

## LONGER TERM IMPACT OF MOVING THE NEEDLE

This research brief examines the longer-term impact of participating in Credo’s Moving the Needle (MTN) on first-time, full-time (FTFT) student retention to the second year. The twelve schools that participated in and completed<sup>1</sup> MTN since its creation in 2011 serve as the basis for this analysis. The schools are from across the United States and come from the independent, not-for-profit sphere of higher education. The schools have a median undergraduate enrollment of 1955<sup>2</sup> and a median starting FTFT retention rate of 66.5%.<sup>3</sup> Data for this analysis were extracted from the US Department of Education’s *Integrated Postsecondary Educational Data System* (IPEDS), which currently has data through its 2020 collection year available for public analysis.

### Data Analysis

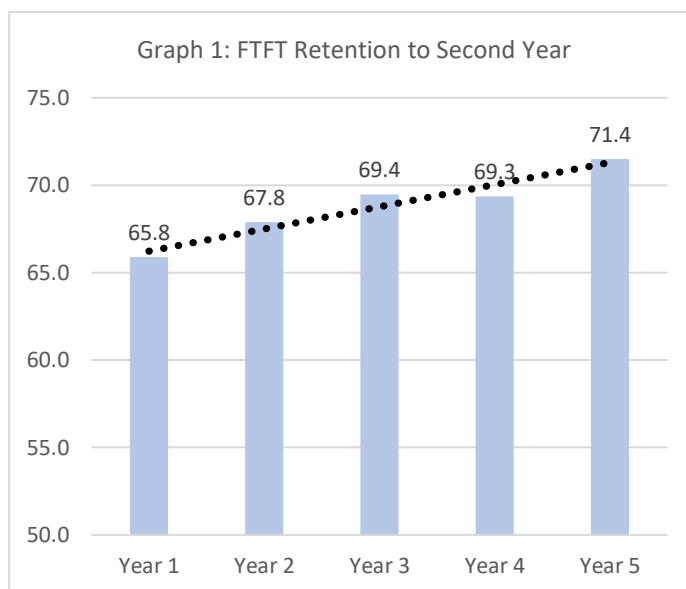
Data for this research brief were analyzed using the mean of the institutions’ FTFT retention rate from their start (first year of engagement) and the subsequent four years to provide a five-year picture of the impact of MTN participation. All 12 schools have data for years 1-3, 10 for year 4, and nine for year 5 in this study. Those schools with less than five years of data were included in the study to incorporate more recent participants in MTN.

To examine the level of impact by institutional characteristics, FTFT retention was disaggregated at the medians for undergraduate enrollment and starting retention. The median was used to ensure that each data point represented a minimum of four participating schools.

### Results

Graph 1 shows the mean FTFT retention rate of MTN participants based on their starting years (Year 1) and the associated trendline.<sup>4</sup> The data indicate a steady upward trend in FTFT retention for at four years following the introduction of MTN on the campus. The retention trend (+1.3%) remained relatively constant throughout the period.

Table 1 (See next page) provides disaggregated results based on institution’s undergraduate enrollment and starting retention rate in year 1. The data indicate that regardless of enrollment or starting FTFT retention rate, institutions



<sup>1</sup> An additional 15 schools are currently participating in MTN but not included because there are insufficient data points to track retention beyond their current engagement.

<sup>2</sup> Based on fall 2015 enrollment.

<sup>3</sup> Based on the first fall of their engagement with MTN.

<sup>4</sup> Trend: Retention = 65.0% + 1.27\*Years

participating in MTN experience increases in their retention. Schools classified as having lower initial retention start at 57.3% but by the fifth year experienced an increase to 64.8% (+1.9% annually). Schools starting with a higher rate (above 66.5%) also experience an increase from 74.3% to 79.8% although the change was not as great (+1.4% annually).

There is a strong correlation between enrollment and starting FTFT retention with 10 of the 12 schools considered either “smaller and lower retention” OR “larger and higher retention”. Given the strong overlap, it is not surprising that patterns based on enrollment or starting retention are similar. Smaller schools started with an initial FTFT retention of 58.1% that rose to 64.2% by the fifth year with strong upward trend (+1.5% annually). Larger schools started at 73.5% in year 1 but rose to 80.5% by the year 5, reflecting an annual increase of 1.8%.

Table 1: FTFT Retention to Second Year by Undergraduate Enrollment and Starting Retention Rate						
	Year 1	Year 2	Year 3	Year 4	Year 5	Annual Change <sup>5</sup>
Overall	65.8 n=12	67.8 n=12	69.4 n=12	69.3 n=10	71.4 n=9	+1.4%
Starting Retention						
66.5% or less	57.3 n=6	59.2 n=6	62.0 n=6	62.4 n=5	64.8 n=5	+1.9%
Above 66.5%	74.3 n=6	76.5 n=6	76.8 n=6	76.2 n=5	79.8 n=4	+1.4%
Undergraduate Enrollment						
1955 or less	58.1 n=6	60.0 n=6	62.3 n=6	63.8 n=5	64.2 n=4	+1.5%
More than 1955	73.5 n=6	75.6 n=6	76.5 n=6	74.8 n=5	80.5 n=5	+1.8%

## Implications

- Participating institutions experienced increases in their annual FTFT student retention for at least five years after beginning MTN.<sup>6</sup>
- Over the five years, average FTFT retention increased from 65.8% to 71.4% (+5.6%) resulting in an annual increase of 1.4%.
- FTFT retention increases regardless on the institution’s starting retention.
- Schools with lower initial retention experienced greater absolute (+7.5%) and annualized (+1.9%) increases most likely linked to their lower start point.
- Smaller schools’ FTFT retention increased from 58% to 64% by the fifth year after starting MTN.
- Larger schools’ FTFT retention increased from 74% to 81% by the fifth year after starting MTN.

<sup>5</sup> Annual change computed as the difference between Year 5 and Year 1 divided by the four years of change.

<sup>6</sup> Preliminary analysis of years 6 and 7 suggest that annual increases continue during that period.