
Building a Culture of Evidence for Community College Student Success: Early Progress in Achieving the Dream

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Presentation outline

1. Evaluation methodology
2. College performance at baseline
3. Implementation at the colleges
4. Overall assessment and conclusions



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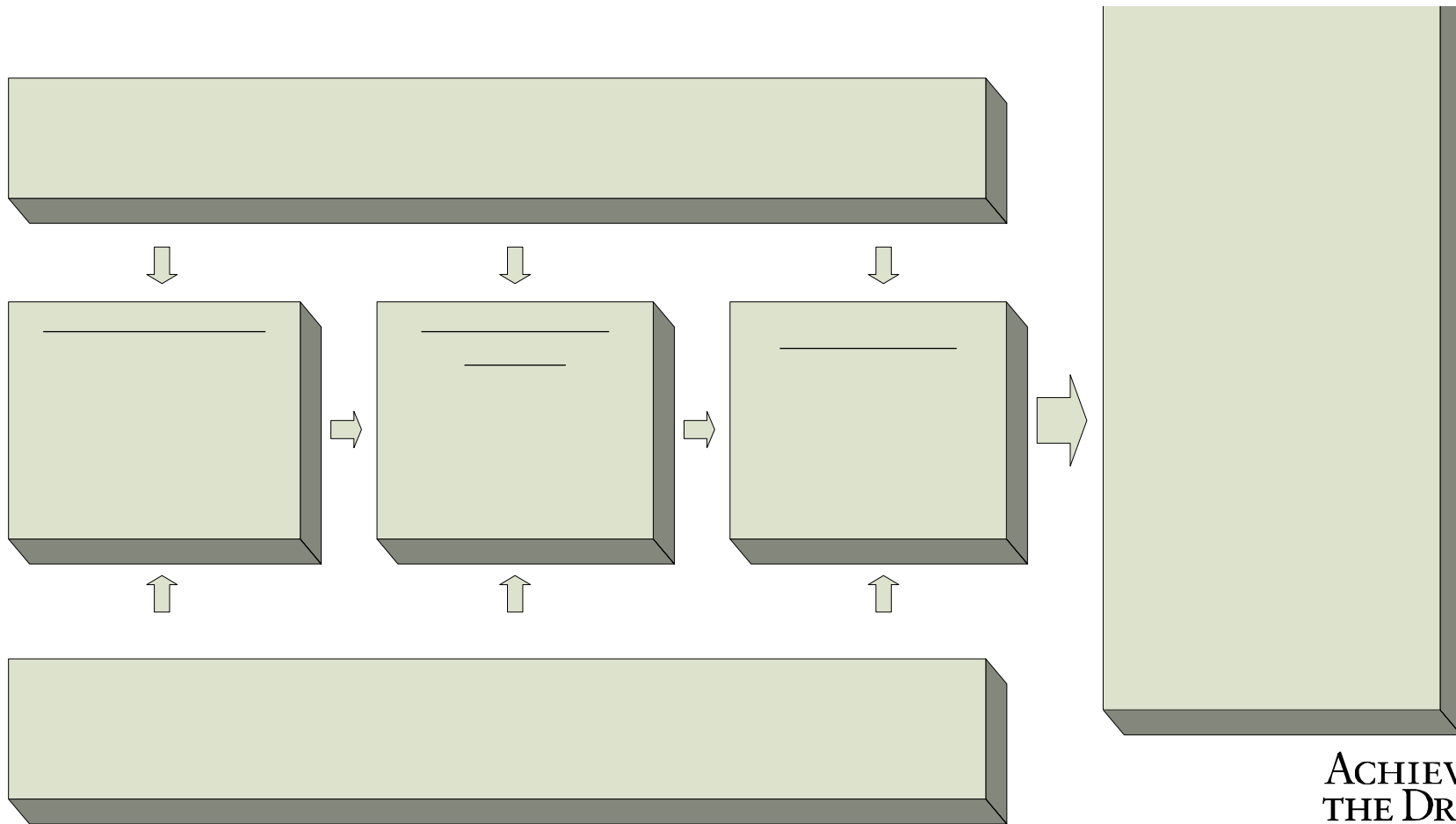
Evaluation methodology

