCAN member postsecondary success services (class of 2011)

NCAN member-served students who received postsecondary success services completed at higher rates than those who did not.



NCAN contacted members participating in this round of the Benchmarking Project and providing success services to students who did not see significant stopouts in years 4 through 6 to gain their insight about which parts of their programs they thought had an impact on student persistence and completion. Three programs' responses are below, and NCAN looks forward to continuing to delve into this important topic.

The **College Success Foundation (CSF)** provides an integrated system of supports and scholarships to inspire its students from the District of Columbia to persist in college. This system focuses on **college affordability, regular advising, career connections, and on-time graduation**. Advisors work to reduce out-of-pocket costs for students by ensuring that they receive all available funds, in addition to the CSF Achievers Scholarship. They also engage with students throughout the year with a frequency based on stop-out risk, talk consistently about career goals, and set expectations for students to graduate from college in five years or fewer.

Bottom Line students complete college at higher rates than their peers due to our intentional program model. Our College Success Program provides one-on-one support from college and career advisors to help students persist through college, earn a degree, and prepare for a career. Specifically, we have several strategies that we feel are particularly crucial in allowing students to persist in college: responsible college choice, assistance with financial aid, intensive advising, structured services, accountability systems for staff, and a data-driven approach. *For more on Bottom Line, see NCAN's [case study](#) on the program.*

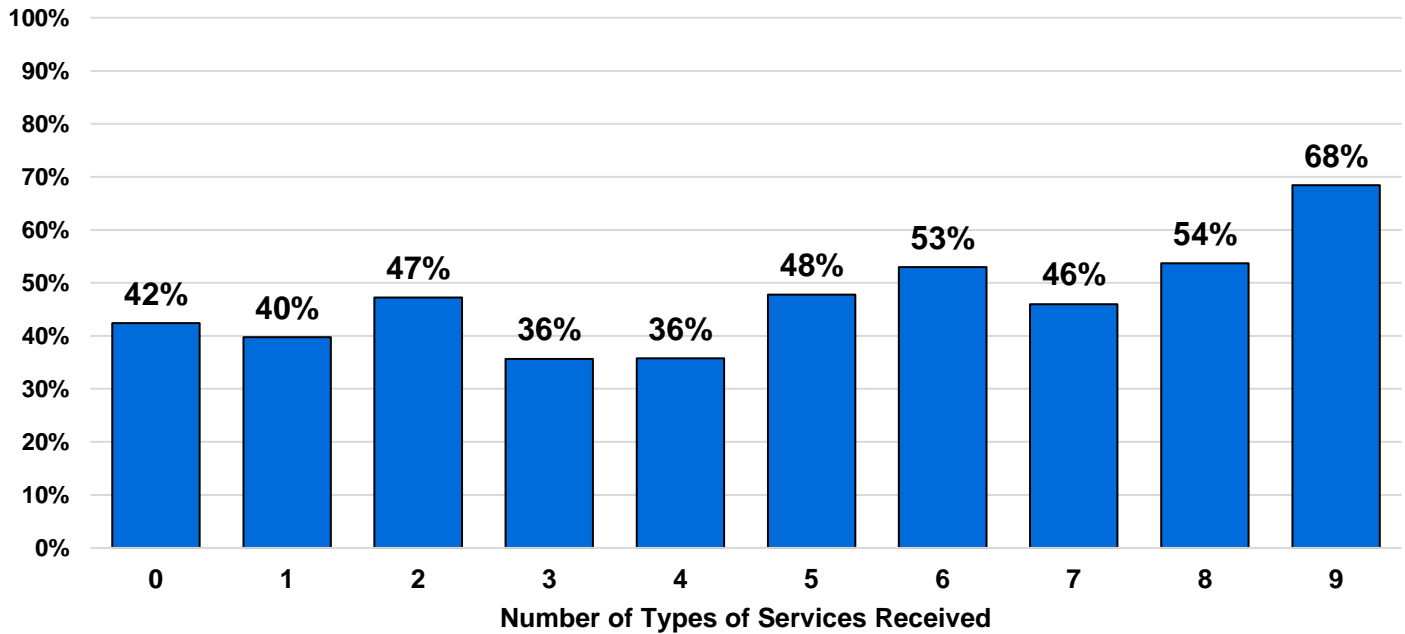
The **Crosby Scholars** program attributes its success to a number of factors. Among them are offering a last dollar grant and requiring students to submit their grades at the end of each semester. These keep students connected to the program and let them know that they are supported. Additionally, many of the organization's students start with the program in sixth grade, so they have been connected to the program for several years before going to college. Preparation over that time builds confidence and a network of support. Students learn how to navigate the college admission and financial aid process. Finally, the program is based in an area with an abundance of local higher education institutions, so if students stop out or drop out, there is easy access to re-enroll.

