

GRAND RAPIDS PROMISE ZONE

Comprehensive Student Support Framework

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Public Policy Associates, Incorporated is a public policy research, development, and evaluation firm headquartered in Lansing, Michigan. We serve clients in the public, private, and nonprofit sectors at the national, state, and local levels by conducting research, analysis, and evaluation that supports informed strategic decision-making.



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INTRODUCTION

Context

Building on the early successes of the Kalamazoo Promise, Michigan in 2009¹ became the first state in the nation to promote the creation of local, place-based scholarship initiatives (Promise Zones) designed to increase college and credential attainment while also helping grow economic development and talent retention. Since their inception, the Promise Zones in Michigan have been expanded. There are now 15 approved Promise Zones (12 currently operating) in Michigan, including the Grand Rapids Promise Zone Authority (GRPZA), formally approved by the Michigan Department of Treasury in February 2020. GRPZA's first class of Promise Zone students enrolled in fall 2020—with the first Grand Rapids Promise scholarship student graduating from a credentialing program in March 2021.²

Each Promise Zone in Michigan is unique and autonomous; however, each Promise Zone must submit a written report to the Michigan Department of Treasury each year. Reporting requirements include, but are not limited to, the number of students receiving financial assistance; the number of completions of a certificate, associate's degree, or bachelor's degree programs; and six-year college graduation rates.

Promise programs (including those operated statewide and locally) are sometimes connected with one higher-education institution, as is the case with the GRPZ, whereas other programs allow institutional choice among participants.³ An example of a Promise Zone that allows for institutional choice is the Detroit Promise, which provides three years of tuition, first allowed students to attend one of five community colleges in metro Detroit. More recently, several four-year institutions have been added for eligible Detroit students. Another example is the Benton Harbor Promise Zone, which allows a student to attend any Pell-eligible⁴ community college or trade/vocational school in Michigan where a student is accepted. Like the GRPZA,⁵ Mason County's program⁶ includes a partnership with a single community college, West Shore Community College. More research has been done on these wide-reaching programs, with less known about the impact of the narrow programs.⁷

In addition to community college partners, Promise Zones in Michigan also have outside partners and funders, including Local College Access Networks (LCANs), which have been

¹ Michigan Promise Zone Authority Act (Public Act 549 of 2008), [http://www.legislature.mi.gov/\(S\(av2g1qilnt33zyogihikcuv\)\)/documents/mcl/pdf/mcl-Act-549-of-2008.pdf](http://www.legislature.mi.gov/(S(av2g1qilnt33zyogihikcuv))/documents/mcl/pdf/mcl-Act-549-of-2008.pdf).

² Danielle Nelson, "Grand Rapids Promise Zone produces program's first graduate," *Grand Rapids Business Journal*, March 29, 2021, <https://grbj.com/news/education/grand-rapids-promise-zone-produces-programs-first-graduate/>.

³ Elizabeth Bell, "Does Free Community College Improve Student Outcomes? Evidence From a Regression Discontinuity Design," *Educational Evaluation and Policy Analysis* 43, no. 2 (2021): 329–350, DOI: 10.3102/016237372199314.

⁴ A federal grant for undergraduate students with financial need.

⁵ The GRPZA established a partnership with Grand Rapids Community College (GRCC).

⁶ Unusual is that Mason County uses a "middle-dollar" approach, where funds are provided after state and federal aid is granted.

⁷ Elise Swanson, Angela Watson, Gary Ritter, and Malachi Nichols, "Promises Fulfilled? A Systematic Review of the Impacts of Promise Programs," University of Arkansas College of Education & Health Professions, Working Paper, October 4, 2016, <http://www.uaedreform.org/downloads/2016/10/promises-fulfilled-a-systematic-review-of-the-impacts-of-promise-programs.pdf>.

created across the state with the support of the Michigan College Access Network (MCAN) and others. In some cases, LCANs share governance structures with the Promise Zones. Other local partners in Michigan are community foundations, four-year higher education institutions, and school districts and intermediate school districts (ISDs). The Newaygo and Muskegon Promises are operated through partnerships with their local ISDs. Promise Zones in Michigan may also belong to the Michigan Promise Zone Association (MPZA), which was formed in 2016 to promote cross-zone learning and collaboration.

Some Promise Zones, but not all, in Michigan offer college-readiness activities (e.g., career exploration and goal-setting) and counseling directly in K-12 schools to reduce knowledge gaps and increase college access and awareness. Other programs seek to improve outcomes by developing a “college-going culture” and serving as community coordinators preparing students for college and career pathways by providing information about financial aid, enrollment services, and forging partnerships with other organizations such as nonprofits that promote higher education attainment and completion.

Under Michigan law, Promise Zones must serve all high school graduates who reside within their boundaries (including public school districts, charters or public-school academies, and private or parochial schools). Beyond that, each Promise Zone sets its requirements for scholarship eligibility, such as a minimum grade point average (GPA) or credit-taking requirements, but many do not impose these kinds of restrictions. The Grand Rapids Promise has very few qualifications, only that students who enroll in the program must meet admissions criteria for Grand Rapids Community College (GRCC) to be eligible.

Promise Zones, after their second year, are eligible for tax capture.⁸ GRPZA will be eligible for its first payment in fall 2022. The Baldwin Promise became the first Zone to receive tax captures from the state in 2012.⁹ Mason County, another newer Promise program like the one established in Grand Rapids, received its first tax capture in fall 2020.

Scholarship Overview

Promise Zones in Michigan have one primary and overarching purpose: to provide scholarships¹⁰ to high school graduates in their communities to further postsecondary credential attainment. The Grand Rapids Promise scholarship, a “last dollar” program, covers tuition, books, required course materials, and mandatory fees to attend GRCC for up to 60 credit hours total (the equivalent of an associate’s degree). To be eligible, students must complete the FAFSA (Free Application for Federal Student Aid).¹¹ GRPZA’s scholarship represents an important step for the City of Grand Rapids and its residents to grow their talent.

The GRPZA’s mission is: *“To support the young people of our City as they pursue their aspirations after high school graduation by removing financial, societal, and systemic barriers.”* The three primary goals outlined by the GRPZA are to: (1) provide equitable access to

⁸ Promise Zones are tax-increment financing districts that can use a share of the growth of Michigan’s state property tax to pay for the scholarships.

⁹ “History,” Michigan Promise Zones Association, <https://promisezonesmi.com/history/>.

¹⁰ Some are “first-dollar programs,” which means that funds are provided to students before other financial aid; however, most, such as the GRPZA scholarship, are “last-dollar,” which means that students draw on public grants (such as Pell) before being awarded additional funding.

¹¹ Undocumented and DACA (Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals) students are exempt from completing a FAFSA form.

college and career training; (2) create a city-wide culture of continuing education after high school; and (3) prepare Grand Rapids' diverse student population to meet the demand for talent within the region.

Educational Network

The Grand Rapids Promise scholarship is open to high school students who graduate from any of the 24 public, charter, or private schools in the city of Grand Rapids to attend associate-degree and job-training and certification programs at GRCC.

Eligible High Schools Include:

- Grand Rapids Public School District Schools
 - C.A. Frost Environmental Science Academy
 - Grand Rapids City High School
 - Grand Rapids Learning Center
 - Grand Rapids Montessori High School
 - Grand Rapids Public Museum School
 - Grand Rapids University Prep
 - Innovation Central High School
 - Ottawa Hills High School
 - Southeast Career Pathways
 - Southwest Community Campus High School
 - Union High School
- Grand Rapids Adventist Academy
- Grand Rapids Catholic Central High School
- Grand Rapids Christian High School
- Grand Rapids Covenant House Academy
- Hope Academy of West Michigan
- Lake Michigan Academy
- NorthPointe Christian High School
- NexTech High School
- Plymouth Christian High School
- Sacred Heart Academy High School
- Wellspring Preparatory High School
- West Catholic High School
- West Michigan Aviation Academy

Student Profile

To qualify for the Promise Zone scholarship, eligible students must have lived in the city of Grand Rapids since the start of the 11th grade, attend one of the 24 high schools within the zone, and graduate from high school. Students who started school and started living in the city of Grand Rapids before the 10th grade are eligible for a 100 percent scholarship with those starting school prior to the 11th grade eligible to receive a 50 percent scholarship.

Table 1 below displays student eligibility numbers and GRCC enrollment data for Promise Zone students for 2020-21 and GRCC's estimated enrollment for 2021-22.

Table 1. GRCC Enrollment Data for Promise Zone Students, 2020-21 (actual) and 2021-2022 (estimated)

| Year of High School Graduation | 2020 | 2021 |
|---------------------------------------|-----------|-------------|
| Conditional Eligibility # | 1,002 | 1,135 |
| Official Eligibility # (%) | 887 (89%) | 1,000 (88%) |
| Percentage Enrolling within 12 Months | 31% | 35% |
| 2020-21 Enrollment # | 279 | 183* |

| | | |
|-----------------------------|----------------|----------------|
| 2021-22 Enrollment | n/a | 350 |
| GRCC Academic Year | 2020-21 | 2021-22 |
| Total PZ Student Enrollment | 279 | 533 |
| Full-Time # (%) | 168 (60%) | 320 (60%) |
| Part-Time # (%) | 111 (40%) | 213 (40%) |

*Note: Assumes a 65% retention rate from 2020 to 2021.

Source: Grand Rapids Community College's Office of Institutional Research and Planning

The table below displays GRCC's enrollment data for fall 2020 and winter 2021, which is broken down by gender, race/ethnicity, and Pell-eligibility status.

