

# Financial Empowerment for Student Success

An Evaluation of SparkPoint Centers at  
Bay Area Community Colleges

PREPARED FOR UNITED WAY BAY AREA

UNITED WAY  
BAY AREA



**SPARKPOINT**

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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# AN EVALUATION OF SPARKPOINT CENTERS AT BAY AREA COMMUNITY COLLEGES: EXECUTIVE SUMMARY



United Way Bay Area (UWBA) launched SparkPoint in 2009 to help families and individuals improve their financial health. At SparkPoint Centers across the San Francisco Bay Area, individuals can access a wide variety of services to help them achieve financial prosperity. SparkPoint Centers often provide services at multiple locations in a community. Currently, SparkPoint offers services at ten community college locations across the San Francisco Bay Area. Through an external evaluation, UWBA wanted to gain deeper insight into SparkPoint Centers at community colleges, including the profile of clients served and services offered at community college locations, how SparkPoint contributed to the success of community college students who were receiving services at these locations, and how SparkPoint was integrated with other student success services and resources on campus and in the community.

## Key evaluation findings

SparkPoint Centers at community colleges varied in who they served

Some SparkPoint Centers primarily served members of the campus community (students and staff). Other SparkPoint Centers at community colleges served a mix of members of the campus community, and community members who were not enrolled at or affiliated with the college.

SparkPoint Centers leveraged relationships with on-campus partners and external organizations

All the SparkPoint Centers offered clients financial education through financial literacy workshops and one-on-one financial coaching. They also partnered with on-campus partners and external organizations to offer additional services, such as financial assistance, food assistance, and legal assistance.

Financial success and academic success were both seen as important outcomes

SparkPoint staff viewed success in the financial domain to be just as integral to student success as progress and achievement in the academic domain.

Students gained knowledge and skills in credit management, budgeting, and building savings

SparkPoint helped community college students gain new knowledge and skills in credit management, budgeting, and building savings. Many SparkPoint clients who received services at community college locations (students, college staff, and community members) made some progress toward increasing their income, improving their credit, increasing their savings, or reducing their debt.

**Students also benefited in non-financial ways**

Community college students who participated in SparkPoint experienced increased empowerment, reduced stress and anxiety, and increased academic success.

**Integration with other on-campus student services required strong leadership support**

The SparkPoint Centers that were most strongly integrated with other student success services and programs tended to have firm backing from campus leaders and staff, and high visibility on campus. They often had a central physical location that was accessible to students, and strong name recognition among students and staff. Additionally, they tended to have close partnerships with existing student success services and programs, and were often co-located with these services.

**Recommendations**

**Deepen integration with other student success services and programs**

UWBA should work with existing SparkPoint Centers at community colleges to deepen their integration with other student success services and programs, whether on or off campus, in order to achieve greater impact. Integration is critical as it maximizes the use of existing student success supports on campus and in the community, and helps students access these resources in a seamless and coordinated manner. Because integration requires strong buy-in from campus leadership, UWBA should strongly support and publicize the work of community colleges that already have a deep commitment to providing student success supports, and that see SparkPoint as an essential part of this overall strategy. At the same time, UWBA and SparkPoint Centers should continue to engage campus leadership at community colleges where institutional buy-in is weak, to show how SparkPoint is aligned with campus priorities and how it will help the campus achieve its institutional goals.

**Continue collecting evidence of SparkPoint impact and promote cross-campus sharing**

If UWBA is considering expanding SparkPoint to other community college locations in the Bay Area, UWBA should continue to collect evidence of impact of SparkPoint programming at current community college locations. UWBA already tracks the financial health of clients fairly comprehensively and should consider the feasibility of complementing those financial metrics with academic metrics for student clients, such as term-to-term persistence. UWBA should also continue to promote cross-campus sharing of how different colleges implement the SparkPoint program model, and draw out key success factors and lessons. These lessons will be beneficial for all SparkPoint locations, whether they are well-established, fairly new, or still in early stages of planning.

## INTRODUCTION

### About United Way Bay Area

**United Way Bay Area (UWBA)** brings together individuals, nonprofits, businesses, and local government partners to create lasting impact through fighting poverty and engaging the community. UWBA invests in initiatives that work to end the cycle of poverty so that all Bay Area residents have the opportunity to prosper and thrive. UWBA also empowers individuals to donate, advocate, and volunteer to strengthen the community and change lives. UWBA operates multiple core programs designed to move people out of poverty. Each year, these programs reach more than 250,000 Bay Area residents by connecting them to food, shelter, work opportunities, academic and career help, and financial literacy resources.

### About SparkPoint

UWBA launched **SparkPoint** in 2009 to help families and individuals improve their financial health. At SparkPoint Centers across the San Francisco Bay Area, individuals can access a wide variety of services to help them achieve financial prosperity. SparkPoint clients work one-on-one with a financial coach who helps clients identify goals, develop a step-by-step action plan, and keep clients on track. SparkPoint services focus on three key features of financial prosperity: increasing income, managing credit, and building assets. While all SparkPoint Centers share the common goal of supporting individuals and families on their paths toward financial prosperity, they use varying strategies to achieve this goal, drawing on local resources and priorities.



