



PERSIST
GUIDANCE TO GRADUATE



2023-2024
Annual Report
Celebrating Five Years

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LETTER FROM OUR EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

Friends,

In August 2019, Persist sent our very first text to a student. Using spreadsheets, willpower, and a healthy dose of start-up naivete, we began a journey with Nashville students that continues today—a journey to empower more MNPS graduates to earn their postsecondary degree or certificate.

Five years later, we've now worked with more than 4500 students, provided more than \$175,000 in emergency grants, and hosted three golf tournaments. The same belief and expertise that informed our first outreaches in 2019 still drives our work today. We've grown our team, honed our expertise, and partnered with practitioners from around the country in our quest to close equity gaps in college enrollment, persistence and completion for Nashville students.

It can be cliché to say none of this is possible without you, our supporters, but it couldn't be more true. In 2023 alone, your support ensured that 1637 students had a coach by their side through the FAFSA struggles this year, had someone to turn to when their confidence wavered, and knew just who to celebrate with when they picked up their cap and gown.

In 2023-2024, Persist proudly celebrated with 175 graduates. College success coaching is not filled with instant gratification or quick wins. However, as you'll see in the following pages, the smiles and pride on students' faces when they reach their goals and realize "they did it" will always provide us with the energy we need to keep making good on the promises we first made five years ago.

While we celebrate every student who has achieved their postsecondary aspirations, we know that more students who are still striving for theirs. Higher education systems are complex and can be unwelcoming for first-generation students. With your support, Persist coaches students through these challenges towards a successful postsecondary path. Thank you—together we can close equity gaps in college completion for Nashville students.

With gratitude,

Jennifer Hill
Executive Director



THE PERSIST STORY

In 2019, Scott Campbell and Kristen King, Persist Nashville's co-founders, became aware of the startling statistic that only 1 in 4 Metro Nashville Public Schools graduates was earning a college degree within six years of high school graduation. The 2019 Bridge to Completion report, released by the Nashville Public Education Foundation in collaboration with the Tennessee College Access and Success Network, also illustrated equity gaps among students enrolling, persisting and completing college.

As high school educators, Scott and Kristen knew that these statistics did not accurately reflect the ambitions and aptitude of the students they served. They envisioned an organization that could leverage technology to provide high-quality college success coaching to low-income students, first generation college students, and students of color. Persist was founded with the vision to double the number of MNPS graduates earning a college degree and with the mission to empower those graduates to earn their degree.

HOW DOES IT WORK?

Persist provides professional coaching to MNPS graduates for the first two years of their college journey—regardless of the type of institution they attend—to ensure that they are able to persist and complete their college degree.

“Utilizing text-enabled technology, coaches support students’ social-emotional needs, prompt them around campus-specific deadlines, and connect them to campus resources when barriers are encountered.”

The text-first approach allows coaches to build meaningful and trusting relationships with students through their preferred communication method, while simultaneously supporting a larger number of students than more traditional approaches.

Persist supports MNPS graduates through two programs: *College Enrollment Coaching* and *College Persistence Coaching*. Both programs are staffed by skilled professional coaches with extensive experience in both K-12 and higher education settings. *College Enrollment Coaching* works to address the “leakiest” part of the high school to postsecondary pipeline—the summer after high school graduation. With high school counselors on summer break and having not yet matriculated to college, students are expected to lean on personal networks for “college knowledge.” Persist fills that gap to ensure students complete the college enrollment process and successfully matriculate.

Once enrolled, *College Persistence Coaching* works with students during the first two years of their postsecondary journey. Through a combination of text-based coaching, workshops, and 1-1 meetings, coaches support students’ social-emotional needs, assist them in getting established within their campus communities, and ultimately persist from semester to semester towards degree completion.

Since 2019, Persist has served more than 4300 students along their postsecondary journey and its students have achieved an 87% college persistence rate with 175 Persist students having earned a degree or certificate.