Table 2. Demographic Data of Promise Zone Students at GRCC, Fall 2020 and Winter 2021

| Demographic Factors # (%) | | Fall 2020 (n=245) | Winter 2021 (n=200) |
|------------------------------|------------------------|----------------------|------------------------|
| Gender | Female | 142 (58%) | 124 (62%) |
| | Male | 103 (42%) | 76 (38%) |
| Race/ Ethnicity | Asian | 8 (3%) | 6 (3%) |
| | Black/African-American | 67 (27%) | 48 (24%) |
| | Hispanic/Latino | 43 (18%) | 38 (19%) |
| | Multi | 18 (7%) | 14 (7%) |
| | Not Specified/Other | 36 (15%) | 32 (16%) |
| | White | 73 (30%) | 62 (31%) |
| Pell Status | No Pell | 94 (38%) | 73 (36%) |
| | Pell | 151 (62%) | 127 (64%) |

Source: Grand Rapids Community College's Office of Institutional Research and Planning

The COVID-19 pandemic has yielded significant decreases in college enrollment overall, with freshman enrollment falling 13.1 percent nationally from fall 2019 to fall 2021.¹² Additionally, community colleges suffered the most from enrollment declines while all other institutional sectors had more positive enrollment outcomes.¹³ GRCC's reported headcount was down 8.8 percent from fall 2019 to 2020 and 10 percent from winter 2020 to winter 2021.¹⁴ According to GRCC, summer enrollment has been trending positively.¹⁵ Decreased enrollment, particularly for low-income students, students of color, and first-generation college-going students, potentially complicates the work of Promise programs interested in promoting college attendance and success.

More than a Scholarship

Promise programs in Michigan and nationally vary greatly, but many today provide additional wraparound services to students. Results have shown that oftentimes it is not enough to cover the financial costs of tuition for students; they need other supports to help them transition from

¹² "Current Term Enrollment Estimates Fall 2020," National Student Clearinghouse, December 17, 2020, <https://nscresearchcenter.org/current-term-enrollment-estimates/>.

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ "Enrollment Reports," Grand Rapids Community College, <https://www.grcc.edu/faculty-staff/institutional-research-planning/documents-reports/enrollment-reports>.

¹⁵ Annah Johnson, "Board of Trustees Reviews Proposed 2021-2022 Budget," *The Collegiate*, Grand Rapids Community College Student Publication, May 6, 2021, <https://thecollegiatelive.com/2021/05/board-of-trustees-reviews-proposed-2021-2022-budget/>.

high school to college and to see them through their college experience, particularly students who do not have the benefit of family members who attended college themselves.

Student-support programs common around the country include individualized, personal coaching, financial incentives, and an information management system that provides up-to-date information on progress (and early warning signals to staff and faculty). At the heart of student support is a commitment to equity, providing additional supports, beyond what is available to all students, to low-income students, students of color, and first-generation college-going students.

For example, the Tennessee Promise, a last-dollar state program, provides students with community-based mentors during their senior year of high school.¹⁶ The program pairs students with a community mentor (e.g., an executive, parent, or young professional in the area) for an entire school year. Typically, the mentors meet with students between 10 and 15 hours annually. In Michigan, the Hazel Park Promise Zone has also recruited community mentors that work with a postsecondary success coach to mentor first-year students. The program pays students up to six \$50 gift cards for their participation in the mentoring program.

Other state and local programs provide college-readiness activities during high school that disseminate college-access information (including financial aid applications and information sessions) and close familial knowledge gaps about college access and college-going culture. Developing college-going culture is eminently important for many families of first-generation college students, newly arrived families, and families with English learners as head of the household.

Studies of community college students show that some students struggle to navigate the systems in place at higher education institutions. Students often face challenging decisions and systems with limited guidance. Additional guidance is necessary if students are to successfully navigate and complete a program of study. In short, personalized student support programs will likely lead to improved student outcomes for the Grand Rapids Promise.

Creating a Student-Support Framework

The GRPZA Board sought to create a student-success framework to ensure that its students have the best opportunity at reaching graduation and fulfilling the potential of the Promise for the community.

The proposed framework outlined in this document has been constructed through an iterative process, using collaborative engagement with multiple stakeholders, including the GRPZA Board and other key informants, and was designed to identify activities to supplement current initiatives to promote college access, persistence, and completion.

Extant research provided many of the best practices that can make a difference in student success in higher education identified for the framework. Building on the existing student-success initiatives (including retention vision and mission activities already present at GRCC), this framework is designed to help GRPZA expand priorities and activities for the Promise Zone, as well as develop sound metrics that can be used to measure success and identify gaps or barriers present in the system and ensure accountability.

¹⁶ “Volunteer to Mentor,” Tennessee Promise, <https://www.tn.gov/tnpromise/volunteers.html>.

Given the close association of the Grand Rapids Promise scholarship with Grand Rapids Community College, an important part of the framework development included developing an understanding of the services and supports already offered by the college and considering these services and supports against the backdrop of successful student-success interventions across Michigan and nationwide.

Groups involved in the process included:

- The GRPZA Board
- High school counselors (Grand Rapids Public Schools [GRPS], charter, and private)
- GRCC's Student Success and Retention staff and faculty
- GRCC's Academic Leadership Team
- GRCC/PZ students and prospective students
- Grand Rapids community leaders, organizations, and foundations
- Promise Zone experts
- Service providers
- GRPZ parents

The most important action the GRPZA can take at this time is to ensure that student-success programming is not an optional or add-on component to the initiative but rather at the core of the Promise scholarship. Additional funds beyond the scholarship should be allocated at each stage of student progression to reach the students who need it the most, when they need it the most, with access ensured for low-income students, students of color, and first-generation college-going students.

Literature Review

As part of the framework development, Public Policy Associates (PPA) completed a comprehensive scan of existing supports offered by Michigan Promise Zones and a selection of other Promise-like programs nationally. The scan included reviewing the research literature around student support in higher education, specifically at community colleges. Supports found in different Promise Zones, many identified earlier in this document, included supports like coaching (including career and major exploration), mentoring, peer-to-peer supports, summer engagement, and providing lists of available resources to families of students (e.g., guides on navigating their colleges and accessing community-level resources beyond academics). Common supports found in community colleges similarly included: coaching services, early warning systems, course supports (e.g., Right Math at the Right Time), financial education, and financial literacy.

A recent study found that Promise programs, such as the GRPZA, increased enrollment at community colleges, particularly for African-American and Hispanic/Latino students.¹⁷ However, educators and program implementers with even the most generous scholarships have

¹⁷ Denisa Gardana and Amy Li, "Promise for Whom? 'Free-College' Programs and Enrollments by Race and Gender Classifications at Public, 2-Year Colleges," *Educational Evaluation and Policy Analysis* 42, no. 4 (2020) <https://doi.org/10.3102/0162373720962472>.

faced challenges in moving students toward completing their study programs and/or earning credentials.¹⁸

A recent study of Detroit Promise Path showed fewer than 100 of the 1,000 students in a randomized controlled study of the program had earned a degree or certificate within three years. Additionally, only 7.2 percent who participated in the support program had earned certificates or a degree within three years, compared to 6.8 percent who received tuition assistance alone. The research from Detroit highlights the need for wraparound services (e.g., addressing students' social determinants of health and improving access to supports like transportation, food, and affordable housing) and social-emotional supports for low-income students, students of color, and first-generation college-going students.

To address issues of equity and address barriers that have multiple contextual dimensions, intersectionality has been offered as a framework to promote student success.¹⁹ The theory of intersectionality addresses various systemic barriers that might be present in a system (race, ethnicity, gender, and socioeconomic status, etc.).²⁰ Building student success among students will require countering interpretations that fail to notice racial, ethnic, gender, and socioeconomic inequities and provide targeted, additional resources and support to students.

Community Assets

As part of this project, PPA conducted an asset scan of community resources, including academic and non-academic supports available to students. In addition to the web-based scan, PPA researchers interviewed and surveyed a range of stakeholders, including community leaders, parents, students, and staff. The community scan identified several college-going and support programs. Programs that currently exist in the Grand Rapids community to support students accessing, persisting, and completing college include:²¹

- Challenge Scholars. The program is only offered to families on Grand Rapids West Side (those that will attend Union High School) and covers the costs of education, college, or technical training, after high school.
- Grand Rapids Community Foundation Scholarships. Each year, \$1 million is provided in scholarship funding for students in Kent County. This program serves all schools in the community.
- T2CStudio. The To College Through College Studio is a public partnership between the City, the school district, and Grand Rapids area colleges and universities. The program only serves students from Grand Rapids Public Schools.

¹⁸ Byrd Pinkerton, Jillian Weinberger, and Amy Drozdowska, "Free College Tuition Helps, But it's Not a Silver Bullet," *Vox*, February 12, 2020, <https://www.vox.com/2020/2/12/20997880/free-college-tuition-kalamazoo-promise-the-impact>.

¹⁹ "How to Start a Revolution: Use Intersectionality as a Framework to Promote Student Success," Donald "DJ" Mitchell, Jr., ACPA—College Student Educators International, <https://www.myacpa.org/blogs/senior-scholar-blog/how-start-revolution-use-intersectionality-framework-promote-student>.

²⁰ Kimberle Crenshaw, "Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex: A Black Feminist Critique of Antidiscrimination Doctrine, Feminist Theory and Antiracist Politics," *University of Chicago Legal Forum*, Vol. 1989, Article 8, <https://chicagounbound.uchicago.edu/uclf/vol1989/iss1/8/>.

²¹ The bulleted lists in this section are examples found in the Grand Rapids community. This is not intended to be a comprehensive list of community resources; but, rather, selected examples identified as community assets through our research.

- TRIO Student Support Services at GRCC. This federally funded program is open to all GRCC students and serves first-generation college students and those who meet Federal Income Guidelines and focuses on personal, academic, and professional development.
- Grand Rapids Community College Foundation. The GRCCF provides over \$1 million in scholarships each year to GRCC students.

Other opportunities for Grand Rapids students to access information about GRCC, and the Promise Zone in particular, were identified. Those opportunities include, but are not limited to:

- Concurrent Enrollment. Area participating high school students can earn high school and college credit in the same location. The course is held at a high school during regular school hours with a college faculty member teaching the course, and only high school students from that school can attend the class. This is not an option for all Promise Zone students.
- Cruisin' to College. The program is an eight-week summer program open to GRPS students and several additional area public school districts. Students enroll in an introductory college course, earning two (2) college credits. The program assists with math placement, shares post-graduate employment opportunities, and provides field trips to colleges. Students also earn a stipend (\$500) for completing the program.
- Dual Enrollment. Under Michigan law, students can begin taking free dual-enrollment classes in the 9th grade and take up to ten dual-enrollment courses overall in grades 9-12. The courses are paid for by the local district. Requirements vary by district.
- Early/Middle College. Students who choose this option can earn a high school diploma and an associate's degree after a 13th-year experience. GRCC currently only partners with the following school districts: Wyoming, Cedar Springs, East Kentwood, Ottawa Hills, Kent ISD, and the Ottawa Area ISD.
- Grand Rapids Learning Center. The program is an accelerated, online high school credit and diploma recovery and credit opportunity and is offered in partnership with Grand Rapids Public Schools.
- Bridges to College – Raider Ready. Students from Kent and Ottawa counties (classes of 2020 and 2021) are eligible for this new program. Students will work with college navigators during the summer, helping prepare them for their college experience. The goal of the program is to build students' math and reading skills before they attend GRCC or another college.