**Increasing Income**



**Managing Credit**



**Building Assets**

UWBA provides SparkPoint Centers with funding and technical assistance, and supports them with data tracking and reporting. UWBA also serves as a convener for SparkPoint Centers to promote sharing of best practices.

### About this evaluation

Through this evaluation, UWBA wanted to gain deeper insight into SparkPoint Centers at community colleges, including the profile of clients served and services offered at community college locations. UWBA was also interested in exploring how SparkPoint contributed to the success of community college students who were receiving services at these locations, and how SparkPoint was integrated with other student success services and resources on campus and in the community.

The following questions guided data collection and reporting:

## **SparkPoint at Community Colleges**

- What is the profile of SparkPoint clients who are served at community colleges?
- How does SparkPoint support clients who are served at community colleges? Does this support vary by model typology<sup>1</sup>? If so, how?

## **SparkPoint and Student Success**

- How does SparkPoint define and support student success? What are the components of SparkPoint that contribute to student success?
- What evidence is there of the benefit of SparkPoint to community college students, their families, and the broader community?
- How are SparkPoint services for community college students integrated with other student success services?

To answer the guiding questions, the evaluation team reviewed SparkPoint-related documents and data from UWBA and SparkPoint Centers at community college locations. The team also conducted interviews with SparkPoint staff based at community colleges and held three focus groups – one with SparkPoint staff and two with SparkPoint clients who were community college students.

## **Data limitations**

As with any evaluation, there are limitations to the data collected by the evaluation team. First, impact data tracked by UWBA and SparkPoint Centers for community college locations includes all clients served at those locations. Because the student status of clients is not tracked, there is currently no way to disaggregate the impact data to focus exclusively on the outcomes for community college students. Second, impact data for Ohlone College was limited as SparkPoint Fremont is still in the early stages of working with the college. Finally, the evaluation team conducted client focus groups at two community colleges with well-established SparkPoint Centers. As a result, the findings from those focus groups may not be generalizable to all SparkPoint Centers at community college locations.

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<sup>1</sup> Public Profit's 2017-18 evaluation of SparkPoint developed a model typology that allowed classification of SparkPoint Centers into different model types based on the structure of the lead agency.

## SPARKPOINT AT COMMUNITY COLLEGES

### Introduction to SparkPoint at community colleges

UWBA funds a diverse array of mission-driven organizations to implement SparkPoint programming in their respective communities through SparkPoint Centers. These Centers are hosted in community-based locations, K-12 community schools, and community colleges. Each Center is run by a different lead agency, and often provides services at multiple locations in a community.

Community colleges play an important role in promoting economic mobility and lifting individuals and families out of poverty through higher education. However, many community college students face challenging financial situations, including food and housing insecurity, that put them at risk of dropping out of college.<sup>2</sup> Community colleges are therefore natural partners for an initiative like SparkPoint that helps students address financial concerns, and makes it more likely that they will persist in college and complete their degrees or certificates in a timely manner.

Currently, SparkPoint offers services at ten community college locations across the San Francisco Bay Area. In FY17, SparkPoint served 510 clients at community colleges, 72% (367) of whom were returning clients.<sup>3</sup>

SparkPoint Center	Community college location
SparkPoint Cañada	Cañada College
SparkPoint Marin	College of Marin
SparkPoint College of San Mateo	College of San Mateo
SparkPoint Contra Costa	Contra Costa College
SparkPoint Oakland	Laney College
SparkPoint Fremont	Ohlone College <sup>4</sup>
SparkPoint San Jose	San Jose City College, Evergreen Valley College
SparkPoint Skyline	Skyline College
SparkPoint Solano	Solano College

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<sup>2</sup> Food and housing insecurity are serious concerns faced by community college students in California. The results of the #RealCollege survey conducted by the Hope Center in fall 2016 and fall 2018 revealed alarming rates of food and housing insecurity among California community college students: 50% of respondents were food insecure in the last 30 days, 50% were housing insecure in the previous year, and 19% were homeless in the previous year. Retrieved from <https://hope4college.com/california-community-colleges-realcollege-survey/>

<sup>3</sup> A SparkPoint participant is considered a client if they complete a baseline assessment. A client is considered 'measurable' if they complete a baseline assessment and a follow-up assessment. The proportion of clients who return for a follow-up assessment (i.e. who are "measurable") is an indication of their level of engagement with SparkPoint.

<sup>4</sup> SparkPoint Fremont's partnership with Ohlone College is very new, so data from Ohlone College is limited.

## Profile of SparkPoint clients served at community colleges

The profile of clients served by SparkPoint at community colleges varies from college to college.