- **Field visits to all Round I colleges in Spring 2006**
- **Interviews conducted with:**
 - Presidents
 - Vice presidents
 - Deans
 - Institutional researchers
 - Faculty and other members of the core and data teams
 - Some faculty and staff not directly involved with Achieving the Dream
- **Analysis of Achieving the Dream Database**
 - Three-year outcomes for students entering college in fall 2002



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Interviews focused on Achieving the Dream “Theory of Action”



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Supports from

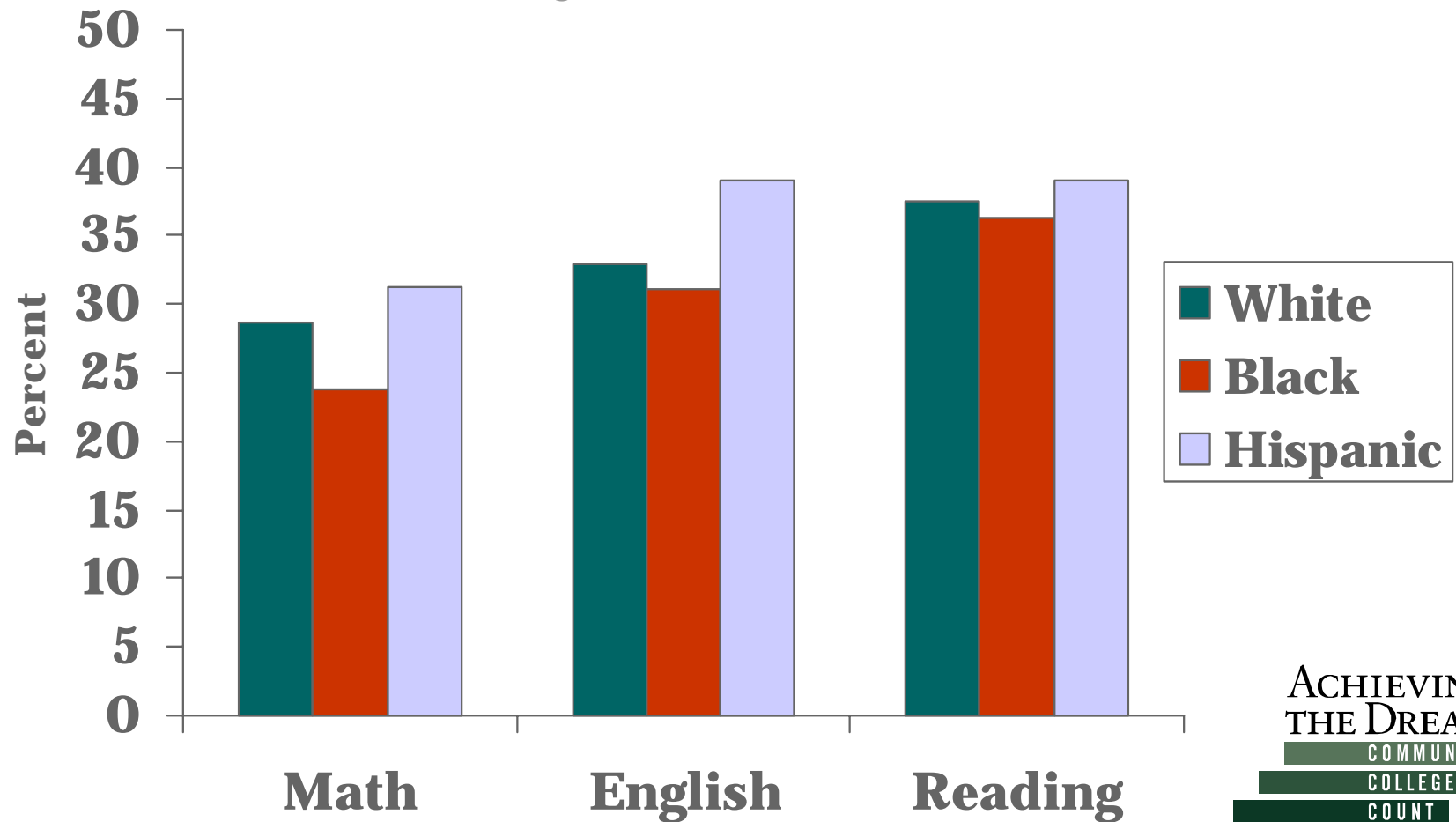
Key findings on college performance at baseline