In addition to the programs identified above, GRCC also provides extensive wraparound support resources for students. These services, available to all GRCC students, including Promise Zone scholarship recipients, include, but are not limited to the following:

- Laptop Loan Program. GRCC provides access to the technology, including laptops, internet Wi-Fi hot spots, headphones, web cams, etc.²²
- Tutoring. GRCC provides a range of academic support and tutoring services. The College provides eight subject-specific tutorial labs staffed by professional tutors and peer tutors, an appointment-based peer tutoring program, and specialized programs to support student success.²³

²² These digital access programs were initiated in response to the COVID-19 pandemic.

²³ In fall 2020 and winter 2021, these services were offered remotely.

- Disability Support Services (DSS). The program ensures students with disabilities have equal access to all curricular and co-curricular opportunities at GRCC.
- Mental Health and Wellness. GRCC provides a range of supports to students, including: personal counseling (both consultations and referrals); emergency services; community-resource information; and self-help resources so students can identify and address mental health and wellness concerns as they arise.
- The Office of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion. The Office leads institutional objectives and focuses on the principles of access, equity, and inclusion.
- Student Engagement Programs. There are three college-sponsored, student-engagement programs, open to all students, and facilitated through the Woodrick Center Social Justice Consortium:
 - *ALAS* (means ‘wings’ in Spanish). The program provides professional development, academic support, career exploration, mentoring, and social and cultural activities.
 - *NIA* (means ‘purpose’ in Swahili). The program assists students who may encounter non-academic challenges that impact their college experience.
 - *Brother 2 Brother (B2B) Network*. The program aims to enhance students’ lived experiences; strengthen their academic skills; foster leadership development; and support personal development.
- GRCC’s Dental Clinic. GRCC offers preventative services to the public through its dental clinic.
- GRCC’s Food Pantry. The pantry is designed to meet the immediate food needs of GRCC students on campus and provides free, non-perishable food items and basic necessities to students and families.

The community and college asset scan, interviews, and focus groups also helped to identify the current staffing dedicated through GRCC and the Promise Zone to support Promise Zone students. The following individuals and positions currently support Promise Zone students at GRCC:

- The GRPZ Director.
- A GRPS Navigator employed through Student Affairs works with GRPS students from elementary school to high school grades and shares information about GRCC.
- A faculty academic advisor and a success coach are assigned to each Promise Zone student (the advisor through the Academic Advising and Transfer Center, the success coach through the College Success Center).
- GRCC also has a grant through MCAN’s College Completion Corps to employ two coaches who work with a campus-defined cohort of low-income students, students of color, and first-generation college-going students, focusing on college persistence and completion. These coaches were dedicated to Promise Zone students in 2020-21.

The scan also identified three unique opportunities that provide quite a bit of flexibility to students who can access the scholarship in various ways not found in other Promise Zones in Michigan. These opportunities include:

- Guest Students. Promise Zone-eligible students can earn university-level credits that will transfer back to a home institution.
- Dual- or Co-Enrollment. Promise Zone-eligible students can opt to take classes at GRCC and a four-year university simultaneously.

- Workforce Development Programs. GRCC's programs include a range of employment and credentialing opportunities in addition to academic courses leading to work and transferable degrees.

These flexible programs are unique to GRPZA and represent key opportunities to address student needs identified through this framework.

ELEMENTS OF THE FRAMEWORK

Students go through three stages to successfully reach postsecondary education goals:

- First, students gain **access** to college through application and enrollment. Students can lose their way around the application process, the FAFSA and cost-planning, placement assessments, and registration. For some, the summer between high school graduation and the start of college is a crucial time for commitment and determination.
- Once at college, students take courses to **persist** in their programs of study. It is at this point that students may struggle with ongoing course selection, advanced course content, and time management.
- When students reach the third stage, they **complete** a degree and seek employment in their career field or opt to transfer to a bachelor's program. Here, students can experience difficulties with applications and other preparations, ensuring credits count for transfer, job searching, and financial concerns such as loan repayment.

At any stage, students can fall off track. And the challenges noted above are only those related to the processes within the college; students also face a host of other decisions and needs in their personal lives. For first-generation college students, those from low-income families, and others without a complete set of resources, challenges can quickly turn into disconnection from college. With this reality, the Grand Rapids Promise Zone and its partners can support students as they holistically navigate these stages.

The following graphic shows the proposed Grand Rapids Promise Zone Student Support Framework. In addition to acknowledging the three-stage process to college-going and success, this highlights the need for support resources in three categories: skills and knowledge, financial stability, and well-being. These categories represent the main areas in which students require assistance to engage with and continue toward their goals. Each category is relevant and applicable to each stage of progression.

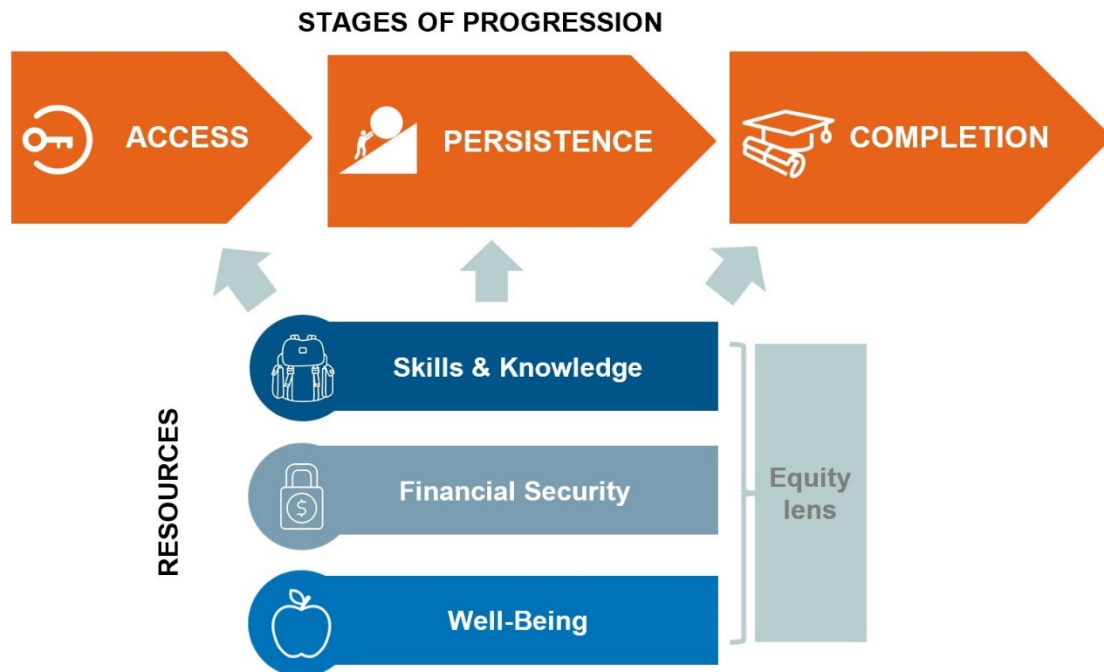


Figure 1. Grand Rapids Promise Zone Student-Support Framework

- **Skills and knowledge** resources are those that help a student to navigate within college and through life. These include, for example, awareness and understanding of college procedures and technology, academic preparation, soft skills like self-motivation and the ability to communicate effectively, and information about career paths and degree requirements.
- **Financial security** resources are those that give students the economic stability to pursue their goals. Financial aid is a significant resource in this category, but also important is the ability to cover one's expenses beyond tuition and fees like transportation, food, utilities, and housing. For many students, this requires having wages or other assistance to meet needs.
- **Well-being** resources are those that contribute to a student's ability to cope with obligations from a social-emotional standpoint, such as mental and physical health, safety, social connectivity, and stress management.

The Role of Equity

Promise Zone strategies should be rooted in deep and trusting relationships between students, families, and staff members to contribute to the goal of equitable achievement for the community. In putting equity at the forefront of its framework, GRPZA can simultaneously address opportunity gaps and disproportionate practices by improving the overall college-going climate and better serving students at each level of their college career. Attention to equity is crucial for positive outcomes at the individual and Promise Zone levels.

Equity means providing individuals who may have additional barriers with the supports they need. While some resources will benefit all students, students do not need “equal” resources since they differ in their skills and knowledge, financial security, and level of well-being; their needs vary, so the aim should be to distribute resources “equitably” to meet differentiated needs.

An equity lens at the activity level, within the resource categories, reflects a progression from access to completion, where outcome measures (using disaggregated data) will demonstrate whether equity is being achieved.

The Role of the Community and Families

Using a framework that addresses all the community's and families' needs is essential to the success of the Promise Zone. The Grand Rapids Promise Zone can aid students through their educational journeys and build a college-going culture that helps develop and retain talent in the region. Resources may come from the Promise Zone itself, Grand Rapids Community College, the high schools, or the community. With the success of the Promise Zone students as a shared focal point, coordinated efforts to deliver services, fill gaps, and continually improve effectiveness will benefit the students, families, and the Grand Rapids economy. More information on how the Promise Zone can coordinate efforts to provide student support follows later in this document.

Logic Model

Another way of looking at the framework is to lay it out in a logic model. A logic model explains what occurs to generate the desired results. Core elements are the inputs, activities, outputs, outcomes, and impacts. Inputs contribute to the activities. The activities that take place are expected to result in certain outputs. Outputs are highly immediate results, whereas outcomes may take a bit longer to manifest but relate to the goals and objectives of the Promise Zone. Impacts are the long-term results the Promise Zone wishes to see. A logic model serves as a high-level, quick-reference guide for action and as a point of reflection when considering results.

The inputs and impacts apply to the student-support framework as a whole. The outcomes apply to a stage of progression for students within the framework (i.e., access, persistence, completion).