Some SparkPoint Centers, such as those based at College of Marin, Contra Costa College, and Laney College, primarily serve members of the campus community. The SparkPoint Center at College of Marin currently serves only students and college staff. Similarly, the SparkPoint Center at Contra Costa College serves mainly students and staff, and actively refers community members who are interested in taking up SparkPoint services to the West Contra Costa office in Richmond. The SparkPoint Center at Laney College serves Career and Technical Education (CTE) students only.

Other SparkPoint Centers at community colleges serve a mix of members of the campus community, and community members who are not enrolled at or affiliated with the college.

<b>SparkPoint Centers that primarily serve members of the campus community</b>	<b>SparkPoint Centers that serve both members of the campus community and community members</b>
College of Marin	San Jose City College
Contra Costa College	Evergreen Valley College
Laney College	Skyline College
	Cañada College
	Solano College
	College of San Mateo

## How SparkPoint supports clients at community colleges

SparkPoint programming focuses on three key features of financial prosperity: increasing income, managing credit, and building assets. All of the SparkPoint community college locations included in this evaluation offered their clients financial education in these areas through financial literacy workshops and one-on-one financial coaching.

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 | [spointclient.org](http://spointclient.org)

While all SparkPoint community college locations offered financial education through workshops and coaching, they also drew on local resources and partnerships to offer additional services to their clients. This is consistent with SparkPoint’s model of leveraging existing resources to complement their core financial education offerings, and building a robust network of co-located and integrated partners. SparkPoint Centers at community colleges partnered with on-campus partners as well as external organizations like Bay Area Legal Aid, Second Harvest Food Bank, and local credit unions to provide legal assistance, food assistance, benefits screening, and support for bank account enrollment.



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- Landlord's name, address and phone number for CA Renter's Credit
- Your household's health coverage information (Forms 1095-A, B or C)
- Savings and checking account and routing numbers for direct deposit

The picture above is of a generic tax document.

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- All 1099s, 1088s, and any other tax forms
- Last year's tax return
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Some locations also introduced incentive or reward programs to encourage clients to participate in SparkPoint financial coaching and to complete positive financial behaviors. For example, the SparkPoint Center at Cañada College implemented an incentive program called Cañada Cash that awards clients \$25 each time they complete an action such as organizing their financial documents, creating a spending tracker, drafting a budget, reviewing a credit report, paying down debt, setting up a recurring bill payment, and accessing benefits, for a maximum of \$100. The SparkPoint Centers at Skyline College and College of San Mateo recently launched similar incentive programs for positive financial behaviors, called SparkPoint Cash and Bulldog Dollars respectively.

For locations that served both students and community members, there was some variation in the profile of clients who used the different services. For example, SparkPoint Skyline observed that its food pantry was more heavily used by community members than by students, while its financial coaching was more heavily taken up by Skyline College students. Overall, despite slight differences in implementation, the evaluation team found that the types of support provided by SparkPoint to clients were very similar across the nine community college locations.

## SPARKPOINT AND STUDENT SUCCESS

There are many dimensions to student success. A recent survey of 64 community colleges leaders conducted by EdSurge<sup>5</sup> found that there was no single definition of student success that was consistently used across the respondents' institutions. While many of the institutions defined student success in terms of persistence (e.g. retention from fall semester to spring semester, retention from first fall semester to second fall semester) and educational attainment (e.g. attainment of an associate's degree, attainment of any credential or degree), others took into account measures of academic achievement (e.g. credit completion) and student advancement (e.g. graduation within two/three/four years, transfer to a four-year institution, job placement).

In this study, the evaluation team sought to understand how SparkPoint defined student success. Our interviews with SparkPoint staff revealed that they viewed success in the financial domain to be just as integral to student success as progress and achievement in the academic domain. In the financial domain, staff saw success as students making progress on and meeting goals in four key areas that are highly aligned with the SparkPoint model: decreasing debt, increasing income, increasing savings and improving credit. SparkPoint staff recognized that these indicators of financial wellbeing were relevant both in the short- to medium-term while students were still in college, and in the longer-term, when they left college and entered the workforce. In the academic domain, SparkPoint staff regarded short-term success as students continuing to attend classes and persisting in college to the next semester, and medium-term success as students eventually completing their degrees or certificates, or transferring to four-year colleges.

### How SparkPoint supports student success

Through interviews with SparkPoint staff and focus groups with SparkPoint clients, two program components emerged as having the greatest impact on student success: (i) financial education through workshops and one-on-one coaching, and (ii) connecting students to other resources on campus.

#### Financial workshops and one-on-one financial coaching

SparkPoint staff said that providing financial education to students through financial workshops and one-on-one financial coaching helped students to address financial barriers with the guidance and support of trusted individuals. The financial workshops offered by SparkPoint covered a range of topics that were relevant for students, including how to cut costs and save money, how to improve credit scores, and how to repay student loans. Additionally, one-on-one financial coaching provided students with more in-depth and personalized support. In the coaching sessions, students had the opportunity to discuss their individual financial concerns with their coach, set financial goals, and decide on concrete steps to achieve them.