- On average, low rates of student success
- Achievement gaps exist, but not on all measures – and there are some surprises
- Considerable variation among colleges



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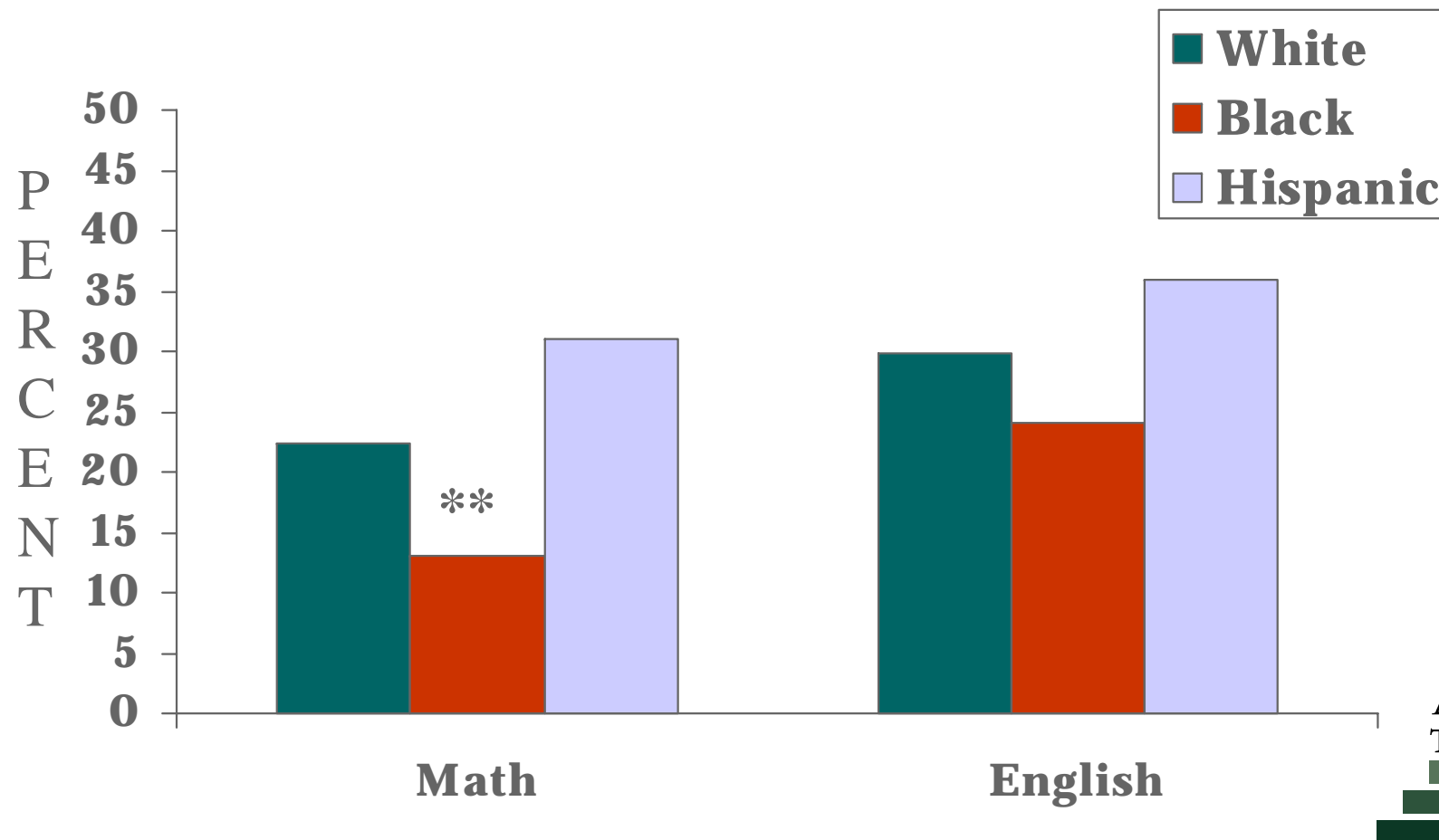
Students who complete remedial courses in 3 years