To ensure that equity remains a focus throughout the student support framework, all outcome measures should be reported in the aggregate, as well as broken down by race/ethnicity, gender, first-generation college student status, income bracket, and high school.

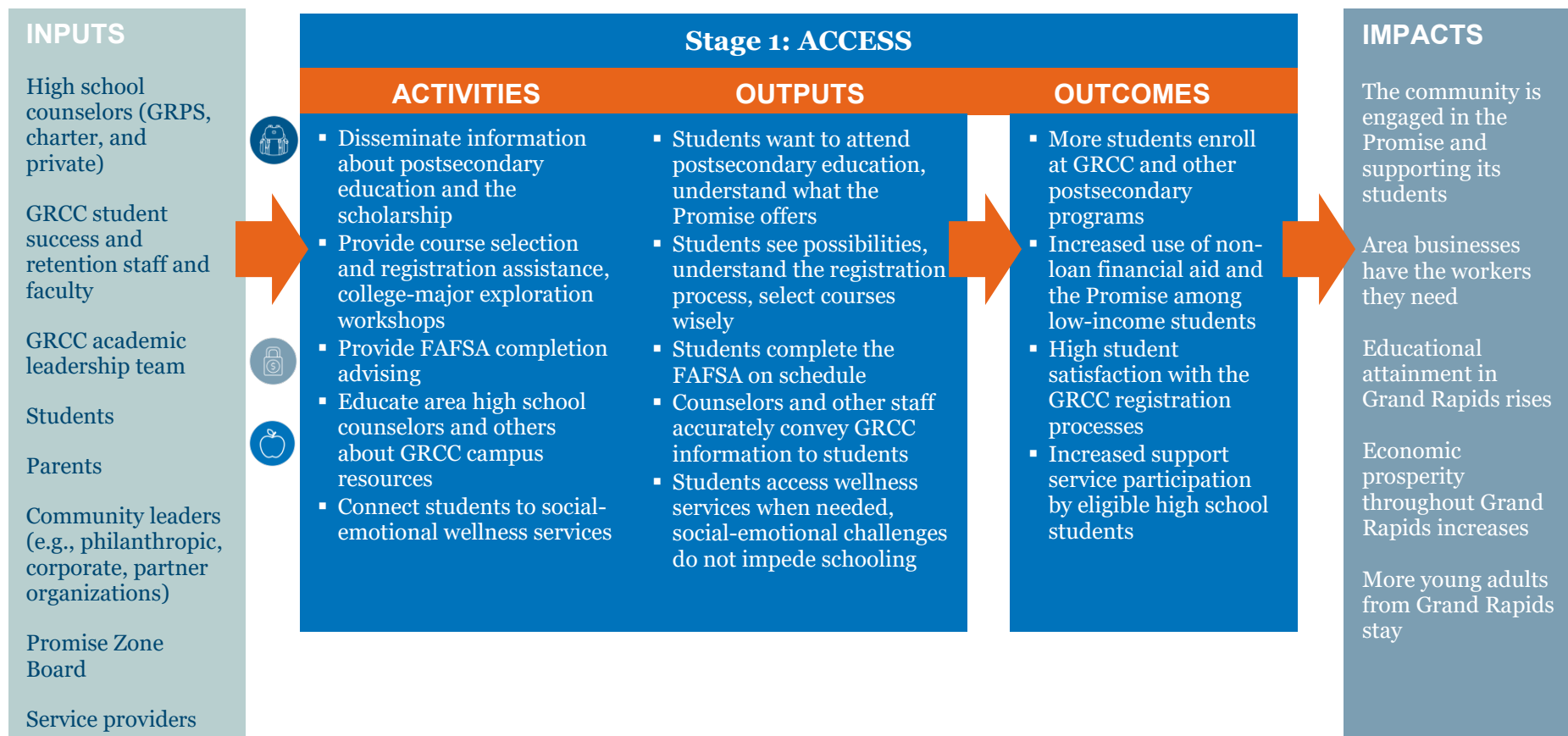


Figure 2. Grand Rapids Promise Zone Student-Support Framework Logic Model – Access Stage

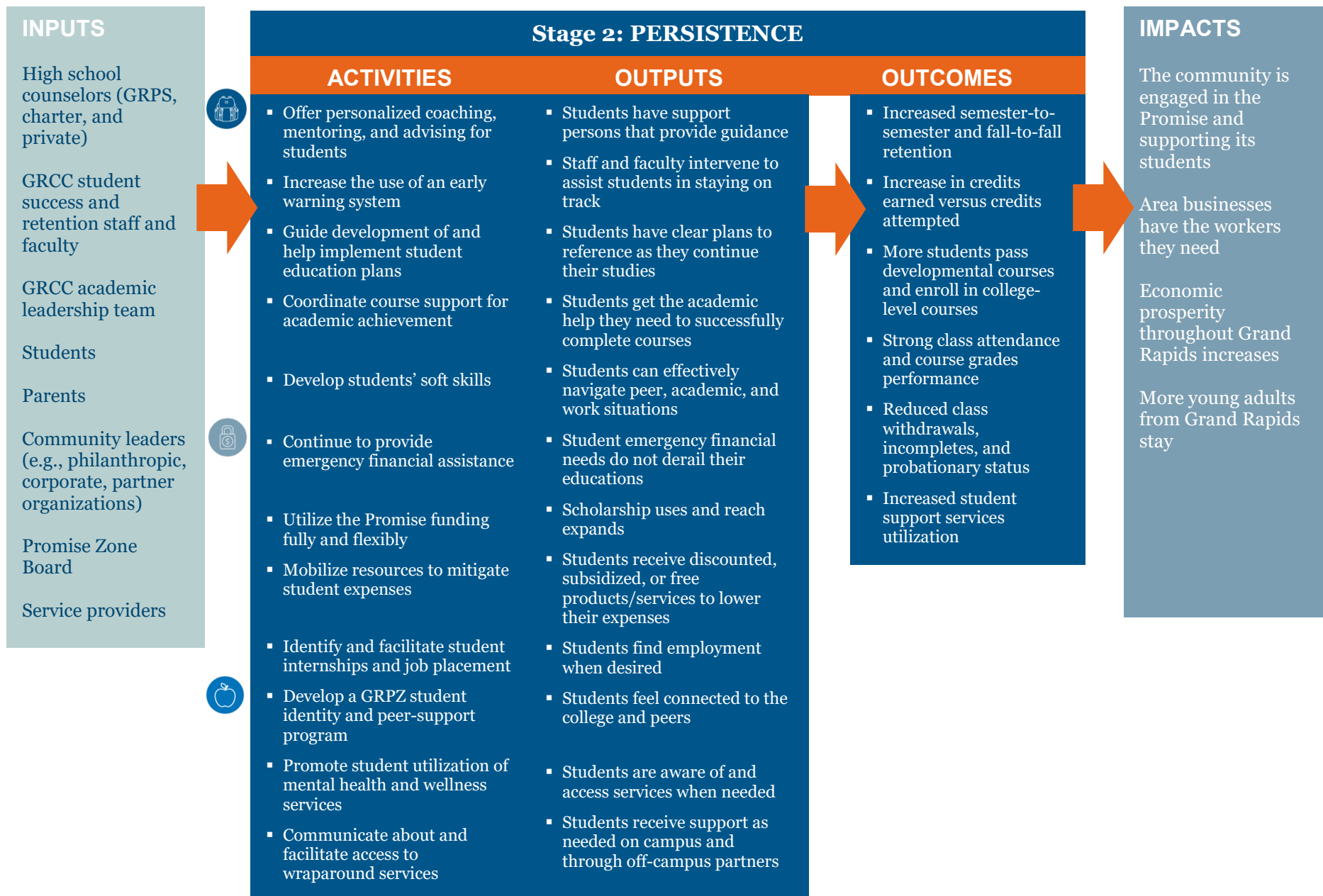


Figure 3. Grand Rapids Promise Zone Student-Support Framework Logic Model – Persistence Stage