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<sup>5</sup> EdSurge. (2018). Measuring Up: How Community Colleges Define, Measure and Support Student Success.

*“[Having] a coach that is guiding you and supporting you is a great support system for students.”<sup>6</sup>*

- SparkPoint staff

## **Connecting students to other resources on campus**

SparkPoint staff also discussed how they helped to connect students to other available resources on campus and in the community, such as financial assistance, food assistance, and legal assistance. SparkPoint staff would help students address their immediate needs, often by referring students to available resources on campus and in the community, and then use the initial contact with them as a starting point for much deeper engagement.

*“One student said, ‘I’m in good shape’ when asked to participate in SparkPoint. But I encouraged him to participate. When he came back, he said, ‘There were so many more resources that I had no idea that I would be eligible for or that they were even available.’”*

- SparkPoint staff

*“Sometimes SparkPoint is the first step in the door – [the SparkPoint coach] will say, ‘Here’s a master list of resources on campus – take what you need.’ SparkPoint is a good way to figure out what the resources are on campus or in the community.”*

- SparkPoint client

*"People aren't able to meet their basic needs because they are spending so much money on rent, food, medication, going to the doctor. It's difficult when they come in and they have exhausted their resources and they are desperate. We try to connect people to other resources... we try to help them find the place that can help them... We welcome them with open arms to help the students to address whatever issue."*

- SparkPoint staff

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<sup>6</sup> Stakeholder quotations are based on notes taken during interviews and focus groups and are not a precise transcription.

## Increasing student access to SparkPoint services



Several SparkPoint staff we interviewed acknowledged that there is often a stigma among students associated with seeking financial and food assistance. They stressed the importance of taking steps to reduce this stigma to improve student access to SparkPoint services. Some of the ways that colleges have worked to reduce stigma include doing outreach to all students, asking faculty to promote SparkPoint in their classrooms, and partnering with other student support services on campus to increase SparkPoint visibility. For example, SparkPoint San Jose, which operates SparkPoint Centers in San Jose City College and Evergreen Valley College, has focused its efforts on bringing information about SparkPoint directly to students through classroom workshops on relevant topics such as financial wellness, budgeting, credit, and financial aid. These classroom workshops send a clear message that SparkPoint is a valuable

resource for *all* students, not just students who are struggling financially. Similarly, the SparkPoint Center at Skyline College conducts classroom presentations, and asks all students to complete interest cards for different SparkPoint services. Some colleges, including Skyline College and College of San Mateo, have implemented campus-wide snack programs. Free snacks are made available to all students on campus, with information about SparkPoint attached to them.

## Impact of SparkPoint on community college students

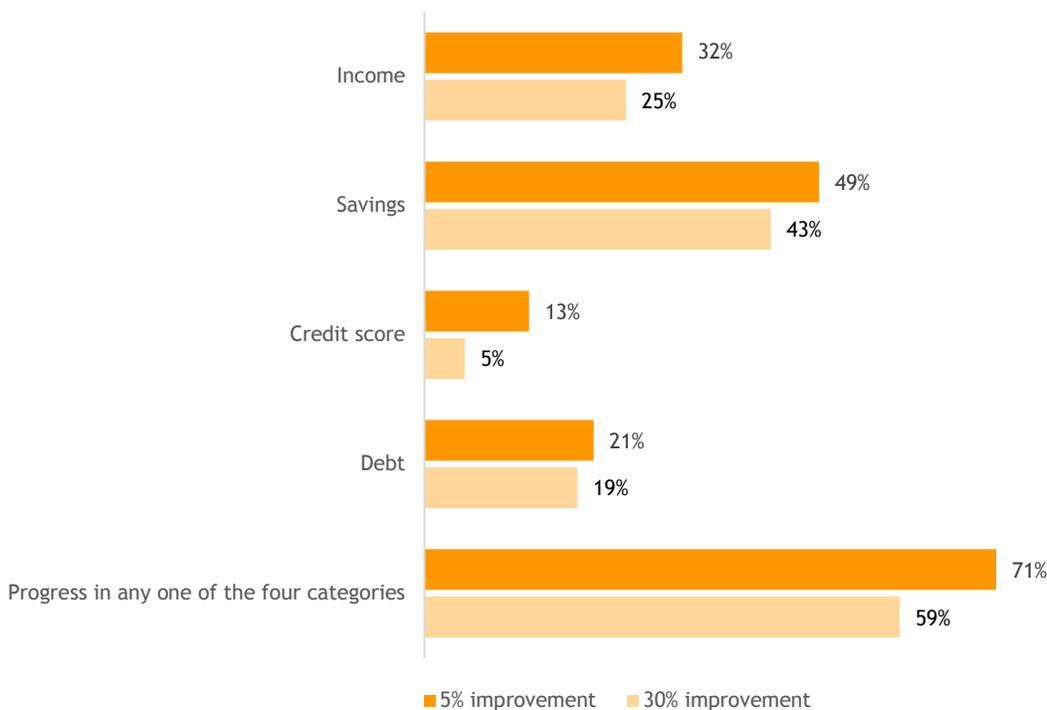
In this study, the evaluation team explored the financial and non-financial impact that SparkPoint has had on community college students.