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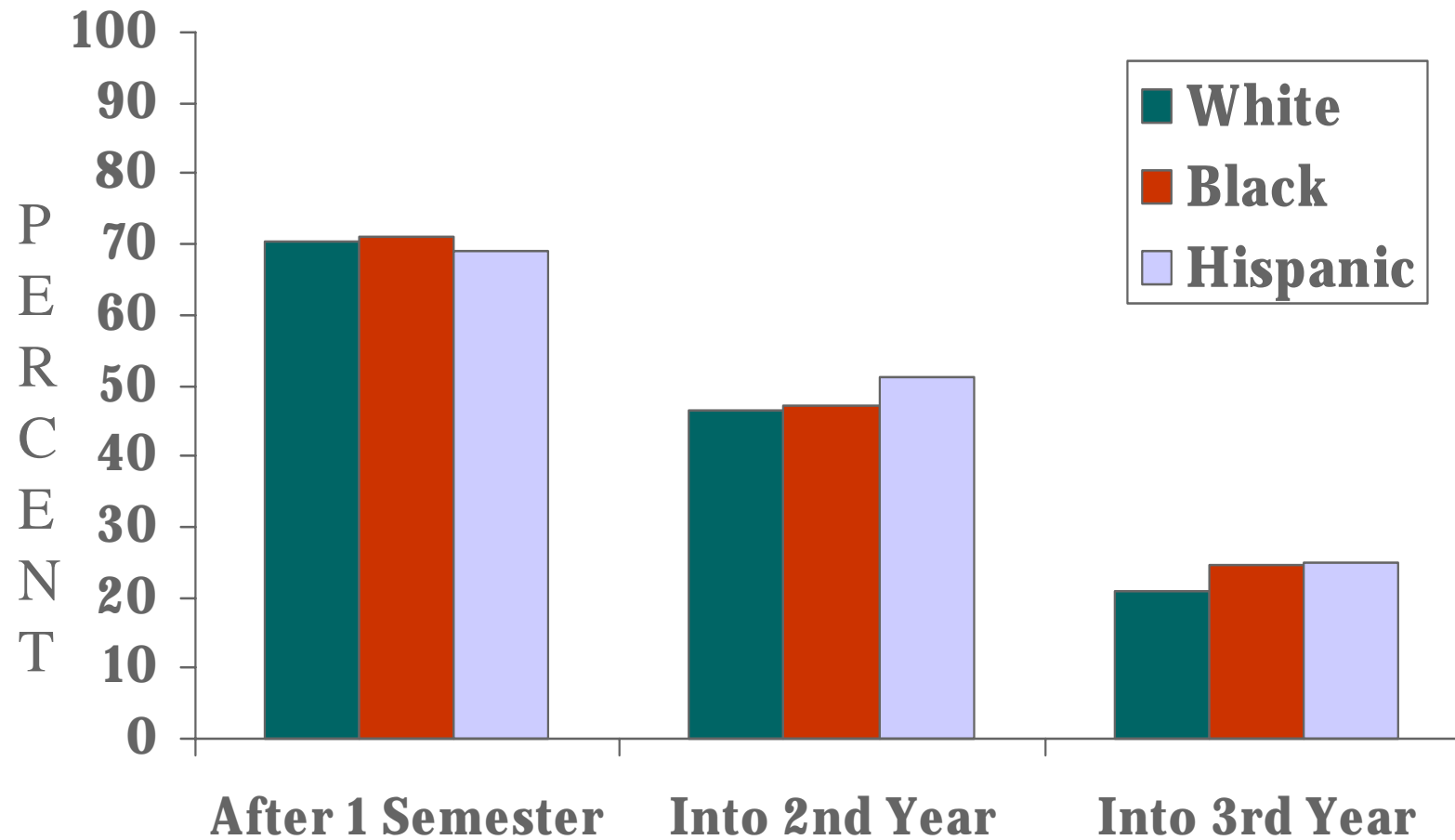
Students who complete “gatekeeper” courses in 3 years