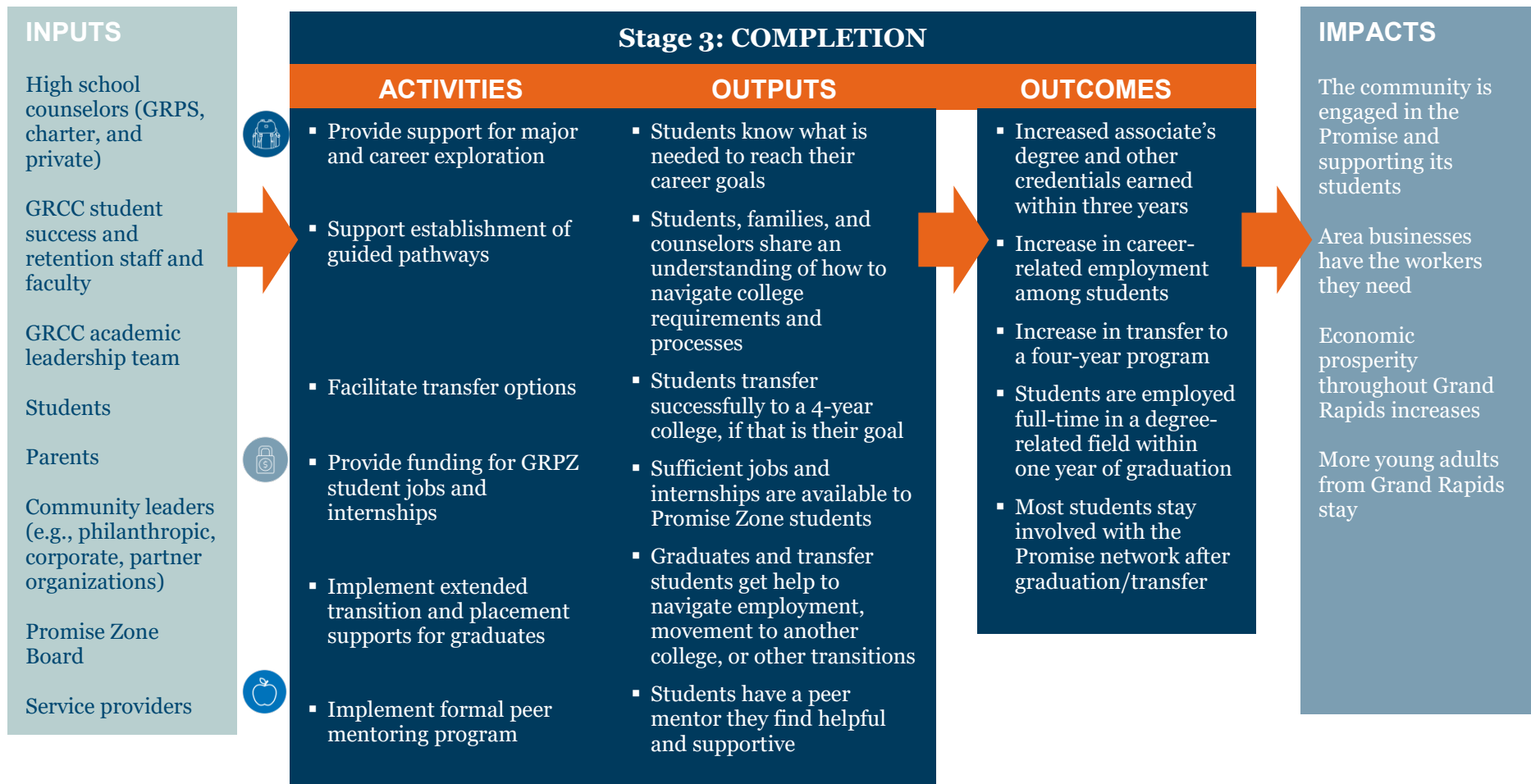


Figure 4. Grand Rapids Promise Zone Student-Support Framework Logic Model – Completion Stage

ACCESS

Skills and Knowledge

Activity 1. Disseminate clear understandings of and information for the scholarship and other postsecondary education options. It is critical for Promise and other related programs to share offerings early with and in partnership with high school collaborators. Students during focus groups indicated not being fully aware of postsecondary options and looking for higher education opportunities outside Grand Rapids. Clearly articulating the Grand Rapids Promise Zone aims and purposes as a program to ensure the completion of associate's degrees from GRCC to students, parents, and community stakeholders is central.²⁴ Recent research shows that personalized scholarship offers and tuition guarantees have a greater impact on college application and enrollment compared with less-specific, non-personalized outreach efforts communicating scholarship availability.²⁵

Academic Outreach at GRCC, in collaboration with Promise Zone staff, plays a critical and intentional role in supporting and sharing opportunities with students and their families. Such opportunities include dual and concurrent enrollment, summer programs, and early/middle college, allowing students to complete high school and earn college credit up to an associate's degree while achieving a high school diploma.²⁶ Additional postsecondary education options are noteworthy for students and their families. MCAN offers various programming to assist students in college attainment within a "knowledge-based" economy.²⁷ Another program is To College Through College Studio (T2CStudio),²⁸ a program offering comprehensive student support from the college application process to meeting students' individual campus needs. Adult stakeholders with vested interests in the success of Grand Rapids students need to be knowledgeable of all available resources.

Activity 2. Provide course selection and registration assistance for entering students from success coaches, as well as major exploration workshops. As students navigate different educational environments, support is needed to traverse new spaces and decide upon academic majors and course selection. There are also specific course requirements, prerequisites, and minimum required grades to persist through academic programs. Understandings of these requirements should be provided by Promise Zone success coaches and GRCC faculty and staff, specifically academic advisors. At GRCC, Academic Pathways,²⁹ Student Support Services,³⁰ and the College Success Center³¹ assist in determining programs and career fit, allow students to schedule appointments with advisors, and offer students success coaching—key to student success—by selecting and registering for courses and programs.

²⁴ Grand Rapids Promise Zone, <https://grpromisezone.com/>.

²⁵ Susan Dynarski, C.J. Libassi, Katherine Micheltore, and Stephanie Owen, "Closing the Gap The Effect of a Targeted, Tuition-Free Promise on College Choices of High-Achieving, Low-Income Students," NBER working paper series; no. w25349 (Cambridge, Mass.: National Bureau of Economic Research, 2018).

²⁶ "Academic Outreach," Grand Rapids Community College, <https://www.grcc.edu/students/academic-outreach>.

²⁷ "Equity Through College Access," Michigan College Access Network, <https://micollegeaccess.org/>.

²⁸ "Get to College and through College," To College Through College Studio, <https://www.t2cstudio.us/>.

²⁹ "Academic Pathways," Grand Rapids Community College, <https://www.grcc.edu/programs/pathways>.

³⁰ "Student Support Services," Grand Rapids Community College, <https://www.grcc.edu/students/student-support-services>.

³¹ "College Success Center," <https://www.grcc.edu/students/college-success-center>.

Intentional introduction to and frequent interfacing with students is necessary for student success and needed interventions. The continued interaction and guidance are particularly important as students' interests and goals may change during their schooling, requiring them to reconsider progress toward the degree, prerequisites, and required courses.

Further, as students explore their career and major interests, attendance and participation in major exploration workshops hosted by GRCC can play an essential role in achieving their academic goals defined on students' terms. Career and major exploration workshops present additional opportunities for students to make connections that they otherwise might not be able to and build relationships with faculty and staff to aid in their successful matriculation through GRCC. GRCC details departmental information that is useful as students explore their options through Academic and Student Affairs.³²

Financial Security

Activity 1. Provide Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) completion advising. Students are required to complete a FAFSA application to access resources from Promise and supplemental financial aid programs and scholarships. Within GRCC, Financial Aid and Scholarships provides detailed information on the FAFSA process, including the financial aid calendar, qualification requirements, and important news updates.³³ Some parents may be uncomfortable with the amount of personal information required to complete the FAFSA, including social security numbers and the listing of income and other financial support. Complex family or custody arrangements could present additional barriers to completing the application.

Specific FAFSA completion advising is needed to articulate clear and concise requirements for students and their families, alleviate the stress around completing the application, and work through individual scenarios. Partnerships, like West Catholic High School, in conjunction with GRPZ, offer FAFSA completion workshops for high school students and their parents/guardians to demystify the financial aid process.³⁴ Other high schools in the Promise Zone also offer similar workshops for seniors throughout the year.

In addition to Promise financial support, other avenues exist to aid students in affording their postsecondary education. Grand Rapids Community Foundation Scholarships offers over \$1 million annually in scholarships for students within Kent County.³⁵ Similarly, the Grand Rapids Community College Foundation also offers over \$1 million in scholarships to GRCC students. The Challenge Scholars program provides tuition-free college to eligible students.³⁶ Finally, the Michigan Tuition Incentive Program (TIP) gives Medicaid recipients an incentive to complete high school by providing tuition assistance for certificate, associate's degree, and even bachelor's

³² "Academic and Student Affairs," Grand Rapids Community College, <https://www.grcc.edu/students/academic-student-affairs>.

³³ "Applying for Federal Aid," Grand Rapids Community College, <https://www.grcc.edu/pay-college/financial-aid-scholarships/types-aid/federal-student-aid/applying-federal-aid>.

³⁴ West Catholic High School, FAFSA Completion Workshops, <https://www.grwestcatholic.org/>

³⁵ "Scholarships," Grand Rapids Community Foundation, <https://www.grfoundation.org/apply-for-scholarships>.

³⁶ "What is Challenge Scholars?" Challenges Scholars, <https://www.challengescholars.org/>.

degree programs.³⁷ Knowledge of the financial aid process eliminates barriers to achieving a postsecondary education credential that would otherwise seem impossible.

Well-Being

Activity 1. Provide training and professional development for area high school counselors (or mentors/advisors in community programs) so that they have awareness of GRCC’s on-campus resources. The training could include a multitude of areas, including mental health counseling and workout facilities. As a result, counselors at the high schools would counsel Promise Zone students to utilize these services as needed once they transition to GRCC’s campus. The idea is that many resources students need, beyond academics, are centralized on campuses in ways they may not be in the community writ large, which may be important in terms of access to some students.

Activity 2. Collaborate with community partners to work with area high schools and students to provide social-emotional wellness services. In some cases, mental health or other barriers associated with general health and well-being could be barriers to students considering and applying to college. Therefore, students accessing college need to have access to social-emotional supports throughout their K-12 careers—especially as they prepare to transition to college. In addition, high school staff could be trained to attend to these behavioral health needs or be able to refer students to community-based supports and support students in accessing these services.

Outcome Measures

Track and analyze all metrics in aggregate and by key subgroupings, including race/ethnicity, gender, and income level (e.g., Pell-eligibility).

- Percentage of students enrolled at GRCC and other postsecondary programs from eligible high schools (aiming for an upward trend)
- Percentage of Promise Zone students utilizing non-loan financial aid for postsecondary education
- Percentage of eligible high school graduates who have utilized the Promise
- Percentage of students satisfied with the Promise application and GRCC registration processes
- Percentage of eligible students participating in support services

³⁷ “MI Student Aid,” State of Michigan, Office of Postsecondary Financial Planning, <https://www.michigan.gov/mistudentaid/0,4636,7-372--481218--,00.html>.

PERSISTENCE

Skills and Knowledge

Activity 1. Initiate and sustain student engagement with personalized and comprehensive coaching, mentoring, and advising.³⁸ Coaching is the most common institutional action to support and strengthen student persistence in Promise programs.³⁹ College professionals dedicated to Promise Zone students, such as the GRCC success coaches and MCAN competition corps coaches, can (and do) serve as students' prime point of contact, principal resource for connection to other student services, and a trusted expert for guidance, advice, and support. Coaching programs may require or incentivize student participation. Still, to be effective, coaches should have access to all manner of student records, and both coach and student should be able to initiate contact through a range of modalities. Studies have shown that such programs positively impact student persistence,⁴⁰ and GRCC has introduced a shared advising model, which may enhance the effect. Further, GRCC data shows that success coaches report student successes and Promise Zone students value the program.

Activity 2. Increase the use of early warning systems that trigger targeted interventions specifically for Promise Zone students.⁴¹ Existing analytic tools with appropriate data inputs specific to the college or the student population can predict which Promise Zone students are most in need of support services, including those who are in danger of course failure or dropping out. Research shows the positive effects on retention and persistence of early alert and timely contact systems, especially for disadvantaged and at-risk students. Success coaches, academic advisors, and faculty could use early alerts to timely intervene with Promise Zone students in a manner best fit to the evidence of educationally adverse behavior.