### Financial impact

SparkPoint Centers collect detailed information about their clients' financial health on a regular basis. To understand the impact of SparkPoint on the financial wellbeing of clients served at community colleges,<sup>7</sup> the evaluation team explored FY17 outcomes data from eight<sup>8</sup> college locations.

### Progress in income, savings, credit, or debt

SparkPoint Centers monitor participants' financial health by measuring changes in income, credit, debt, and savings amounts. Centers track the proportion of clients who have made 5% and 30% increases in income, credit, and savings, or decreases in debt, in a given time period. In FY17, about seven in ten clients (71%) made at least 5% progress on increasing their income, increasing their savings, improving their credit scores, or decreasing their debt.



<sup>7</sup> The financial impact data includes all clients served at community college locations, including students, staff and members of the community. Because the student status of clients is not tracked, the evaluation team was not able to disaggregate the data to examine outcomes for students only.

<sup>8</sup> Evergreen Valley College and San Jose City College count as a single college location for the purposes of this analysis as the evaluation team received combined data for the two colleges. As SparkPoint Fremont's partnership with Ohlone College is very new, FY17 data from Ohlone College is not available.

## Stability, success and prosperity metrics

In addition to the 5% and 30% metrics, UWBA measures financial progress in stages to capture the improvements clients make towards long-term goals. The stages of “financial stability,” “financial success,” and “financial prosperity” are represented by different metrics for achieving a self-sufficient income,<sup>9</sup> robust savings,<sup>10</sup> a healthy credit score,<sup>11</sup> and no revolving debt (outlined in the table below). In FY17, among measurable clients at the eight community college locations, 38% achieved at least one Stability metric, 31% achieved at least one Success metric, and 26% achieved at least one Prosperity metric.

Financial Stability	Financial Success	Financial Prosperity
75% of self-sufficient income	85% of self-sufficient income	100% of self-sufficient income
2 weeks of savings	1 month of savings	3+ months of savings
600 credit score	650 credit score	700+ credit score
-	-	No revolving debt

## Client milestones

UWBA also tracks clients’ milestones, such as purchasing an asset or maintaining a budget. In FY17, among measurable clients at the eight community college locations, 28% created or maintained a budget, 19% purchased an asset (either a car or a home), 7% eliminated debt, and 20% achieved their own financial goals.

## Improved financial knowledge, attitudes, and behaviors

Community college students who participated in the client focus groups said that attending financial workshops and working with a coach over a period of time helped them increase their financial knowledge and develop improved financial attitudes and behaviors. Many students mentioned gaining new knowledge and skills in credit management, budgeting, and building savings.

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<sup>9</sup> Livable income that reaches the Self-Sufficiency Standard, which defines how much families need to meet basic needs without public subsidies or private assistance. Definition retrieved from:

<http://www.selfsufficiencystandard.org/the-standard>

<sup>10</sup> Sufficient savings to cover living expenses for a period of time. For example, 2 weeks of savings means savings equal to 2 weeks of living expenses.

<sup>11</sup> FICO credit score.

*“I write down what I spend. Since my parents only have elementary education, they live paycheck to paycheck. They only know how to finance their money based off that. I see myself living paycheck to paycheck and I don’t want to do that.”*

- SparkPoint client

*“Credit was a major thing – I didn’t know anything; I didn’t have credit. It really helped me understand credit more. There’s a lot of good workshops here. With SparkPoint, I can get an understanding and wrap my [head] around it.”*

- SparkPoint client

*“SparkPoint told me about credit unions and to not have overdrawn charges. I opened another account to save up more money. I have a notebook that keeps my expenses. I budget everything. I’m still working on it.”*

- SparkPoint client

## **Non-Financial impact**

Besides financial health, community college students benefited in other ways through participating in SparkPoint. They experienced increased empowerment, reduced stress and anxiety, and increased academic success. Interviews and focus groups with SparkPoint staff and student clients provided insights into these outcomes.

### **Increased empowerment**

SparkPoint staff said that the one-on-one coaching model helped students feel empowered, as students were supported by their SparkPoint coach in setting individualized financial goals and taking steps to achieve those goals. Community college students mentioned that coaches taught them tips and tricks to manage their finances, and that they felt inspired to use these tools to change the trajectory of their financial future.