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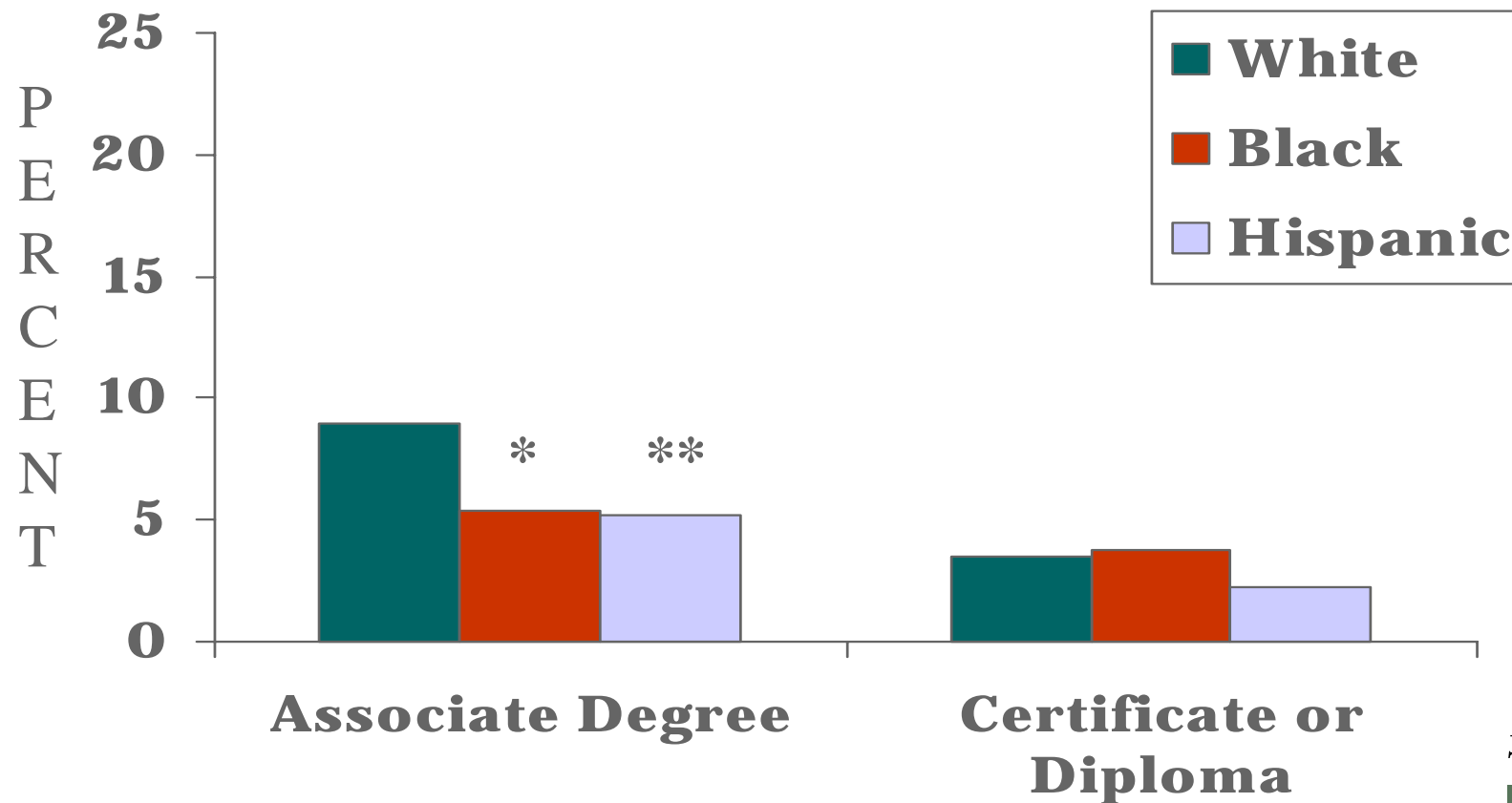
Students who persist in college