Other Services

This report considers two more questions about the connection between services received and completion outcomes. First, were students who received a wider variety of services more likely to graduate within the six-year window? Second, which combinations of services did students receive most often, and what were the completion rates associated with these combinations?

Figure 20 shows six-year completion rates for students from the class of 2011 by the number of services they received. The average student in the class of 2011 who enrolled in the first year following high school graduation and completed sometime within the six-year window received just over five types of services. The chart shows a generally positive correlation between completion rate and the number of types of services received. Notably, this chart does not control for any of the program- or student-level characteristics that would also affect completion rates (i.e., we cannot say "all else being equal" about this chart). It is a simple descriptive look at outcomes by one factor. The table below Figure 20 displays the sample size by type of service received.

Figure 20. Six-year postsecondary completion rates, by number of member-provided services received (class of 2011)



# of Svcs	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
Students (N)	2,029	760	324	188	1,234	4,783	16,169	635	419	1,099

We also consider the combinations of services delivered most often to students in the Benchmarking Project sample and the completion outcomes associated with these combinations. Students from the class of 2011 who enrolled in the first year following high school received 100 different combinations of services from NCAN members. Of these combinations, just 29 of them were offered to a total of 40 or more students.

Tables 2 and 3 below sort the services into two top 10 lists. Table 2 displays the 10 combinations with the largest number of students receiving that combination of services and their average six-year completion rate. Table 3 shows the 10 combinations of services with the highest completion rates (minimum sample of 40 students). Note that reporting the services provided to students is optional for project participants, which explains the “no services reported” row in the table.

Table 2. Top 10 Combinations of Services By Number of Students Receiving, Including Six-Year Completion Rates of Students from the Class of 2011 Who Enrolled in the First Year Following High School

Combination of Services (Number of Service Types)	Number of Students Receiving	Six-Year Completion Rate
(6) FAFSA assistance, Financial literacy/aid education, High school academic advising, College admissions test preparation, College admissions counseling, Grit/life skills curriculum	15,268	53.2%
(5) Financial literacy/aid education, High school academic advising, College admissions test preparation, College admissions counseling, Grit/life skills curriculum	3,777	47.0%
(0) No services reported	2,029	42.4%
(9) FAFSA assistance, Financial literacy/aid education, High school academic advising, College admissions test preparation, College admissions counseling, Grit/life skills curriculum, Provided information to parents, Postsecondary success services, Career success services	1,099	68.4%
(4) Financial literacy/aid education, High school academic advising, College admissions counseling, Grit/life skills curriculum	625	34.4%
(5) FAFSA assistance, Financial literacy/aid education, High school academic advising, College admissions counseling, Grit/life skills curriculum	491	24.8%
(6) FAFSA assistance, Financial literacy/aid education, College admissions counseling, Provided information to parents, Postsecondary success services, Career success services	464	48.1%
(4) Financial literacy/aid education, Grit/life skills curriculum, Postsecondary success services, Career success services	429	38.2%
(1) Postsecondary success services	424	43.9%
(7) FAFSA assistance, Financial literacy/aid education, High school academic advising, College admissions test preparation, College admissions counseling, Provided information to parents, Career success services	329	31.3%

Table 3. Top 10 Combinations of Services by Six-Year Completion Rates of Students from the Class of 2011 Who Enrolled in the First Year Following High School, Including Number of Students Receiving

Combination of Services (Number of Service Types)	Number of Students Receiving	Six-Year Completion Rate
(5) Financial literacy/aid education, High school academic advising, College admissions test preparation, College admissions counseling, Provided information to parents	76	86.8%
(7) FAFSA assistance, Financial literacy/aid education, High school academic advising, College admissions counseling, Provided information to parents, Postsecondary success services, Career success services	86	82.6%
(5) Financial literacy/aid education, Grit/life skills curriculum, Provided information to parents, Postsecondary success services, Career success services	49	79.6%
(5) FAFSA assistance, Financial literacy/aid education, College admissions counseling, Postsecondary success services, Career success services	288	79.2%
(2) Financial literacy/aid education, Postsecondary success services	67	74.6%
(8) FAFSA assistance, Financial literacy/aid education, High school academic advising, College admissions test preparation, College admissions counseling, Grit/life skills curriculum, Provided information to parents, Postsecondary success services	113	69.0%
(9) FAFSA assistance, Financial literacy/aid education, High school academic advising, College admissions test preparation, College admissions counseling, Grit/life skills curriculum, Provided information to parents, Postsecondary success services, Career success services	1,099	68.4%
(7) FAFSA assistance, Financial literacy/aid education, College admissions counseling, Grit/life skills curriculum, Provided information to parents, Postsecondary success services, Career success services	62	64.5%
(6) FAFSA assistance, Financial literacy/aid education, High school academic advising, College admissions test preparation, College admissions counseling, Grit/life skills curriculum	15,268	53.2%