*“Having a partner who can help them be comfortable with the decisions they are making – helping them see their own potential is so powerful. A lot of students have multiple priorities – they are single parents, working, returning to workforce, first gen, language barriers. So, to have someone who can help them believe in themselves, that’s an intangible benefit of this program. The belief in themselves is sometimes underestimated and not communicated in terms of data. The self-advocacy – it carries forward into the rest of their lives.”*

- SparkPoint staff

*“Helping students to set goals is a big part of the SparkPoint model. We don’t focus as much on the individual incomes, but whether some is setting their own goals and taking the steps to achieve the goals. All of our clients do and redefine what is working to help reach their goals.”*

- SparkPoint staff

*“[SparkPoint] gives me more knowledge moving forward to see how I want to plan out my life. And use the tools for what works for me. I don’t want to be naïve. I’m more knowledgeable.”*

- SparkPoint client

### Reduced stress and anxiety

Community college students said that participating in SparkPoint services helped reduce their stress and anxiety as they made tangible changes to their financial management and health.

*“[SparkPoint] knocked down the stress level in the household tremendously – I see it... It has changed the stress level in the house.”*

- SparkPoint client

*“Without SparkPoint I would be more fearful and a lot more nervous.”*

- SparkPoint client

### Increased academic success

SparkPoint staff and student clients said they saw SparkPoint contributing to academic success. They saw financial and academic success as deeply intertwined, as increased financial stability made it far more likely that students would succeed academically.

*“When [students] can focus on academic success, that means that their life is stable, their financial stressors are under control. If we can take care of their financial wellbeing, then their likelihood of staying is higher.”*

- SparkPoint staff

Students said that managing their finances allowed them to focus on school instead of spending their energy worrying about their finances. They also mentioned the food pantry and snack programs as ways that SparkPoint helped them meet their basic needs in order to focus on school.

*“You can’t be a student and try to focus on bills. SparkPoint helps you with managing that.”*

- SparkPoint client

*“You have to focus on school. SparkPoint has a lot of food. Just those snacks, they feed me. My hunger is curbed because of those snacks and keeps me focused in school.”*

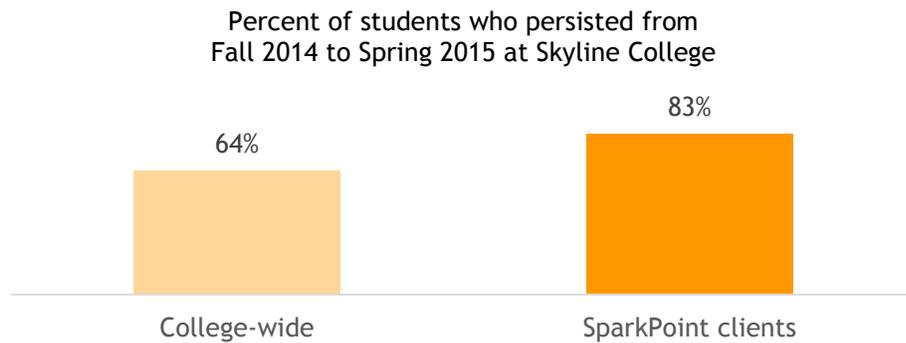
- SparkPoint client

SparkPoint staff and student clients also saw how SparkPoint participation benefited students’ families and the broader community.

*“If a student is... able to stay housed, able to pay their bills, taxes and not have to drop out... then that is a benefit to [their] families and community. We all benefit when one person is able to thrive.”*

- SparkPoint staff

One short-term indicator of student success is persistence. SparkPoint Skyline has collected data on their student clients’ term-to-term persistence rates compared to the college-wide persistence rate. The data show that SparkPoint clients had a higher rate of persisting to the next term: 83% of SparkPoint clients persisted from Fall 2014 to Spring 2015, compared with the 64% of students college-wide.<sup>12</sup> SparkPoint Skyline also found that the more SparkPoint services a student accessed concurrently, the higher their persistence rates.



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<sup>12</sup> Chad, Thompson (November 6, 2018). SparkPoint at Skyline College: Increasing Community College Access, Student Persistence, and Success [PowerPoint slides].

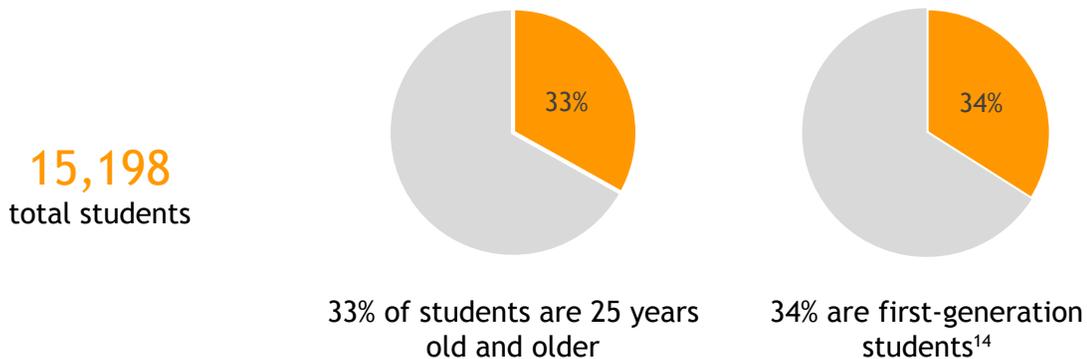
## How SparkPoint is integrated with other student success programs and services