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Students who earn a credential in 3 years



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Key findings on implementation at the colleges

- Strong support for “culture of evidence”
- Active involvement of most campus leaders
- More limited involvement of faculty, staff, and students
- Many strategies being implemented to increase student success
 - Most are still in formative stage
 - Colleges struggling with assessment



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Idea of “culture of evidence” resonates strongly

“Our people are beginning to ask, ‘what does the evidence show?’ rather than, ‘what do you think?’ [It is] the culture of evidence...rather than the anecdotal stories we’ve used for 30 years.”

-- President at a North Carolina college



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Progress in building a “culture of evidence”

- Nearly all colleges submitted data to JBL Associates
- A majority of colleges reported that they were surprised or alarmed by results
- A majority of colleges also conducted focus groups or used CCSSE
- About half the colleges identified priorities to address based on the data analysis



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Challenges to building a “culture of evidence” in some colleges

- Weak information technology systems that hinder data retrieval and analysis
- Insufficient IR capacity
- Resistance from faculty and staff
- Lack of experience in how to analyze data and use results



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Importance of leadership

“I really think that when it comes to Achieving the Dream, because the president and the entire administration are behind it, then people are more responsive... It presents a better picture of the institutional commitment. Also, if the president says it has to be done, you do it.”

-- Counselor at a Texas college



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Evidence of leadership

- All presidents voiced support for Achieving the Dream. Their motivations:
 - To help students succeed
 - To manage and plan more effectively
 - To support re-accreditation
 - To bring institutional prestige
- Many presidents participated in core teams
- Several took steps to embed initiative into college operations



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Challenges to effective leadership at some colleges

- Turnover (9 colleges)
- Preoccupied with other pressing problems
- Delegated initiative to consultants or staff with insufficient authority

Importance of engaging faculty and staff

“Four years from now we will probably have another president, chief academic, chief financial officer. The people that fill these positions may not come from the ranks... We hope we are able to instill [Achieving the Dream] goals and values in mid-level managers and faculty leaders so that they expect data-driven decision-making.”

-- Core team member at a North Carolina college



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Mixed results on faculty and staff engagement

- At 14 colleges, Achieving the Dream increased collaboration among administrators, faculty, and staff across “silos”
- Collaboration generally limited to members of core and data teams
- Outside these teams, only vague awareness of Achieving the Dream or its goals



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Challenges to broad engagement

- Colleges not sure how to involve faculty and staff in data analysis
- “Blame game:” faculty and staff still pointing fingers
- Concerns that Achieving the Dream threatens educational quality
- Belief that targeting is inequitable



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Selecting strategies to improve student success

“If we keep doing what we’re doing now, nothing is going to change. So we will have to make some changes. This way, we get to try some things. If they work, we’re going to keep them. If not, we’ll move to something else.”