The interactions between student- and program-level characteristics and services received are complicated and demand an inferential analysis to examine more completely the associations between them. NCAN anticipates releasing a more complete inferential analysis of these data as a follow-up to this report.¹⁰

Conclusion

For a half decade, NCAN and its members have collaborated to pursue a better understanding of the impact of providing low-income, first-generation students with the college access and success services and college-going knowledge they lack relative to their better-resourced peers. We have learned that, provided with these services and knowledge, member-served students can access postsecondary education at rates exceeding their peers and matching national outcomes. However, that is not enough. Making significant changes to individual and intergenerational trajectories requires completion, not just enrollment and persistence.

Although member-served students complete at rates much higher than their peers, we have not yet helped them to achieve parity with national outcomes. This report points to a specific inflection point at which our students' outcomes diverge with those of students nationally: the latter years of postsecondary education. Armed with this knowledge, we can examine how to counteract this phenomenon and identify programs that are seeing students all the way through to completion.

This collaboration between NCAN and our members remains a significant contribution to the college access and success field. The act of exploring, analyzing, and reporting publicly on these outcomes is an important one for accountability, transparency, and improvement. NCAN will continue to strive to improve the services and technical assistance it provides to members in the hope and belief that our members will, in turn, continue to enhance their performance for students and continue to improve these students' lives.

Methodology

NCAN and the NSCRC have been partners on the Benchmarking Project since its inception. The NSCRC is a nonprofit organization dedicated to using data from the National Student Clearinghouse (NSC) database to inform educators and policymakers about students' educational pathways and outcomes. The NSC is a 501(c)(6) organization that collects information on enrollment and degree completion from 3,600 higher education institutions covering 98 percent of students enrolled in postsecondary institutions in the U.S. .

The 69 organizations participating in Round 5 of the Benchmarking Project submitted data on over 108,000 students. As more organizations participate, we move closer to a representative sample of both NCAN member programs and students served by these programs, and the results become more

¹⁰ For an inferential analysis using data from Rounds 2 through 4 of the Benchmarking Project, see Livingstone, R., Martinez, J., McLean, C., Sangster, C., & Tingle, M. (2017). NCAN Benchmarking Breakdown: Which Services Matter Most?

http://www.collegeaccess.org/images/documents/Benchmarking_Documents/NCAN_Benchmarking_Breakdown_Which_Services_Matter_Most.pdf

generalizable to the broader NCAN membership. However, methodological challenges to account for the broad diversity in member shapes and sizes do persist. In future rounds, we hope to engage even more member organizations and move closer to a more perfect understanding of our impact on our field's mission of increasing college access and success for students. We hope individual organizations are pursuing a similar understanding about their own work.

The NCAN members that participated in the Benchmarking Project submitted student-level data through the NSC's StudentTracker service, and the NSCRC aggregated these data to create enrollment and completion rates for students served by the 69 member programs. These data included high school graduates from the classes of 2011 and 2016.¹¹ The NSCRC matched the student data submitted by NCAN members with NSC enrollment and completion information for those same students. NSCRC also identified the characteristics of the postsecondary institution at which the students first enrolled. NCAN members also submitted information on students' demographics and services received.

This report allows NCAN to examine college enrollment, persistence, and completion rates for member-served students based on gender, race/ethnicity, Hispanic background, and starting institution type. Thanks to the data collection in Round 5 as well as additional national benchmarks available from the NSCRC, we look forward to continuing to release regular Benchmarking Breakdowns and other briefs throughout the year to illuminate enrollment patterns, persistence rates, and the correlation of various combinations of programmatic interventions on student outcomes.

Sample

The Benchmarking Project collects student-level data on a variety of variables. Table 4 below compares data on demographics, services received, high school, and starting institution type for the classes of 2011 and 2016.

