

# ADVANCING OPPORTUNITY: THE UASPIRE AFFORD PROGRAM EVALUATION

A randomized controlled trial evaluation—the gold standard for research studies—of the uAspire Afford program was funded by the GreenLight Fund in partnership with the Corporation for National and Community Service Social Innovation Fund. From 2014 to 2018, WestEd evaluated the program’s implementation and impact on San Francisco high school students’ ability to complete the complex process to gain financial aid for college.



## THE PROBLEM

**25%** of students from low-income high schools will graduate college compared to 47% of students from higher-income schools

**490:1** national student-to-school counselor ratio

**\$28,650:** average student loan debt for Class of 2017 graduates

**\$2.9 billion:** amount of available federal financial aid left unused each year

## OUR SOLUTION

Through the Afford program, uAspire offers individual advising on college affordability to seniors in their high schools and over text. Our program supports students to access financial aid and make informed financial decisions that will enable them to complete a college degree with limited debt.

### CORE AFFORD ACTIVITIES

1. Planning Session
2. Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA)/ California (CA) Dream Act Certification
3. Financial Aid Offer Review

## EVALUATION DESIGN

During the 2017-18 school year, WestEd randomly assigned 1,091 seniors in five San Francisco Unified School District high schools to treatment (714) and control (377) groups. A further analysis of the treatment group compared students who completed all three core activities (331) to a matched control group sample.

# EVALUATION FINDINGS

## Implementation

WestEd found that the Afford program was implemented with fidelity, according to its intended model, in all five high schools.

Treatment students opted into offered services and completed the core activities at significant rates:

- 95%** completed the Planning Session
- 47%** completed Financial Aid Offer Review
- 82%** completed FAFSA/CA Dream Act Certification
- 46%** completed all three Core Activities

School staff reported appreciation for Afford advisors' financial aid expertise and confirmed that uAspire fills a gap in services that would otherwise not be provided.

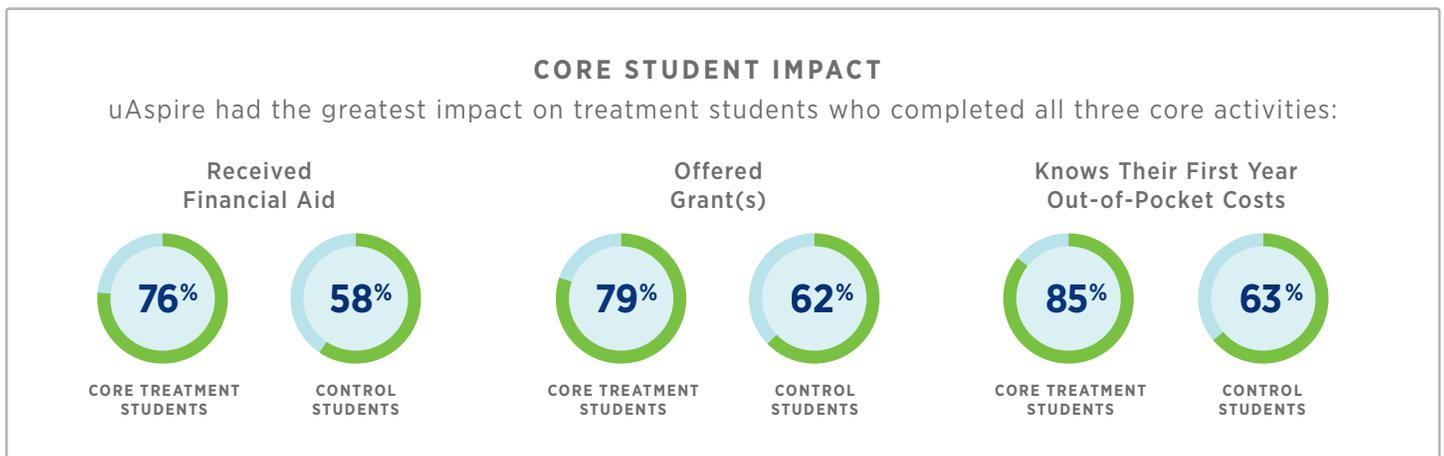
## Impact

WestEd found that the Afford program was effective in increasing student understanding of the financial aid process, helping students complete the steps for financial aid submission, and assisting students to leverage financial aid.

Treatment students were statistically more likely than control group students to:

- **Submit the FAFSA/CA Dream Act application with greater accuracy**
- **Report beliefs that college can be affordable**
- **Report that they received the information and support needed to complete the financial aid process and were clear on the steps to get financial aid for college**

**\$23,828:** average amount of financial aid that treatment students were offered for their first year of college



## PROGRAM IMPROVEMENT

With these findings uAspire will increase our effectiveness by refining the Afford program at all sites nationwide to maximize the number of students who complete the three core activities, and by launching our Succeed postsecondary program in the Bay Area to support college students via text advising.

Visit [nationalservice.gov/research](https://nationalservice.gov/research) to access the full evaluation report.