PERSIST BY THE NUMBERS



4,300 students served



240 graduates



191 postsecondary institutions attended



55% of students commute



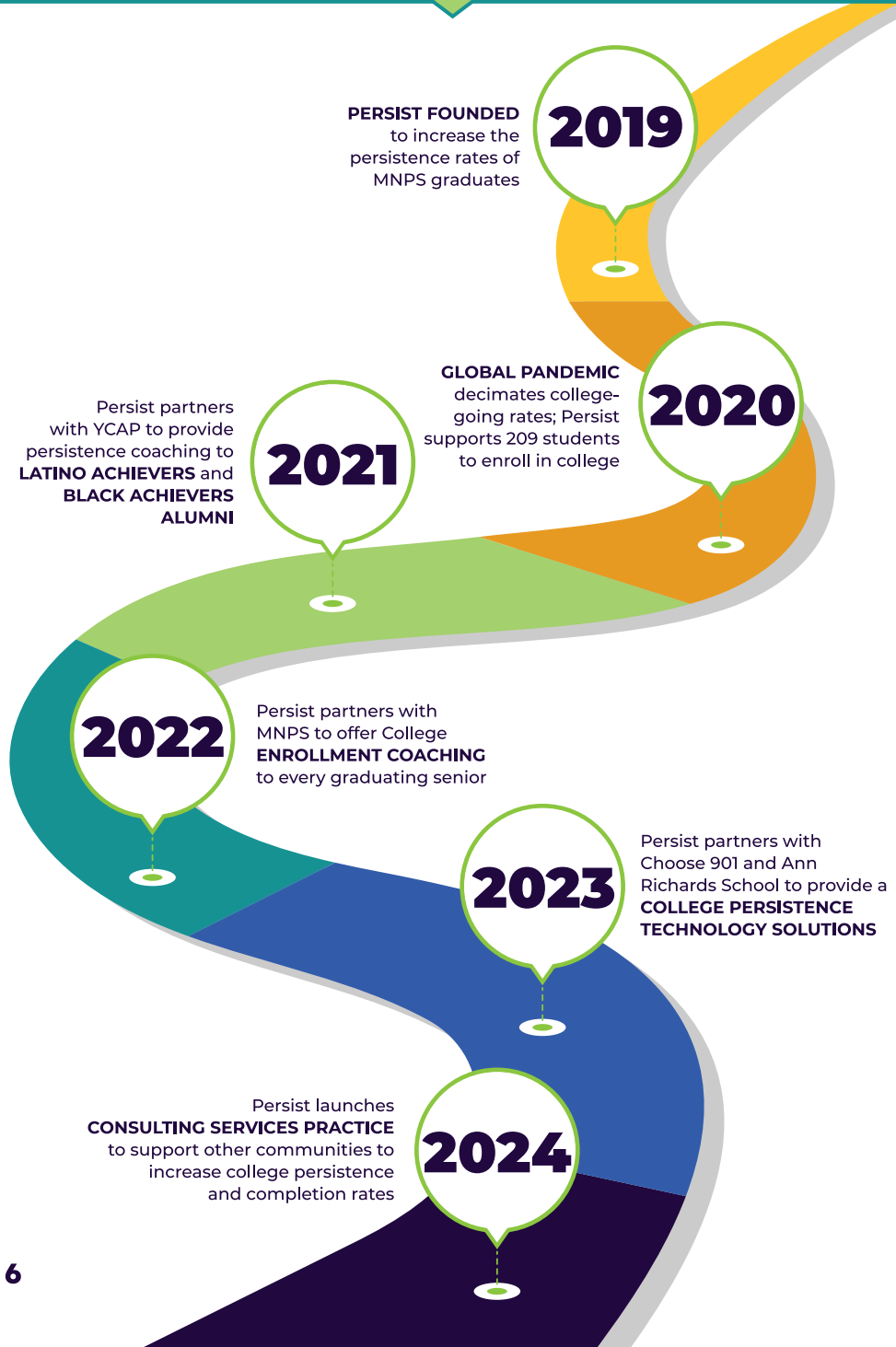
65% of students identify as first-generation college students



110,948 text messages sent in 2023



5 YEARS OF PERSISTENCE: A TIMELINE OF IMPACT



2024-2026 STRATEGIC GOALS LOOKING AHEAD



75% of Persist students attending a 4-year college or university will earn a college degree within six years of graduation.



50% of Persist students attending a 2-year college will earn a college degree within four years of graduation.



Persist is recognized as an “Employer of Choice” by team members and the Nashville community.