-- Faculty member at a Florida college



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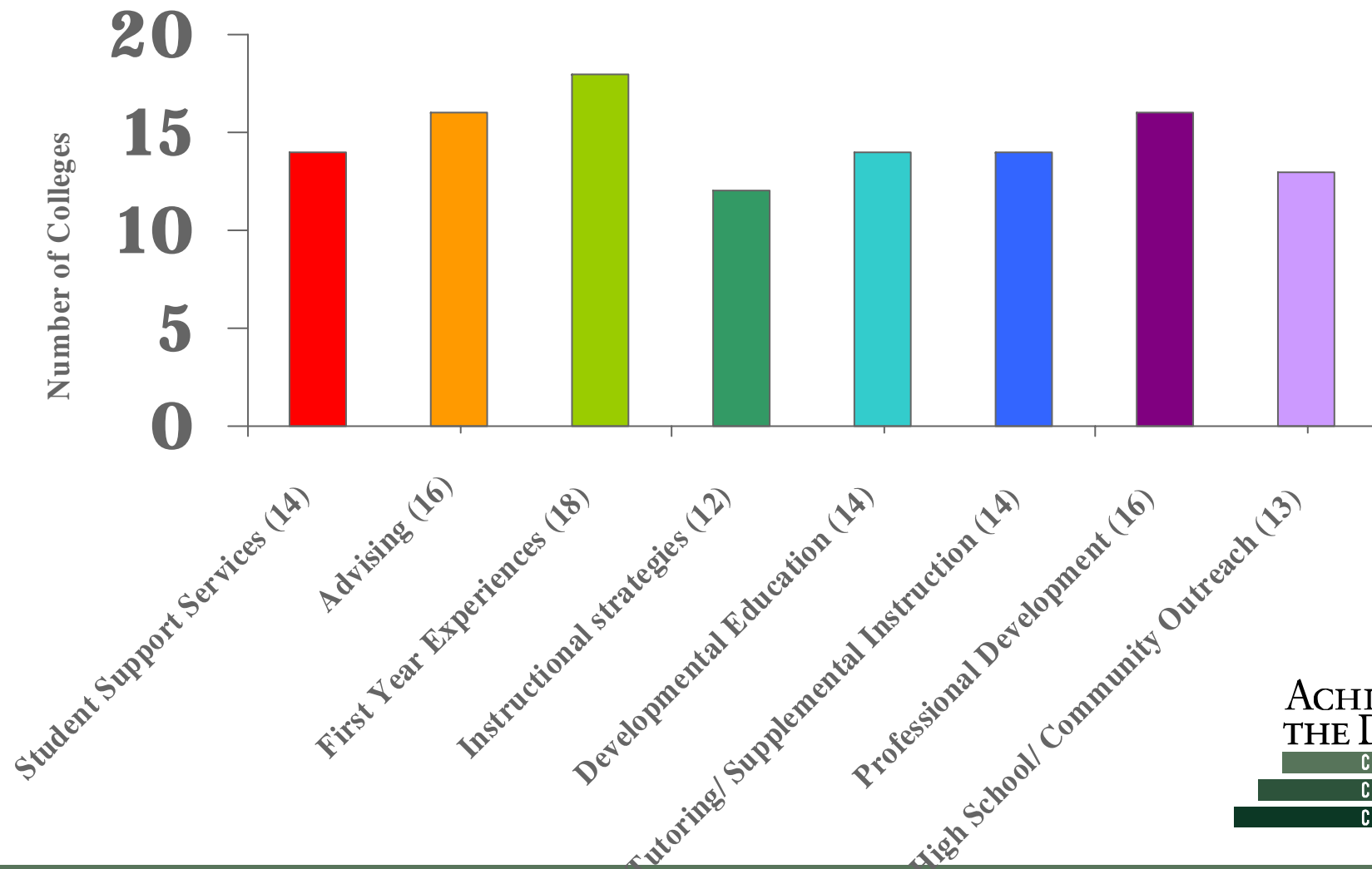
Using evidence to inform choice of strategies

- 10 out of 27 colleges used analysis of their own data to select program strategies
- Some colleges relied on literature review or Strategy Institutes to guide their choices
- Only ¼ of colleges had plans to assess effectiveness of strategies – and many of these plans were flawed.