Activity 3. Guide the development of structured education plans and assist in ongoing implementation.⁴² Research and GRCC data demonstrate that many students struggle to navigate collegiate institutional systems and make complex decisions about their

³⁸ Given the multiple roles of coaches and advisors, together with the individualized relationships they develop with students, this activity can also count as financial security and well-being activities.

³⁹ "Why expanded student supports can improve community college outcomes and boost skill attainment," Rachel Fulcher Dawson, Melissa S. Kearney, and James X. Sullivan, Brookings Brown Center Chalkboard, April 7, 2021, accessed April 23, 2021, <https://www.brookings.edu/blog/brown-center-chalkboard/2021/04/07/why-expanded-student-supports-can-improve-community-college-outcomes-and-boost-skill-attainment/>.

⁴⁰ Programs reviewed and linked to in "Why expanded student supports can improve community college outcomes and boost skill attainment," Rachel Fulcher Dawson, Melissa S. Kearney, and James X. Sullivan, Brookings Brown Center Chalkboard, April 7, 2021, accessed April 23, 2021, <https://www.brookings.edu/blog/brown-center-chalkboard/2021/04/07/why-expanded-student-supports-can-improve-community-college-outcomes-and-boost-skill-attainment/>; research discussed and referenced in Mary Rauner and Sara Lundquist, "Traditional-Aged College Students (18-24 Years): How College Promise Programs Can Support College Access, Persistence, and Completion" in Catherine Millett (ed.), *Depicting the Ecosystems of Support and Financial Sustainability for Five College Promise Populations* (Chapter 5, pp. 24-33), July 20, 2020, ETS Policy Evaluation & Research Center, Policy Information Report and ETS Research Report Series No. RR-20-17 (Princeton, NJ: Educational Testing Service), downloaded April 23, 2021 from <https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1002/ets2.12299>.

⁴¹ GRCC has purchased EAB Navigate with Fall 2021 being the first semester using the early alert functionality. GRCC had other early alert systems in place prior to EAB Navigate.

⁴² Functionality exists within EAB Navigate for advisors to use the degree-planner tool with students. In previous years, MyDegreePath was used by academic advisors.

degree path.⁴³ Academic advisors can provide invaluable information, guidance, and monitoring around course scheduling, placement, credit distribution, and other completion requirements with an assist from success coaches. Students need knowledgeable and skillful help to craft an effectively structured pathway to their educational and career goals.⁴⁴

Activity 4. Coordinate and focus course support. Although delivered by a range of college staff, course supports should be mutually reinforcing and concentrate on academic achievement. For example, Promise Zone students could be scheduled into the same required, gateway, or developmental courses and the same course-specific learning communities, possibly as a cohort. Similarly, effective course curricula for the more challenging subject matter, such as Right Math at the Right Time, and co-remedial/co-requisite models can efficiently contribute to academic success. GRCC evidence reveals a student preference for choice among an array of structured course supports, such as faculty office hours, academic skill workshops, peer tutoring, study group capability, and dedicated or targeted tutoring by appointment or on demand. Faculty, success coaches, and academic advisors should all monitor and communicate about student progress to make the appropriate contacts and referrals timely.

Activity 5. Proactively develop student soft skills. Many students, especially those from disadvantaged backgrounds, have never had the opportunity to develop the academically adjacent skills that contribute to persistence in college. These include, for example, time-management skills, goal-setting and implementation, effective decision-making, and technology use. There are on-campus opportunities for group learning through formal coursework, the TRIO program, and the College Success office workshop series. Promise Zone students may also access community providers (e.g., T2C Studio). In addition, GRCC evidence shows that success coaches and academic advisors can (and do) successfully engage with individual students to help them develop soft skills, which bolster student confidence and motivation.

Financial Security

Activity 1. Provide emergency financial assistance. Sudden, unexpected financial needs may stymie student persistence. The need is strongly evidenced by the experience of GRCC's College Action project. A campus-based unit, such as the GRCC Office of Student Success & Retention, has established and administered a Student Emergency Assistance Fund that provides relatively small, short-term grants or loans to students. This fund should be easily accessed at the immediate point of student need to be effective. Further, its availability and terms should be widely publicized. The college, its partners, or other donors may contribute to the fund.

⁴³ Judith Scott-Clayton, *The Shapeless River: Does a Lack of Structure Inhibit Students' Progress in Community Colleges?* Community College Research Center, Teachers College, Columbia University, CCRC Working Paper No. 25, January 2011, downloaded April 23, 2021 from <https://ccrc.tc.columbia.edu/publications/lack-of-structure-students-progress.html> ; "5 Ways to boost community college completion rates," Elizabeth Mann Levesque, Brookings Institution, October 8, 2018, accessed April 21, 2021, retrieved from <https://www.brookings.edu/interactives/5-ways-to-boost-community-college-completion-rates/?keyword=community%20colleges> ; and Mary Rauner and Sara Lundquist, "Traditional-Aged College Students (18-24 Years): How College Promise Programs Can Support College Access, Persistence, and Completion" in Catherine Millett (ed.), *Depicting the Ecosystems of Support and Financial Sustainability for Five College Promise Populations* (Chapter 5, pp. 24-33), July 20, 2020, ETS Policy Evaluation & Research Center, Policy Information Report and ETS Research Report Series No. RR-20-17 (Princeton, NJ: Educational Testing Service), downloaded April 23, 2021 from <https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1002/ets2.12299>

⁴⁴ "Why expanded student supports can improve community college outcomes and boost skill attainment," Dawson et al.

Activity 2. Fully and flexibly utilize Promise Zone funding. As a one-college “last dollar” program, it is critical that Grand Rapids Promise Zone students make full use of the available scholarship funding. Promise Zone/GRCC staff should continue to extend funding qualifications, both at the program and the non-tuition expense levels. At the former level, the evidence indicates that Promise Zone scholarship monies can be (and have been) applied to certificate or credentialing programs and to support students’ concurrent or guest enrollments. In addition, planning is proceeding to expand Promise Zone-eligible distance learning credits. Promise Zone monies might contribute to the **Activity 3** measures designed to mitigate Promise Zone student non-tuition expenses at the latter level. Several studied Promise programs provide non-tuition financial assistance.⁴⁵

Activity 3. Mobilize reduced-cost or in-kind resources to mitigate student expenses. Tuition is a significant cost for community college students, but it is only a fraction of student expenses. Moreover, there is substantial evidence of the costs GRCC students face on an ongoing basis—for example, expenses related to school fees, transportation, meals, and books and materials. MCAN coaches already attempt to lessen such costs for Promise Zone students, for example, through the ad hoc provision of limited or restricted monies for parking fees, gas cards, public transportation cards, and meal vouchers.⁴⁶ However, it appears that resources need to be systematically and consistently funded and directed toward the purpose of mitigating non-tuition expenses that nonetheless raise barriers to persistence and completion. Beyond its funding sources, the GRPZA may partner with private and governmental entities to provide subsidized or discounted services or goods. Likewise, it may promote, coordinate, and facilitate Promise Zone student access to GRCC offices or community agencies that provide resources in kind.

Activity 4. Identify and facilitate student internships and job placements. The GRCC office of Student Employment Services can expand on and coordinate opportunities with other on-campus units and GRCC partners.

Well-Being

Activity 1. Develop Promise Zone student identity, group cohesion, and peer support. From GRCC enrollment, Promise Zone students should be offered both structured events and informal opportunities to learn, socialize, and develop relationships with Promise Zone peers. (Promise Zone student identity and cohesion can also be enhanced through academic-oriented actions—see Skills and Knowledge Activity 4.) A robust program of varied and ongoing activities organized around Promise Zone student cohorts and cross-cohort Promise Zone student matching might be designed and implemented. The data suggest the popularity and effectiveness of similar activities conducted by the T2CStudio and TRIO. Other indicia of Promise Zone affiliation—like the MCAN-provided Promise Zone swag—could be promoted as well.

Activity 2. Promote student utilization of mental health and wellness services. Persistence can be adversely affected by on- and off-campus stressors and other social-emotional challenges, even among otherwise healthy students. In addition to community mental health and wellness services, the GRCC evidence reflects the availability and accessibility of substantial on-campus services, which students appear to use and benefit from. Still, the

⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶ MCAN provides limited funding to coaches to provide some of these wraparound supports.

services may be underutilized in part due to the stigma that can be associated with seeking care. Thus, the relevant GRCC offices and the GRPZA, perhaps in partnership with off-campus providers, could promote deeper understandings of mental health and well-being issues and the broader utilization of existing services, perhaps through other delivery models (e.g., telehealth services).

Activity 3. Communicate and facilitate access to well-being-targeted wraparound services. There is substantial evidence of many college and community assets that target different aspects of health and well-being. A number of these agencies focus on specific sub-populations and emphasize their commitment to equity. Promise Zone students' persistence would likely benefit from greater awareness of the availability and knowledge of access processes before a need arises. The GRPZA and GRCC could work with these agencies to proactively communicate with Promise Zone students about them and set up Promise Zone student-friendly means of utilization.

Outcome Measures

- In addition to collecting aggregate and disaggregated data on the following measures to assess overall performance and equity in outcomes, the GRPZ could consider collecting student feedback on the program and their college experiences, such as through a survey or focus groups. Qualitative measures might include the challenges students encountered, their perception of supports provided, and suggestions for improvements.
- Percentage of Promise Zone students enrolling semester-to-semester and fall-to-fall
- Number of credits earned versus credits attempted per Promise Zone student
- Percentage of Promise Zone students needing to enroll in developmental courses
- Percentage of Promise Zone students who pass developmental courses and subsequently enroll in college-level courses
- Percentage student class attendance (as available) and course grades
- Percentage of Promise Zone students taking class withdrawals and incompletes
- Percentage of Promise Zone students having probationary status
- Percentage of Promise Zone students utilizing support services

COMPLETION

Skills and Knowledge

Activity 1. Provide support for major and career exploration. Research suggests⁴⁷ that declaring a major too early in their college career may negatively impact students' completion rates. Yet, not having a clear goal in sight could affect students' commitment to persisting in and completing college. GRCC administrators indicate that one chief reason students drop out is a "lack of a why"—or an inability to see how a college degree will improve their lives. Coaches can partner with GRCC academic and career advisors to offer consistent and customized support for

⁴⁷ "Study finds students benefit from waiting to declare a major," August 24, 2016.
<https://www.insidehighered.com/news/2016/08/24/study-finds-students-benefit-waiting-declare-major#:~:text=While%20graduation%20rates%20hovered%20around,points%20less%20likely%20to%20graduate.>

career exploration and advise students on course sequences and other major requirements. GRCC is already doing this on a pilot basis for at least some Promise Zone students. The pilot should be expanded or routinized. They should do this in ways that account for adjustment of expectations and plans so that students are not significantly behind if they change their major mid-course.