In this study, the evaluation team explored how SparkPoint at community colleges was integrated with other student success programs and services. Integration of student success programs and services help to maximize the use of existing services and resources on campus and in the community and ensure that students receive holistic support in a coordinated and seamless way. The evaluation team identified three factors which had the strongest influence on the strength of the integration: (i) the strength of institutional buy-in for SparkPoint, (ii) visibility of SparkPoint on campus, and (iii) partnerships between SparkPoint and existing student success services and programs. The SparkPoint Centers that were most strongly integrated with other student success services and programs tended to have firm backing from campus leaders and staff, and was especially evident when the goals for SparkPoint aligned with institutional priorities. The most integrated SparkPoint Centers also had high visibility on campus. They often had a central physical location that was accessible to students, and strong name recognition among students and staff. Additionally, they tended to have close partnerships with existing student success services and programs, and were often co-located with these services.

### College Spotlights

#### Skyline College

College information (for the 2016-17 academic year)<sup>13</sup>:



SparkPoint is very strongly supported by Skyline College as it is regarded as an “access, persistence, and completion strategy” for the college. SparkPoint is also highly aligned with the strategic plan for San Mateo County Community College District (of which Skyline College is a member) that sets out the district’s plan to “develop and strengthen... support programs that

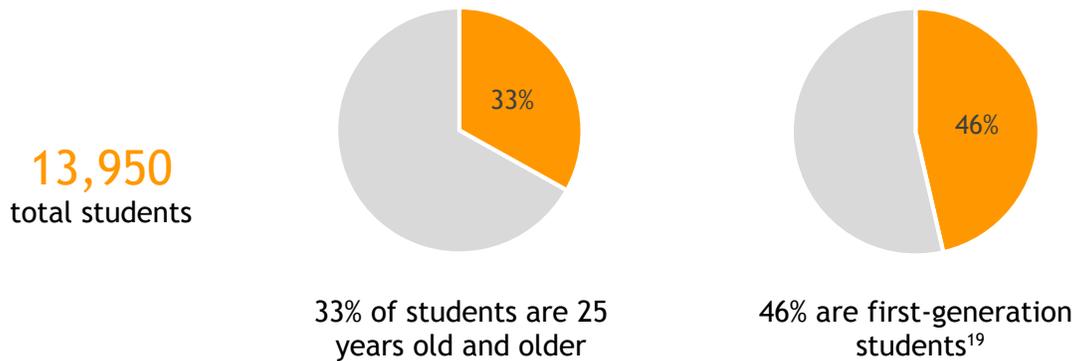
<sup>13</sup> From California Community College’s Student Success Scorecard, 2018. Retrieved from [https://scorecard.cccco.edu/ADA\\_scorecardrates.aspx?CollegeID=373](https://scorecard.cccco.edu/ADA_scorecardrates.aspx?CollegeID=373).

<sup>14</sup> Data source cautions that there is “insufficient data” for first-generation students.

increase student access and success.” SparkPoint at Skyline College is fully integrated with other student success programs on campus. For example, it has strong internal partnerships with the Career Services Center, the Dream Center, and other campus programs such as EOPS,<sup>15</sup> CalWORKs,<sup>16</sup> and TRiO.<sup>17</sup> It is also co-located with many of its internal partners. SparkPoint Skyline has developed partnerships with the college’s Accounting Program to provide free tax preparation assistance to students and community members, and with its Paralegal Program to offer free legal assistance to students and community members.

### Evergreen Valley College

College information (for 2016-17 academic year)<sup>18</sup>:



Although fairly new, SparkPoint at Evergreen Valley College (EVC) has had very strong support from campus leadership, who recognized the benefits the program could bring and strongly advocated for a SparkPoint location on their campus. The SparkPoint Center has a designated space in the college’s student center, and is located right outside the counseling area. Having such a prominent location on campus has helped to increase the program’s visibility, as has dedicated outreach to academic programs such as the Enlace Program which serves Latinx students. SparkPoint has also recruited students who receive CalWORKs to serve as student ambassadors for SparkPoint and promote the program among the student population. Similar to Skyline College, the SparkPoint Center at EVC has developed close partnerships with the

<sup>15</sup> Extended Opportunity Programs and Services (EOPS) is a state-funded program for educationally, economically and linguistically disadvantaged students in California community colleges. It aims to help them enroll and succeed in college.

<sup>16</sup> The California Work Opportunities and Responsibilities to Kids (CalWORKs) program assists students who receive Temporary Aid for Needy Families (TANF). The program provides academic and career counseling, employment assistance, and childcare referrals and assistance.

<sup>17</sup> The TRiO Student Support Services program (TRiO) is a federally-funded program that aims to increase the postsecondary persistence and graduation rates of low-income students, first-generation college students, and students with disabilities.

