

# Strategic Plan 2019-2023

## Executive Summary



Breakthrough Central Texas creates a path to postsecondary success for students who aspire to become the first in their families to earn a college degree. Established in 2002 with 41 students in its inaugural cohort, Breakthrough now serves 1,700 students across Central Texas. The organization makes a commitment – to provide the right support at the right time – to help students overcome the systemic barriers and find college success. There are many indications that the approach is working. Independent studies have confirmed that Breakthrough students are significantly more likely to graduate high school on time, twice as likely to enroll in college, and seven times more likely to graduate from college than their peers.

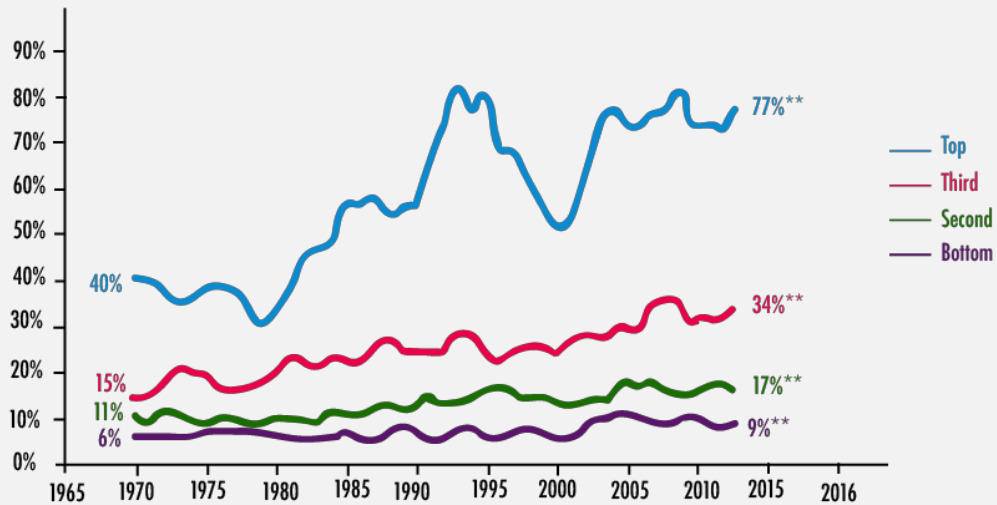
However, there is much more work to be done in the region. Despite the success of Breakthrough students, less than eight percent of all students from low-income communities across Austin are graduating from college each year, a tremendous loss of opportunity and potential. Breakthrough recognizes that it is poised to take a leadership role and support more students to college success. The 2019-2024 Strategic Plan describes a path to scale that is sustainable and impactful. Over the next five years, the organization will move closer to its vision that all Central Texas children have the opportunity to realize their potential through the life-changing power of a college degree.

### NEW RESEARCH FINDINGS

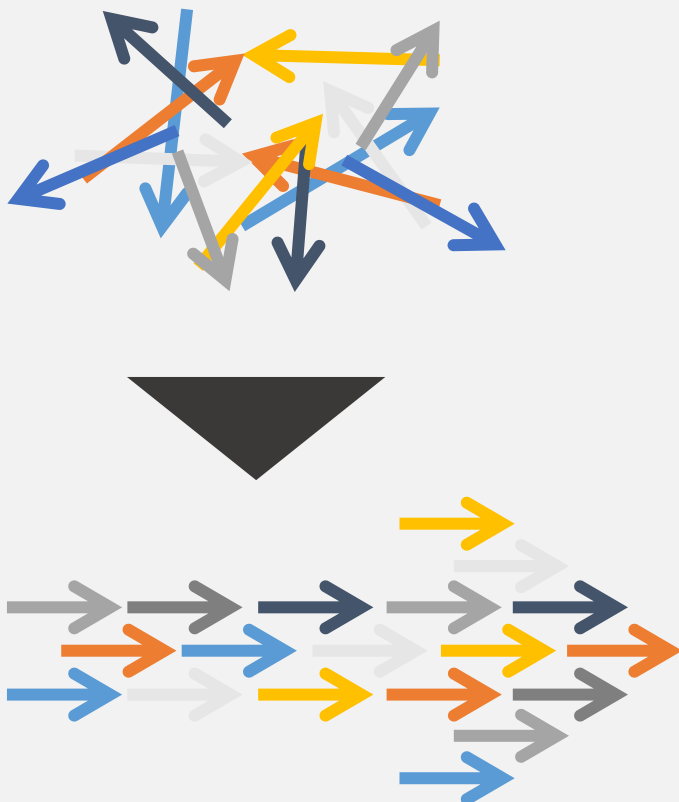
Breakthrough engaged with strategy consulting firm FSG in an intensive research effort, analyzing regional and national data on the inequity of the postsecondary completion that exists for different students, as well as the research on solutions to that challenge. This research uncovered five key findings.