Activity 2. Explore options for guided pathways. For students who have decided on a career path early, offering mapped, modularized programs that help students select and complete required courses and navigate transfer and job market opportunities have increased student success.⁴⁸ While achieving this level of reforms can be implemented institution-wide and led by GRCC leadership, the Promise Zone can help in several ways. First, GRPZ can catalyze community support and understanding of guided pathways, ensuring that students, their families, and high school counselors understand the concepts of guided pathways and enroll students accordingly.

Activity 3. Facilitate multiple transfer options. While the focus of the Promise Zone is on the students who are enrolling in GRCC, some subset of these Promise Zone students will be interested in eventually transferring to a four-year college. Therefore, coaches should build relationships with advisors and admissions teams at neighboring institutions and help facilitate a warm hand-off once students are ready to leave GRCC.

Financial Security

Activity 1. Provide funding for Promise Zone students for student jobs and internships. GRCC administrators report that it is prevalent for GRCC students to take on jobs on top of their college courses. Often, students cannot obtain family support for their life expenses and are the ones who are financially supporting their families. Their need to work more than 20 hours per week may hinder their progress toward a degree. On-campus jobs or jobs and internships with community employers may provide students with a more meaningful living wage while allowing them to gain skills related to their desired career fields. The Promise Zone Authority should secure funding and support for such job placements for their students, and coaches, alongside GRCC career advisors, should guide students in identifying and applying for such jobs while providing coaching and programming to help students acclimate to work in a professional setting.

Activity 2. Implement extended transition and placement supports for graduates. As students approach their graduation or look to transfer to a four-year institution, many of the supports available to them on the GRCC campus will no longer be available. Coaches should be funded to work throughout the summer months to help students navigate transition periods and continue to be available for case management in the first months following a student's exit from GRCC.

⁴⁸ Davis Jenkins, Amy E. Brown, John Fink, Hana Lahr, and Takeshi Yanagiura. "Building Guided Pathways to Community College Student Success: Promising Practices and Early Evidence from Tennessee." *Community College Research Center, Teachers College, Columbia University* (2018). Also see resources on Equity-conscious Community College Pathways here: <https://occrll.illinois.edu/what-we-do/equity-driven-change/EC3P>.

Well-Being

Activity 1. Implement formal mentorship programs. In their focus groups, current Promise Zone students indicated that some programs on campus, such as TRIO, have seen success in building a community among their students. There should be a similar effort to engage Promise Zone students in building relationships with their campus peers. Mentorship opportunities between cohorts and with recent graduates would assist the Promise Zone and GRCC in creating a sense of community and belonging within the Promise program and help Promise Zone students create extended networks of support. Coaches and the Promise Zone director would be responsible for coordination and oversight of the program.

Outcome Measures

- As with the other progression stages, outcome measures for completion should be examined in the aggregate and disaggregated by key subgroupings to ensure equity. In addition to quantitative measures, the GRPZ could also consider qualitative measures of success here, including students' overall satisfaction with the scholarship program, support they received during their time at college, and how they might like to continue to engage with the GRPZ in the future (e.g., peer networking, mentoring, alumni donations).
- Percentage of each student cohort (high school graduation year) earning an associate's degree and other credentials within three years
- Percentage of each cohort transferring into a four-year program
- Percentage of students with a career-related internship or other employment
- Percentage of each cohort employed full-time in a degree-related field within one year of college graduation
- Percentage of students staying involved with the Promise network the year after GRCC completion or transfer to a four-year program

IMPLEMENTATION

Execution

The framework has been designed to assess current programming designed to support students and to define opportunities for future investments. The framework is intentionally designed to carry the students from their K-12 experience into college, and ultimately transfer and/or employment. To be successful at each stage will require students to have certain resources for their journeys, under which student-support activities fit. The framework defines activities to put in place alongside regular scholarship operations to achieve specific goals at specific time periods of student progression through the system. Thoughtful execution will require the leveraging of data and additional insights in a way that leads to identifying barriers or opportunities that could be solved.

Decisions made from this point forward lay the foundation for future strategic thinking that will allow the scholarship to have a greater impact in the community and equitable outcomes. Successful strategic execution will require aligning activities to the overarching goals of the program and the needs of the students and families served.

Outcome Measurement

As the framework is utilized, outcome and effectiveness measures should be captured as actions are undertaken. Outcomes have been identified for each of the three phases of the framework, which will help GRPZA determine whether program actions have achieved their objectives.

Evaluation

Once GRPZA has determined which program activities should be implemented, expanded, or further developed, the Board should begin to identify an evaluation approach. Because the Promise Zone has just begun its efforts, it will be important to begin to use evaluation planning to effectively support accountability and program learning. The GRPZA should develop an evaluation plan to help ensure that future efforts are feasible and instructive. The framework outlined in this document is designed to help the process be more transparent so that all stakeholders can agree on next steps and outcome measures.

Timeline

Over summer 2021, prior to the launch of a new school year, the GRPZA should collaborate with GRCC and others to determine how to proceed on implementing the student-support framework (e.g., appointing a small task force). The logic model provided earlier in this document provides the beginning steps needed to implement the framework, build on the early successes of the Promise Zone, and evaluate and guide future directions. An implementation plan would include details about who, when, and how the GRPZA and/or partners are carrying the activity specified and how and when needed data will be collected and reported.

Cost

The framework provides a wide array of options for the GRPZA to consider implementing. Each activity option will require individualized cost-benefit estimation. Research indicates that successfully supporting students with expanded support (such as coaching and mentoring) can vary from as low as \$1,000 to \$5,700 per participant per year. By leveraging existing structures and services, the GRPZA avoids having to provide all actions directly. However, to meet needs, capacity at partner organizations, including GRCC, may need to be expanded. For instance, building a support system with dedicated, personalized coaching and intensive mentoring is likely to be labor intensive; staffing could grow as services are grown to reach more students.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Recommendations are drawn from the previously identified activities and so are summarized according to each of the three resources within each of the three framework elements.

Access

The following set of recommendations lists activities related to facilitating college access.

In partnership with GRCC and area high schools, the GRPZA should take the following step to provide students with skills and knowledge to better access college:

- Produce recruitment materials to disseminate clear understandings of and information for the scholarship and other postsecondary education options, as well of the goals and functioning of the GRPZ program. These, together with related program offerings, should be clearly articulated and shared early in a personalized manner and in partnership with GRPZ feeder high schools. The materials should be tailored to reflect concerns commonly expressed by students within the Promise Zone. To the extent practicable, current collaborative outreach focused on prospective Promise Zone students might be expanded, while GRCC Academic Outreach and other program providers seek to inform relevant stakeholders of all available opportunities and resources more broadly.
- To provide course selection and registration assistance for entering students from success coaches, as well as major exploration workshops, Promise Zone success coaches and academic advisors should continue to focus on the intentional introduction to and frequent interfacing with students. Ongoing interaction will beget progressively more individualized guidance to each student's benefit. Career and major exploration workshops are another means by which students' may explore their interest and achieve their goals.

We make the following recommendations for the achievement of the Access outcomes through the Financial Security resource:

- To provide FAFSA completion advising, GRPZ high schools in partnership with GRCC and the Promise Zone might enhance the promotion, timing, setting, mode of activities such as FAFSA completion workshops. Such events might provide avenues for further informing students and parents both about the financial aid process and about the range of financial assistance opportunities. In addition, alternative, more individualized modes of communication might warrant further exploration.

We make the following recommendations for the achievement of the Access outcomes through the Well-Being resource:

- To provide training and professional development for area high school counselors (or mentors/advisors in community programs) so that they have awareness of GRCC's on-campus resources, high school counselors might participate in educative activities concerning the wealth of GRCC wellness services. They could then encourage Promise Zone students to utilize these services as needed once they transition to the campus environment.

- In collaboration with community partners, GRPZA should work with area high schools and students to provide social-emotional wellness services, as well as initiate and sustain contacts to improve student knowledge of and access to social-emotional supports throughout their K-12 careers. Seek to attune high school staff to students' behavioral health needs and to develop staff ability to assist students in obtaining access to community-based supports.

Persistence

The following list of recommendations aims to identify supports for students to help them persist through college.

To facilitate the gaining of skills and knowledge, in collaboration, the GRPZA and GRCC should:

- Ensure that students have access to consistent, engaged, and accurate advising and coaching. To initiate and sustain student engagement with personalized and comprehensive coaching, mentoring, and advising, existing efforts might be assessed, renewed, or revised to prioritize coaches' key roles as students' prime point of contact, principal resource regarding student services, and trusted, expert supporter. Further efforts might be pressed to ensure coaches' access to student records, and to multi-modal communications. Upon evaluation, scale up, modify, or change from the shared advising model.
- Continue gathering and analyzing data to uncover bottlenecks and stumbling stones that Promise Zone students face at GRCC. To institute early warning systems that trigger targeted interventions for Promise Zone students, explore and consider the implementation of appropriate analytic tools to identify Promise Zone students who may benefit from support services. Pre-established intervention protocols may be applied in an effective, timely manner. While these systems already exist at GRCC, using predictive analytics that are specific to the Promise Zone students at GRCC will help ensure that the early warning system is responsive to any unique needs of this population.
- To guide the development of structured education plans and assist in ongoing implementation, (re-)focus the roles and capabilities of academic advisors on the provision of information, guidance, and monitoring around course scheduling, placement, credit distribution, and other completion requirements. Prioritize assisting students in crafting a structured pathway to their educational and career goals.
- To better coordinate and focus course support, those supports should be layered, susceptible to student choice, and concentrated on academic achievement. Consider piloting or growing support models such as common gateway or developmental courses, co-remedial/co-requisite scheduling, and learning communities that could be dedicated to Promise Zone students. Institute or reinforce multiple responsibilities for monitoring and communicating about student progress.
- To proactively develop student soft skills, current on-campus supports should be maintained, perhaps through a broader range of modalities (some developed during the pandemic). The same is true of existing efforts and communications modes used by success coaches and academic advisors, as well as the accessibility of community providers.