¹¹ Unlike previous rounds of the Benchmarking Project, Round 5 asked participants to submit students from two graduating classes, rather than four.

Table 4. Benchmarking Project Round 5 Sample Description, Class of 2011, Class of 2016, Overall

	Class of 2011 N (%)	Class of 2016 N (%)	Overall N (%)
N	37,423	65,642	103,065
Gender			
Female	22,160 (59.2%)	37,829 (57.6%)	59,989 (58.2%)
Male	13,826 (36.9%)	23,823 (36.3%)	37,649 (36.5%)
Unknown Gender	1,437 (3.8%)	3,990 (6.1%)	5,427 (5.3%)
Race/Ethnicity			
American Indian	335 (0.9%)	630 (1.0%)	965 (0.9%)
Asian	2,690 (7.2%)	4,004 (6.1%)	6,694 (6.5%)
Black	7,285 (19.5%)	11,906 (18.1%)	19,191 (18.6%)
Hispanic	16,447 (43.9%)	29,143 (44.4%)	45,590 (44.2%)
Multiracial	1,523 (4.1%)	2,608 (4.0%)	4,131 (4.0%)
Pacific Islander	230 (0.6%)	460 (0.7%)	690 (0.7%)
Unknown Race/Ethnicity	2,223 (5.9%)	6,471 (9.9%)	8,694 (8.4%)
White	6,690 (17.9%)	10,420 (15.9%)	17,110 (16.6%)
First Generation Status			
First Generation	20,370 (54.4%)	34,284 (52.2%)	54,652 (53.0%)
Not First Generation	11,903 (31.8%)	21,405 (32.6%)	33,308 (32.3%)
Unknown First Generation Status	5,150 (13.8%)	9,953 (15.2%)	15,103 (14.7%)
Program Requirements for Participation			
Neither Academic nor Financial	3,599 (9.6%)	14,163 (21.6%)	17,762 (17.2%)
Academic Only	28,001 (74.8%)	40,614 (61.9%)	68,615 (66.6%)
Financial Only	1,868 (5.0%)	4,593 (7.0%)	6,461 (6.3%)
Both Academic and Financial	3,955 (10.6%)	6,272 (9.6%)	10,227 (9.92%)
Receipt of Scholarship from NCAN Member for First Postsecondary Year			
Received a scholarship from the NCAN member	3,461 (9.3%)	5,399 (8.2%)	8,860 (8.6%)

High School Characteristics			
Higher-income high school	11,543 (30.8%)	15,512 (23.6%)	27,055 (26.3%)
Low-income high school	21,550 (57.6%)	38,651 (58.9%)	60,201 (58.4%)
High-minority high school	25,639 (68.5%)	40,304 (61.4%)	65,943 (64.0%)
Low-minority high school	7,324 (19.6%)	13,287 (20.2%)	20,611 (20.0%)
Rural high school	6,163 (16.5%)	7,794 (11.2%)	13,957 (13.5%)
Suburban high school	9,646 (25.8%)	18,335 (27.9%)	27,981 (27.2%)
Urban high school	18,313 (48.9%)	28,039 (42.7%)	46,352 (45.0%)
Low-income, high-minority high school	19,838 (53.0%)	33,759 (51.4%)	53,957 (52%)
Starting Institution Type			
First attended 2-yr public	10,728 (28.7%)	19,156 (29.2%)	29,884 (29.0%)
First attended 4-yr public	15,865 (42.4%)	25,026 (38.1%)	40,891 (39.7%)
First attended 4-yr private, nonprofit	3,300 (8.8%)	6,144 (9.4%)	9,444 (9.2%)
First attended other institution	388 (1.0%)	117 (0.2%)	505 (0.5%)

Background

The National College Access Network is a Washington, D.C.-based nonprofit organization representing over 400 college access and success programs across the U.S. NCAN's mission is to build, strengthen, and empower communities committed to college access and success so that all students, especially those underrepresented in postsecondary education, can achieve their educational dreams through a two- or four-year degree or high-quality certificate program.

The Benchmarking Project is a collaboration between NCAN and its members. With the assistance of the National Student Clearinghouse Research Center and the National Student Clearinghouse's StudentTracker service, NCAN members submit data on the students they serve. The NSCRC matches these data to postsecondary students' enrollment, persistence, and completion outcomes, which the NSCRC then aggregates to create benchmarks that NCAN examines against comparable measures available at the national level. Having completed its fifth round, the Benchmarking Project has examined the postsecondary outcomes of over half a million students served by college access and success programs across the country.

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