1. Central Texas has the lowest college completion rate in the state (8%) for students from low-income communities (Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board).
2. Nationally, college degree attainment rates have risen dramatically for all students but those in the bottom two income quartiles. While college degree attainment rates have gone up over time, they have only done so for individuals with the greatest financial means. (Figure 1)
3. Nationwide, inequity in college access and success is a “complex” problem; strictly technical solutions, such as mass texting services or online test preparatory models, have failed to create impact at scale. Effective approaches to complex problems address root causes to shift the underlying conditions. (Figure 2)
4. Breakthrough’s 12- year core model is highly effective but also intensive and faces a challenging path to rapid scale. If Breakthrough is to expand its reach significantly, it must experiment with different approaches to supporting students.
5. Breakthrough’s most critical competency is building and maintaining trusting relationships with students, families, and education institutions. The success of Breakthrough’s approach is largely built around interventions provided in the context of a trusting relationship, which is an adaptive solution appropriate to a complex problem.

**Figure 1**  
**U.S. Bachelor's Degree attainment by Age 24 by family's income quartile**



**Figure 2**



**Social problems and their solutions:**

- Arise from **interaction of many organizations and individuals** within larger system
- Address **multiple intervention points** rather than relying on a single lever to produce change
- Use **mutually reinforcing** interventions
- Are highly **specific to context**

## A SUSTAINABLE PATH TO IMPACT: THREE STRATEGIES

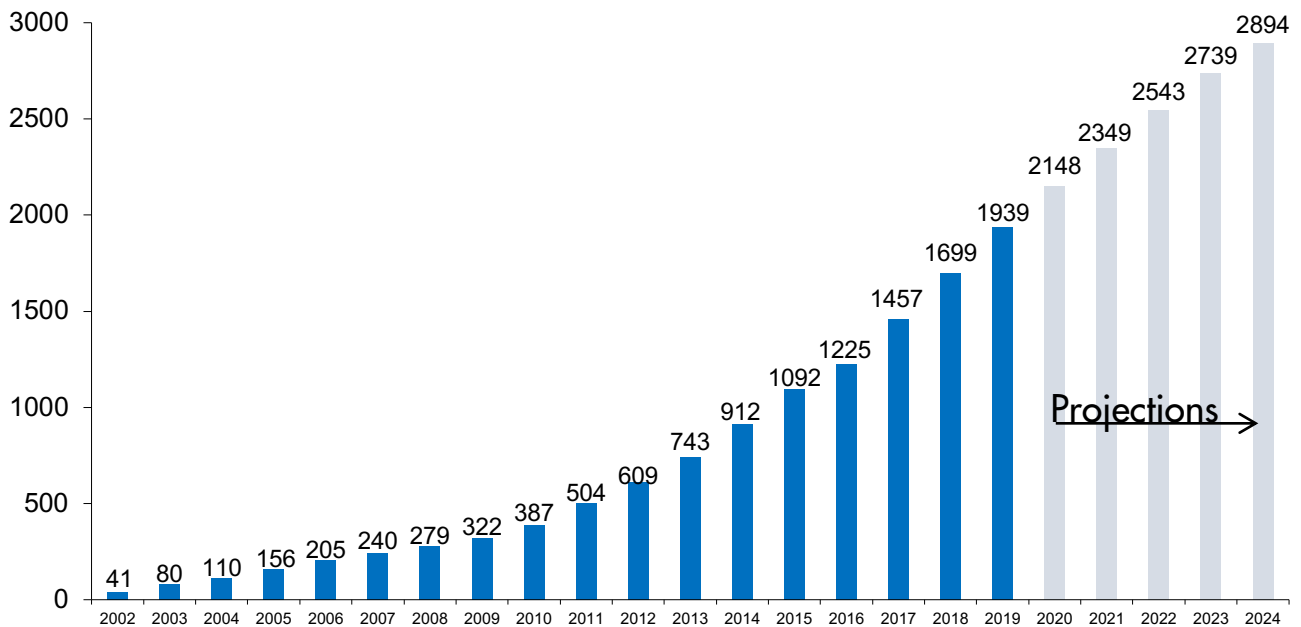
Breakthrough's primary growth challenge is to find feasible, sustainable strategies that keep relationships at the center of our work. We initially sought to address this challenge by continuing to grow the twelve-year core model. However, given potential cost constraints we sought out settings where trusting relationships could be cultivated to provide high touch support for students. Strikingly, it was clear from conversations with Breakthrough's school partners how much trust and capital the organization has as a solution provider. An opportunity exists to enhance human resources available in school settings with the boost of additional services from Breakthrough's staff. In concert with more responsive policies, we can catalyze deeper impact across the region and activate the untapped potential of our students.