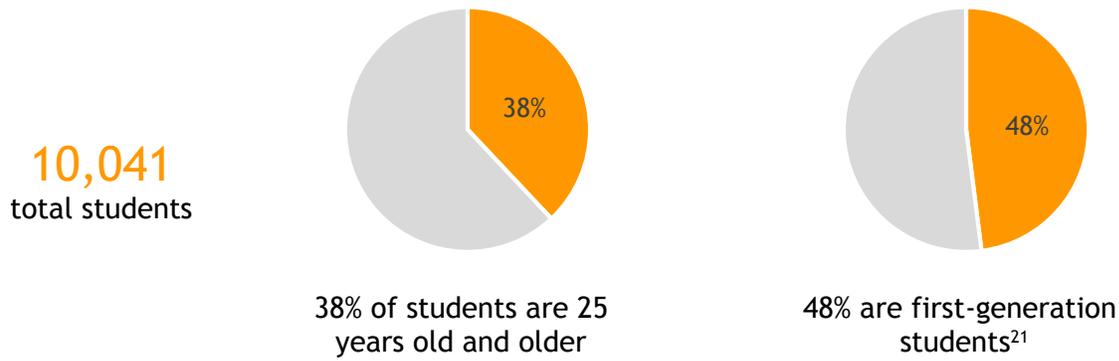
<sup>18</sup> From California Community College’s Student Success Scorecard, 2018. Retrieved from [https://scorecard.cccco.edu/ADA\\_scorecardrates.aspx?CollegeID=471](https://scorecard.cccco.edu/ADA_scorecardrates.aspx?CollegeID=471).

<sup>19</sup> Data source cautions that there is “insufficient data” for first-generation students.

financial aid office and other student success programs on campus such as EOPS and CalWORKs, whose students get credit for participating in SparkPoint activities.

### Contra Costa College

College information (for 2016-17 academic year)<sup>20</sup>:



SparkPoint at Contra Costa College has strong institutional buy-in. Like at Evergreen Valley College, Contra Costa’s campus leadership pushed strongly to have SparkPoint on their campus. While the current SparkPoint site coordinator at the college is not an employee of the college (he is employed by Richmond Community Foundation, the lead agency for SparkPoint Contra Costa), he has been fully embraced by the campus community. The current SparkPoint coordinator is located on campus full-time, has a college email address, sits on several campus committees as a non-voting member, and has limited access to the college’s student database. To boost name recognition across campus, the SparkPoint site coordinator also does outreach through tabling at student events and conducting in-class presentations. SparkPoint has a strong physical presence on campus and is co-located with several student success services, including career advising and transfer advising. Like at Skyline College and Evergreen Valley College, SparkPoint at Contra Costa College has developed close partnerships with other student success programs on campus such as EOPS. SparkPoint is part of the mandatory EOPS orientation, and EOPS students are expected to participate in SparkPoint. SparkPoint workshops also count towards EOPS requirements.

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<sup>20</sup> From California Community College’s Student Success Scorecard, 2018. Retrieved from [https://scorecard.cccco.edu/ADA\\_scorecardrates.aspx?CollegeID=311](https://scorecard.cccco.edu/ADA_scorecardrates.aspx?CollegeID=311).

<sup>21</sup> Data source cautions that there is “insufficient data” for first-generation students.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

This section presents recommendations for UWBA to consider, based on the findings of this evaluation. Implementation of these recommendations will be instrumental in increasing the impact of SparkPoint at community colleges in the Bay Area.

### Deepen integration with other student success services and programs

UWBA should work with existing SparkPoint Centers at community colleges to deepen their integration with other student success services and programs, whether on or off campus, in order to achieve greater impact. Integration is critical as it maximizes the use of existing student success supports on campus and in the community, and helps students access these resources in a seamless and coordinated manner. Because integration requires strong buy-in from campus leadership, UWBA should strongly support and publicize the work of community colleges that already have a deep commitment to providing student success supports, and that see SparkPoint as an essential part of this overall strategy. At the same time, UWBA and SparkPoint Centers should continue to engage campus leadership at community colleges where institutional buy-in is weak, to show how SparkPoint is aligned with campus priorities and how it will help the campus achieve its institutional goals.

### Continue to collect evidence of impact of SparkPoint and promote cross-campus sharing

If UWBA is considering expanding SparkPoint to other community college locations in the Bay Area, UWBA should continue to collect evidence of impact of SparkPoint programming at current community college locations. UWBA already tracks the financial health of clients fairly comprehensively and should consider the feasibility of complementing those financial metrics with academic metrics for student clients, such as term-to-term persistence. UWBA should also continue promote cross-campus sharing of how different colleges implement the SparkPoint program model, and draw out success factors and lessons, such as how to secure institutional buy-in for SparkPoint, how to increase the visibility and accessibility of the SparkPoint on campus, and how SparkPoint can be integrated with other student success programs, services, and resources. These lessons will be beneficial for all SparkPoint locations, whether they are well-established, fairly new, or still in early stages of planning.