Persist is financially sustainable and investing in its future success.



Persist designs and builds a consulting practice that supports college degree completion for students around the county.



STUDENT STORIES



What would you say to a friend to get them to join Persist?

If I were to invite a friend to join Persist, I would share how the organization helped me persist and advance in college. Persist helped me build a strong community and network, where I met amazing fellow students and had opportunities to socialize, learn, and relax. The relationships I built are invaluable both personally and professionally. My college persistence coach guided me through college, life, and my career, offering advice, motivation, and access to their network. Persist also opened many professional doors, helping me find internships and providing support that benefits me even after graduation. I still have regular check-ins with Gabe Marrero, Persist's Director of Data and Technology, where we discuss goal setting, career advice, and personal development. Any student can benefit from joining Persist because it's an organization of caring individuals dedicated to students like us.

In what ways has Persist allowed you to experience success in college?

Persist has been key to my college success by connecting me with a supportive community and a network of industry professionals. Through Persist events and activities, I built relationships that offered guidance, opportunities, and friendships. The network and

opportunities helped me develop skills, gain real-world experience, and earn certifications. My coach and manager kept me focused and driven, significantly contributing to my academic achievements and overall college journey.

How has Persist prepared you to be successful after college?

Persist prepared me for post-college success by equipping me with essential skills and providing continuous support. The connections, internships, certifications, and job opportunities I accessed gave me practical experience and enhanced my professional development. Even after college, I still have regular calls with Gabe, who continues to support me in both my personal life and career. He guided me through securing my first full-time job, which Persist recommended. Persist's ongoing support and the strong network I've built have been crucial to my professional success.

-DAVID HUANG, *University of Tennessee graduate 2023 Bachelor's and 2024 Master's*

What would you say to a friend to persuade them to join Persist?

I would tell my friend to join Persist. It's not just about financial support; it provides emotional, physical, and mental support too! They function like a family and are always there for you. They'll help you discover your aspirations through

academic and life coaching. Persist has been a constant support for me since freshman year. From my initial excitement to navigating depression and feeling lost, Persist, especially Coach Megan, guided me through it all, encouraging me to persevere even when times were tough.

How has Persist prepared you for success after college?

Persist consistently hosts networking events, financial aid seminars, and partners with companies for internships and fellowships. They have prepared me for success by facilitating networking and helping me build connections through these events and partnerships. For instance, I secured an internship with Tennessee Orthopedic Alliance and developed a strong connection with Rob Simmons, the CEO. He allowed me to shadow him and attend meetings to understand hospital operations, which broadened my understanding of organizational dynamics and helped me explore different career paths and degrees.

What's Next? I am considering a Master's degree in Health Management or Public Health. Currently, I am a team lead manager at Walmart in Nashville, TN. As I graduate, I seek experience outside of retail and aim to transition into a corporate

STUDENT STORIES



setting, particularly in healthcare, non-profits, or government sectors. I am open to exploring opportunities to find the best fit. Ultimately, I aim to secure a position with the Tennessee Health Department to address housing crises, improve health insurance access, and enhance family justice services for low-income families and minorities. My goal is to use data and analytics to ensure everyone in need has access to proper healthcare and government services.

-MIRAM REZK, Belmont University senior majoring in Business Systems and Analytics

What would you say to a friend to get them to join Persist? Persist Nashville is dedicated to student success and improvement. Students who join have access to weekly coaching, professional development opportunities, and campus representatives who are readily available

sources of information at each student's respective campus. Joining Persist Nashville provides you with a community dedicated to your success and with the resources to push you throughout your college career.

In what ways has Persist allowed you to experience success in college? As a first-generation college student and a 2020 high school grad during the pandemic, I chose a prestigious university but had to take out loans. After my first semester, I realized financial stability was crucial and decided to transfer to MTSU. Unsure of the process, I reached out to Persist, starting with Scott and Kristen. Scott was vital in my successful transfer to MTSU and securing the MTSU Transfer Fellowship. I moved to MTSU as a second-year sophomore and graduated a year early, debt-free! Without Scott's dedication, I'm unsure where I would be today.

How has Persist prepared you to be successful after college?