The research led us to three strategies to stretch toward Breakthrough's north-star goal to double the number of Central Texas students from low-income communities who graduate from college. First, it will build out its core 12-year model to greatly increase the number of students who attain college success. Second, Breakthrough will launch a school-based model combining direct advising to students with capacity building services at their school to improve college-going rates for every student. Lastly, the organization will create a policy advocacy practice to remove barriers that exist for marginalized students in the region.

### Strategy 1: Build Out of Breakthrough's Core Model

In the next five years, Breakthrough will increase the number of students served by its twelve-year, core model by 70%, from approximately 1,700 students to more than 2,900.

### Breakthrough Core Model Student Enrollment



To build out the core model well, Breakthrough is prioritizing four objectives:

1. **Optimize programs and services for a significantly greater number of students and families** - Breakthrough will greatly increase the number of students and families it serves, in particular students at the secondary and postsecondary levels. While doing so, it will improve its programs and services by seeking opportunities for greater efficiency, effectiveness, inclusivity, and equity of access.
2. **Develop structures and systems for a much larger organization** - As Breakthrough's core model increases in size and impact, the amount of resources required will also increase. To support the expansion of programs, Breakthrough will develop new structures and systems to improve communication, decision making, data tracking, evaluation, external collaboration, and use of technology.
3. **Create an organization where people at all levels of the organization thrive** - People are the greatest resources and assets of Breakthrough's core model. In order to serve more students with a better service and with stronger systems, Breakthrough will invest in the staff members, teaching fellows, AmeriCorps members, instructional coaches, trustees, and volunteers who work to provide a path to college completion for students.
4. **Generate sustainable funding and a larger community of support** - The ambitious growth of Breakthrough's core model requires additional financial resources, volunteers, and partners. We will raise awareness of the organization while securing a larger and more diversified funding base.

## **Strategy 2: Extended Impact Strategy: The School-Based Model**

Breakthrough will pilot a school-based model combining direct advising to students with capacity building services to improve college-going rates for every student at the school. Breakthrough will work closely with the school to design the direct services offered to students, as well as the structural and cultural changes that will allow those services to flourish.

1. **Services** - Deliver college access and success services from no later than 11th grade through at least the first year of college. College access and success services will be delivered by Breakthrough advisors directly to students through 1:1 advising and cohort-based programming.
2. **Structures** - Support schools to create processes and infrastructure (e.g., data systems, curriculum integrated with college options). Capacity building services will be delivered by Breakthrough staff to administrators, counselors, and teachers.
3. **Culture** - Support schools to cultivate a strong college-going culture and develop competencies to support first-generation college students. Create an environment that enables college access services and structures to thrive. Capacity building services will be delivered by Breakthrough staff to administrators, counselors, and teachers.

In the next five years, Breakthrough anticipates serving an additional 1,400 students through the whole school model, with the goal of ultimately doubling the number of students from participating campus(es) who go on to graduate from college.

### **Strategy 3: Extended Impact Strategy: Policy Advocacy**

Breakthrough will launch a policy advocacy practice to extend its influence beyond what is possible through the existing direct service model or the new school-based model. Affecting policies at the local and state level that can enable the success of first-generation students will have wide-ranging impact on the landscape for postsecondary access and completion. The organization is well-positioned to work towards creating structural change through shifting policies, practices, and resource flows that prevent first-generation and low-income students from attaining postsecondary success.

### **CONCLUSION: LOOKING TOWARD THE FUTURE**

Breakthrough Central Texas has the potential to expand its impact through more solidly grounding the success of its core model and broadening its reach to many more students and families through the extended impact approaches. Having thoroughly examined the current configuration of needs and resources in our region and thought deeply about Breakthrough's own assets, strengths, and lessons learned, this dual approach represents the best path to animating the organization's guiding vision and attaining its north star: to double the number of first-generation college graduates in Central Texas each year. The work outlined in this plan will require great commitment and significant investment from its staff, board, and donors. The results will repay the investment many times over: in students' lives transformed, in schools more strongly supporting students to success, and in communities turned into places of opportunity for all.