



**Nativity Preparatory School  
Start-to-Finish Initiative:  
Improving College Persistence & Completion for Low-Income Boys**

**Organization Mission & Overview**

Nativity Prep is an independent, accredited, Jesuit middle school that provides a high-quality, tuition-free education for fourth- through eighth-grade boys from low-income families of all faiths who live in Boston. Founded in 1990, Nativity Prep is the only tuition-free school for boys in the city of Boston. The goal of Nativity's extended-day, extended-year model of education is to close achievement gaps and prepare boys for academic success in high school, college, and beyond. A Jesuit educational institution committed to developing the whole person, Nativity's programs promote not just the intellectual, but the spiritual, physical, social, and emotional growth of its students. A Nativity education inspires boys from Boston to become "men for others," who go on to serve their communities and the world with a spirit of generosity and gratitude.

Nativity Prep serves 75 students in the fourth- through eighth-grades, as well as more than 300 alumni. Over 90% of students come from families living at or below the federal low-income ceiling, and qualify for free or reduced lunch. Nativity's student body is 37% African-America, 21% Latino & Hispanic, 12% Asian, 11% African, 11% Haitian/Cape Verdean/West Indian, and 8% Multi-racial.

Despite the academic deficits many of them arrive with, Nativity Prep students have gone on to study at some of New England's most selective secondary schools, including: The Roxbury Latin School, Boston College High School, Milton Academy, St. Sebastian's School, and Noble and Greenough School. Nativity Prep students have also been accepted to, graduated from, or currently attend some of the finest universities in the country, including: Harvard University, Amherst College, Boston College, Duke University, Georgetown University, Northeastern University, Bentley College, and Tufts University.

**Start-to-Finish Graduate Support Initiative**

There exists today a widening disparity and an escalating crisis of college completion in the United States that disproportionately affects under-represented and low-income students like young men from Nativity Prep. Currently, about half of all students from high-income families have earned a bachelor's degree by age 25. Nationally, just 1 in 10 from low-income families manage to achieve the same.<sup>1</sup> This disparity grows particularly stark among low-income young men of color. Nationally only 26% of black males and 18% of Latino males earn an associate degree or higher,<sup>2</sup> a reality that ranks them at the very bottom among college-going students.

The men educated at Nativity Prep fare better. Roughly 80% of Nativity Prep alumni enroll in four-year colleges, a matriculation rate that rivals that of white students from middle-class and affluent families in the United States. But fewer than 70% persist and earn a degree, meaning nearly half of all alumni do not complete a college education.

The reasons for the college drop-out problem in this country are manifold. Rising tuition rates, complex financial-aid systems, financial aid shortfalls and gaps, high unemployment rates among 18-25 year-olds, and academic deficits and family pressures all conspire to interrupt and derail the college careers of thousands of low-income undergraduates, including some Nativity alums. According to a study conducted by the ACT, three main factors affect low-income students' college completion rates: 1] lack of academic preparedness 2] financial constraints, and 3] difficulty navigating complex college systems.

Nativity Prep's Start-to Finish Initiative will tackle these barriers and directly address the college completion problem among its graduates through the following three-pronged approach:

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<sup>1</sup>[https://www.whitehouse.gov/sites/default/files/docs/white\\_house\\_report\\_on\\_increasing\\_college\\_opportunity\\_for\\_low-income\\_students.pdf](https://www.whitehouse.gov/sites/default/files/docs/white_house_report_on_increasing_college_opportunity_for_low-income_students.pdf)

<sup>2</sup><http://www.opensocietyfoundations.org/voices/boosting-college-readiness-among-black-and-latino-males>

### 1) Navigating Complex College Systems

- Expand the Graduate Support office with the addition of a second staff member.
- Build out more structured college support services and work more intensively with college-bound and currently enrolled undergraduate students and their families to promote persistence.
- Focus admissions counseling to ensure students choose institutions that promise the right “fit.”
- Grow relationships and partnerships with universities and outside scholarship programs in order to increase the amount of financial aid offered to Nativity alumni.

### 2) Academic Preparedness

- Design a structured academic support program for high-school students.
- Increase time spent directly supporting high-school students.
- Focus efforts on the high-school transition year to bolster freshman GPA's.
- Encourage and facilitate student and family access to academic support resources at their high schools.

### 3) Meeting Financial Need

- Provide last dollar aid to students whose financial aid packages do not cover up to the expected family contribution as determined by the FAFSA.
- Through an already established partnership with a book distributor, facilitate free and reduced-price text book rentals.
- Partner with local corporations and school Trustees to develop paid internship opportunities and mentoring that will allow more students to self-pay a portion of their tuition.
- Increase student access to outside scholarships.

Launched in 1995, Nativity's Graduate Support Office has long served as a critical resource for alumni who are frequently the first in their families to attend college, and whose parents often lack the experience and ability to guide them through the college process. For 20 years, the Grad Support Office has been providing a growing and comprehensive suite of services to students and families, upon which the Start-to-Finish Initiative will build. Services include: high school guidance; college tours; test-prep assistance; college application and financial aid counseling; college transition workshops; assistance in securing scholarships; internship and job networking; and alumni reunions.

These support services have helped ensure that 99% of Nativity Prep alumni graduate high school and more than 80% enroll in college. With the launch of the Start-to-Finish Initiative's expanded college services delivery, Nativity Prep will strive for the following results:

- Reduce graduate's college dropout rate from 29% to below 10% over a five-year period.
- Increase the average GPA of Nativity graduates in high school from 2.5 to 2.7.
- Eliminate financial hardship as a reason for non-completion, growing the amount of scholarship money secured, while decreasing the amount of total debt incurred to \$10,000 or less per graduate, thereby allowing gaps in financial aid to be addressed through a combination of student loans and last-dollar aid.
- Improve post-college opportunities for graduates through internships and employment programs with corporate partners.

### Catalyst Factor

The Start-to-Finish Initiative is truly the next frontier of the Nativity's long-range work. Nativity is not simply helping set more low-income young men from Boston on the path *to* college, it is bettering their odds of getting *through* college with a high-value degree. Everything from life span, to earnings, to civic participation and voting, to violence and incarceration is affected by a college degree. College graduates earn more, live longer, vote more regularly, marry and send their own children to college more often than college drop-outs do. They are less likely to suffer chronic illness, become victims of violence or go to prison. So by improving the college completion rates of Nativity Prep grads, Nativity will transform the quality of young men's lives and the quality of their opportunities. Nativity is piloting some promising and bold approaches to solving the completion gap among low-income men of color, and has the potential to impact the entire field of college access, yielding new models and successful strategies for closing the education and achievement gaps among low-income students and young men of color.