We make the following recommendations for the achievement of the Persistence outcomes through the Financial Security resource:

- Emergency financial assistance must be accessible to help students address unexpected expenses. The existing Student Emergency Assistance Fund should be maintained. Its operation may be improved, with perhaps the tapping of more funding sources, particularly after review considering the pandemic and current student need. Similarly, the College Action project pilot might be assessed and continued, modified, or expanded as a result.
- Fully and flexibly utilize Promise Zone funding. Promise Zone and GRCC staff might consider continuing to extend funding qualifications for and the utilization of other types of postsecondary programs. Perhaps, too, the application Promise Zone monies might be extended to non-tuition financial assistance for student expenses, including those the next recommendation involves.
- To mobilize reduced-cost or in-kind resources to mitigate student expenses, resources need to be systematically and consistently dedicated to reducing the burden of students' non-tuition expenses. The GRPZA might directly contribute in partnership with private and governmental entities to provide subsidized or discounted goods or services. It might likewise facilitate Promise Zone student access to GRCC and community resources providing in-kind assistance.
- Identify and facilitate student internships and job placements and refer students to the GRCC office of Student Employment Services, which may be able to assess and enhance its capacity to identify and coordinate opportunities with other entities.

We make the following recommendations for the achievement of the Persistence outcomes through the Well-Being resource:

- To develop Promise Zone student identity, group cohesion, and peer support, Promise Zone students should have access to common experiences through structured events and informal opportunities to develop relationships with Promise Zone peers. A suite of varied and ongoing activities for Promise Zone cohorts might be designed and implemented, along with other symbolic indicia of Promise Zone affiliation.
- To promote student utilization of mental health and wellness services, the GRPZA might collaborate with the relevant GRCC offices to target Promise Zone students with effective messaging that improves understanding of well-being issues and that encourages the utilization of existing services through various modes.
- Communicate and facilitate access to well-being-targeted wraparound services, by proactively bringing to Promise Zone students awareness of service availability and access processes. Also work with community agencies to set up Promise Zone student-friendly means of utilization.

Completion

We make the following recommendations for the achievement of the Completion outcomes through the Skills and Knowledge resource:

- To provide support for major and career exploration, existing and new partnerships between GRCC coaches and advisors might be formalized, regularized, and extended to ensure consistent and customized support for career exploration and advice on course sequences and other major requirements.

- To explore options for guided pathways, particularly by students who have determined a career path early on, GRCC might consider offering modularized programs that are mapped out for students to complete. Serving a complementary role, the GRPZA could mobilize the community support by promoting understanding of the advantages of guided pathways. Together the GRPZA and GRCC could collaborate in relationships with employers and four-year colleges around guided pathways.
- In terms of facilitating multiple transfer options, GRCC and the GRPZA might aim to deepen and expand existing and new relationships with admissions and advisory staff at nearby institutions. Such relationships may serve as the basis for collaboration on efforts to ensure a warm hand-off for transferring GRCC students.

We make the following recommendations for the achievement of the Completion outcomes through the Financial Security resource:

- To provide funding for Promise Zone students for student jobs and internships, the GRPZA might seek new or enhanced funding and support dedicated to placements for Promise Zone students. Students might then be guided, with the assistance of GRCC coaches and advisors, in identifying and applying for appropriate positions, as well as in how to acclimate to professional work settings.
- To implement extended transition and placement supports for graduates, coaches should, to the extent practicable, be funded to work during the summer break, to assist both transitioning high school students and exiting GRCC students.

We make the following recommendations for the achievement of the Completion outcomes through the Well-Being resource:

- To implement formal mentorship programs, Promise Zone students should be engaged in building campus peer relationships through structured mentorship opportunities between cohorts and recent graduates. Responsibilities for program development, coordination and oversight should be explicitly established and assigned.

APPENDIX A: LITERATURE REVIEW

Opportunities to Support Promise Zone Students

Prepared for the Grand Rapids Promise Zone Authority

In order to begin to inform options for consideration by the Grand Rapids Promise Zone Authority (GRPZA) for a student support framework, Public Policy Associates, Inc. (PPA) staff and consultants conducted a scan of existing supports offered by the Michigan Promise Zones and a selection of other promise programs nationally, as well as a review of the research literature around student supports in higher education, specifically at community colleges.

This review, captures common strategies at work across the state and around the nation to help promise zone students persist in college and complete degrees. Student supports is an under-researched area, so the evidence of effectiveness for any given approach likely is limited at this time.

What Other Promise Programs are Doing

The GRPZA now has over a dozen peers across the state, with Michigan Promise Zones stretching from Detroit to Baldwin, as well as peers in other states such as Connecticut, Pennsylvania, and Arkansas.

While these programs share certain characteristics, their emphasis on student success supports differs. Many programs place their focus on helping students to connect to college in order to utilize their scholarship. In these cases, they generally rely on the enrolling colleges to carry the students forward. For those few promise programs that offer supports after students enter college, approaches include coaching or mentoring, peer support linkages, summer engagement opportunities, community resource lists, and crisis relief.

The programs that work with a limited number of colleges, like the GRPZA, have the potential to coordinate and leverage the supports that already exist at the partner colleges.

Coaching and Mentoring

The most common way promise programs support students outside of college access is to offer coaching through staff or mentoring through volunteers.

- The Detroit Promise Path pilot placed success coaches on each college campus where the scholarship can be used. Students meet with their coaches twice a month and receive \$50 for each month of participation, beginning late summer before their first semester. The evaluation of the pilot has shown increased persistence, full-time enrollment, and credit accumulation.
- Hazel Park offers a postsecondary success coach and a community mentoring program. The success coach initiates contact with students on a regular schedule. .



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- The Pittsburgh Promise Navigators are professionals who help students along educational and career paths. Alumni/peer mentors are also available on an as-needed basis. Students are matched to mentor staff.

Peer Supports

Some Promise Zone programs offer to connect students to peers (either current students or scholarship alumni) in order to build social capital. It is unclear how many students engage in these relationships or how helpful they find them based on the information and/or research available.

- The Pittsburgh Promise matches students with program alumni or peer mentors as needed.
- The Hartford Promise offers the web-based Hartford Promise Connect for current students and program alumni. It also operates a Facebook group for alumni.

Summer Engagement

A few programs connect students to summer employment opportunities or recommend that they take summer courses to stay motivated in their college-going process.

- The Detroit Promise makes students aware of the opportunities available through the city's youth summer employment program. The program also encourages summer college attendance.
- The Hartford Promise, the Benton Harbor Promise, and Pittsburgh Promise also offer opportunities for students to access internships.
- The Kalamazoo Promise pays for students to take summer courses.

Additional Resources

A passive step that some Promise Zone programs take is to provide students with lists of resources or guides on navigating their colleges. For instance, the Flint Promise posts two extensive lists of community resources on its website, and Hartford and Hazel Park include tips for college success. In addition, Pittsburgh is offering a pandemic relief fund

What Community Colleges Are Doing

Community colleges often combine a number of services and practices to support their students. Some options require a larger commitment from the institution, while others can be considered supplemental to the services that the college offers students regularly.

Coaching Services

Based on the available information, coaching program structure is largely dependent on the campus context. Some colleges require all of their scholarship recipients to meet with a coach regularly, while others only require that students falling below certain thresholds to establish a connection with a coach (e.g., students with a GPA below 2.0).

For the most part, coaches serve as a first point of contact for students, and work to connect them to other campus services, based on the needs they are facing. Coaches are usually professional college staff, but can be hired through a third-party organization (like a non-profit), or be graduate assistants.

A key feature programs that have shown to have an effect on student persistence and completion is that those coaches have access to student records, including financial aid, and course records, in order to provide more tailored and proactive support.

Early Warning Systems

In an effort to identify students most at need of supportive services, colleges have used predictive analytic tools to build early warning systems. The most effective examples use historical data from colleges themselves to identify barriers and risk factors and target those students whose academic and demographic profiles suggest they are at greatest risk for dropping out.

Currently, there are a number of companies offering these services to institutions of higher education, but similar profiles can also be built internally through collaborations with institutional research staff.

Course Supports

Research shows that remedial and gateway courses, particularly math courses, can pose a barrier to degree attainment.

Several strategies have been piloted nationally and within community colleges in Michigan, including the Right Math at the Right Time taskforce, which provided recommendations for math pathways across Michigan's higher education institutions.

Other strategies include targeted tutoring and support provided by near-peers who have recently successfully completed a course, as well as co-requisite instruction models of instruction, where students enroll in a college-level math course, but receive additional instruction and support through a concurrent, non-credit bearing course.

Considerations for Grand Rapids

The GRPZA knows it wants to have a student support framework for its students. That framework relies on core decisions about the level of support and the degree of coordination with existing resources. Further planning efforts will explore these choices; for now, here are some considerations based on the results of the review.

Be proactive. The literature shows that the more proactive and engaging efforts to support students, although more resource intensive, have a greater impact on student progress.

Look closely at coaching models. Approaches can vary from “available if you need it” to very structured monitoring and outreach. The GRPZA should consider the level of support is best for its students, the location of coaches, and the tools that coaches have at their disposal.

Understand student population and Grand Rapids Community College (GRCC) resources. Having a clear understanding of where Promise students are encountering barriers at GRCC should be one of the first steps in developing a support strategy. A clear understanding of whether students face academic, personal, or financial challenges will help with targeting interventions.

GRCC likely already has resources and programs in place to support students who are struggling to persist in college and complete a degree. A thorough cataloguing of those services, and assessing how they can be deployed to better meet the needs of Promise students should also happen early in the process.

Build support for big changes. It may be necessary to make significant changes to programs and services in order to see an impact on student persistence and degree attainment. Building support within GRCC and the community for major initiatives – such as overhauling the math course sequence or aligning services from community agencies – will need to happen gradually and with a great deal of data to support proposed changes.





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