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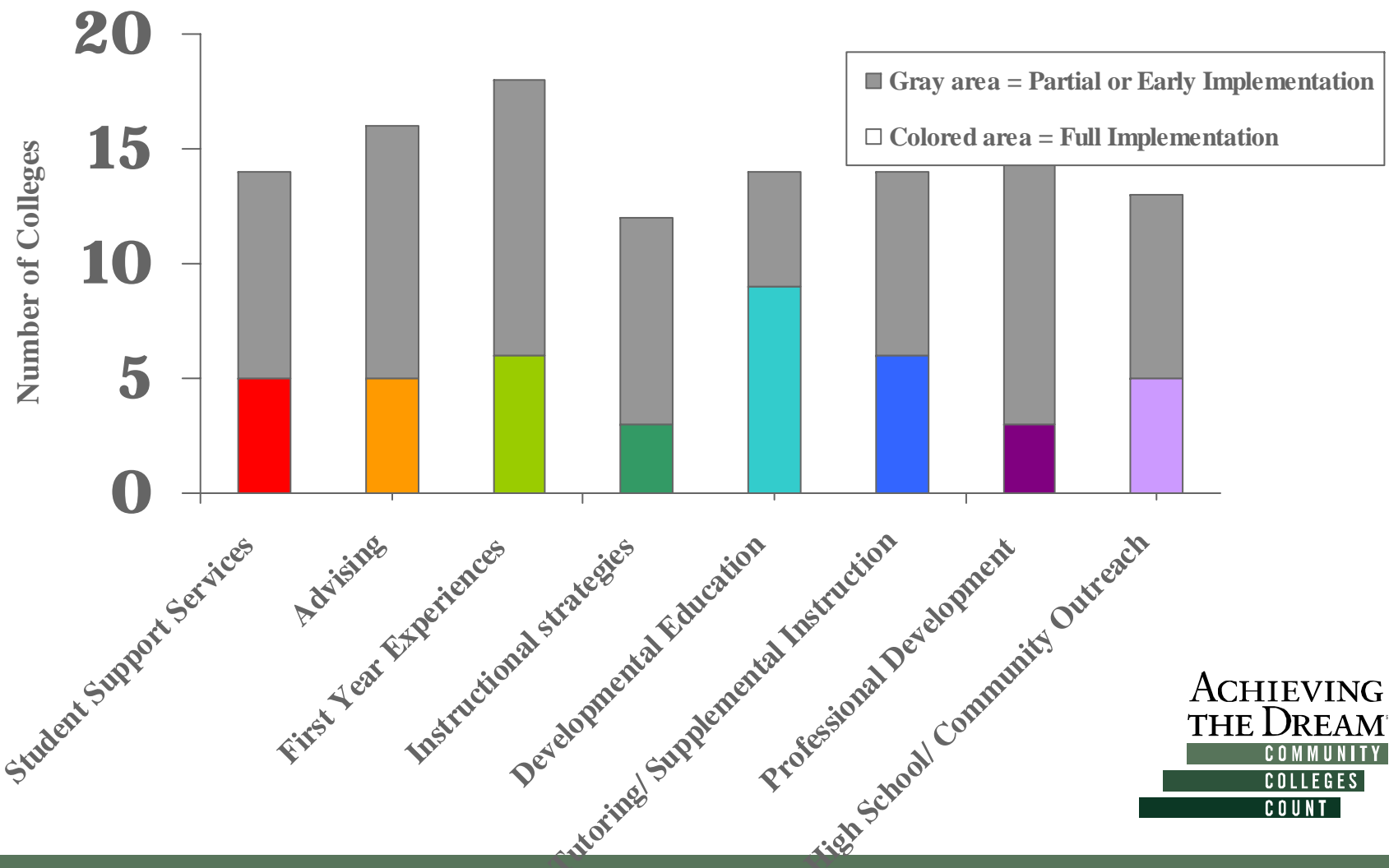
Colleges' choice of strategies to improve student success



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Colleges' progress in strategy implementation



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Overall assessment and conclusions

- **About 6 colleges made clear progress in building a culture of evidence**
 - Most of these had prior experience
- **Most colleges are making headway. Main areas for improvement:**
 - Building IR capacity
 - Strengthening information technology systems
 - Engaging faculty and staff more broadly
 - Implementing and assessing strategies to improve student outcomes



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Evaluation Team

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