Persist taught me the importance of persevering in challenging times. I routinely took advantage of the weekly coaching texts and was inspired to continue to work towards success by the encouraging messages I received. Additionally, Persist Nashville has a great network and loves to connect students with professional development opportunities. I recently took advantage of a part-time legal opportunity recommended to me by Persist Nashville and received the job. This position will allow me to get additional legal experience before beginning law school in the fall.

-DIMEND LITTLE, After graduating from MTSU in August 2023, Dimend became a Supply Chain Business Specialist at the Tennessee Valley Authority. She will attend the University of Tennessee College of Law in Knoxville, Tennessee this fall.



OUR SUPPORTERS

Persist Founders: \$100,000+



Care Foundation of America | Devine-Majors Foundations

Persist Leaders: \$25000+

Bill & Crissy Haslam Foundation
 Clark Family Foundation
 Clay Thompson
 Greg Hagood

Persist Partners: \$5000+

Alliance Berstein	Daniel & Hannah Stephenson	Ingram Charities	Ryan & Sarah Flury
Amazon	Don Cochran	Johnson Cooper	The Spark Foundation
Anne & Dan Toomey	Frank Majors	Microsoft	Stefan & Rachel Hubbard
Bridgestone Americas	Hardy Ross	Ned & Missy Michaels	Wayne Powers
The Caroline Smith Foundation		Pinnacle Financial Partners	

Persist Supporters: \$400-\$4999

800 Pound Gorilla	Christopher Kuzur	Jennifer Hill	Realty Group
Aegis Investments	Clint Smith	Jessica & Jonathan Pahl	Michael Hill
Aggie & Rob Riley	Crystal Churchwell	Joey Humke	Neal Lampley
Allen & Deborah King	Daniel Fisher	John & Leslie Ford	PFW
Amber & Eric Green	Dave Hanson	John Burtchell	Rhinodart
American Family Insurance	Donna & Joseph Pokowitz	Jon Rybka	Ross Markle
Amy McDaniel	Dr. Jane Siegel	Joshua & Susie Mullen	Sarah and Scott Campbell
Andy Faught	Equitable Trust Company	Joshua Ireland	Scholars Raise
Anne Marie & Rob Elliot	Eric & Ellie Osborne	Katie & Morgan Rehnberg	Scott Sims
Asurion	Evans and Victor Evans	Kevin & Jennifer Keeton	Stephen & Jamaica Zralek
Audra Meduri	Gary & Liz Cohen	The Kingston Group	Steven & Brenna Simmons
Brandon Schmidt	Greg Hermandorfer	Kirk & Amy Tanksley	Studio Bank
Brett Michaels	Gregory Johnson	Laurie Brown	Tennessee Orthopedic Alliance
Brian Camp	HCA Healthcare/ TriStar Health	Lee Barfield	Todd Figler
Brian Nock	Hunter Mobley	Leslie CPA & Consulting PLLC	Tom Davenport
CLA	Intevity	Lev & Eliana Hill	William & Ashley McEachern
Camel Express	Jake & Caroline Smith	Lewis & Katie Agnew	Woody Camp
Carwash	Jay Lurie	Lipscomb University	
Carole Peterson	Jefferson Bridge Capital	Madison Whittemore	
Christopher & Emily Kennedy		The McDaniel Luxury	

College Access and Success Program Partnerships

Ann Richards School	DCPS Persists	Intrepid College Prep
City Leadership	Denver School of Science and Technology	LEAD Public Schools
		RePublic Charter Schools



THE 3RD ANNUAL
PERSISTER

CHARITY GOLF AND NETWORKING EVENT

OCTOBER 3RD & 4TH

THURS: Top Golf Kickoff, 5p

FRI: Ted Rhodes Persister Golf Scramble, 7:30a



REGISTRATION

TOP GOLF KICKOFF

\$125

GOLF SCRAMBLE

\$140

COMBO & GROUP
TICKETING AVAILABLE

PERSIST NASHVILLE IS A 501C3 NONPROFIT THAT HAS SERVED OVER 4,500 MNPS GRADUATES OVER THE PAST 5 YEARS, HELPING STUDENTS ENROLL AND PERSIST IN COLLEGE.

register | persistcoaching.org/persister



Giving support
when things
looked
impossible!

-LILIANA CASTRO



www.persistnashville.org

LEARN MORE

