

Student Support (Re)defined

Equitable
Integrated
Cost Effective

What is Student Support (Re)defined?

Student Support (Re)defined aims to understand how community colleges can feasibly deliver support both inside and outside the classroom to improve success for *all* students.

What are the six factors for success?

Through a review of leading studies on effective support practices and interviews with both practitioners and researchers, the RP Group identified “six success factors” that contribute to students’ success. These factors subsequently drove our inquiry into what *students* find critical to their achievement. We list them below in the order of importance according to students participating in our study.

DIRECTED: Students have a goal and know how to achieve it

FOCUSED: Students stay on track—keeping their eyes on the prize

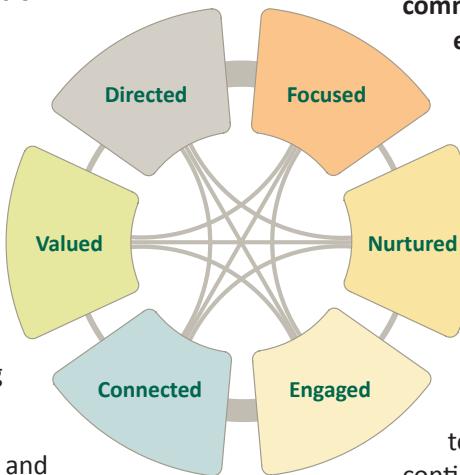
NURTURED: Students feel somebody wants and helps them to succeed

ENGAGED: Students actively participate in class and extracurricular activities

CONNECTED: Students feel like they are part of the college community

VALUED: Students’ skills, talents, abilities and experiences are recognized; they have opportunities to contribute on campus and feel their contributions are appreciated

For a full report of student perspectives on these six success factors, please visit: www.rpgroup.org/sites/default/files/StudentPerspectivesResearchReportJan2013.pdf



What have we discovered?

In phone surveys and focus groups, the RP Group asked nearly **900 students from 13 California community colleges** what supports their educational success, paying special attention to the factors African Americans and Latinos cite as important to their achievement. Five distinct themes emerged:

1. Colleges need to foster students’ motivation.

While this research recognizes students as key agents in their own educational success, it also highlights that even those who arrive to college motivated need their drive continuously stoked and augmented.

Findings suggest that undecided and first-generation students in particular may need additional support to find, hone and maintain their motivation.

2. Colleges must teach students how to succeed in the postsecondary environment. These findings also imply that colleges must show students how to translate their motivation into success. Students need assistance building the specific skills and knowledge necessary to navigate and thrive in their community college, particularly those who are new to higher education or who arrive without a particular goal in mind.

3. Colleges need to structure support to ensure all six success factors are addressed. Participants (a) confirmed the six success factors were important to their progress and achievement and (b) indicated that the factors interact with each other in various ways. Students noted how

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I feel that whenever someone wants me to succeed and is supportive of me, then I am motivated to work harder and be successful. The motivation they provide for me is vital to me pushing myself and being focused, engaged and directed towards success.

— Focus Group Participant

experiencing one factor often led to realizing another, or how two factors were inextricably linked to one another. Since students do not experience these factors in isolation, colleges need to consider ways to help students attain multiple factors at once.

4. Colleges need to provide comprehensive support to historically underserved students to prevent the equity gap from growing.

Comprehensive support is more likely to address the multiple needs—academic, financial, social and personal—identified by African-American, Latino and first-generation participants in this study. These students were more likely to cite a lack of academic support, the absence of someone at the college who cared about their success and insufficient financial assistance as reasons not to continue their education. Colleges must find a way to provide comprehensive support to these student groups—at scale. If they do not, the equity gap will likely grow.

5. Everyone has a role to play in supporting student achievement, but faculty must take the lead.

Participants noted how everyone on a campus can affect their achievement. Their responses underscored the importance of colleges promoting a culture where all individuals across the institution understand their role in advancing students' success, no matter their position at the college. Yet, students most commonly recognized instructional faculty as having the greatest potential impact on their educational journeys and suggested multiple ways teachers can support their progress both inside and outside class.

For a detailed discussion of these themes, please visit: www.rpgroup.org/sites/default/files/StudentPerspectivesResearchBriefJan2013.pdf

A teacher's engaging when they're not just writing on a board or showing you a PowerPoint, but really talking to the class, when they make the eye contact and ask questions. Don't just give us the answer. Talk to the class. Engage people. Make them answer questions. Pick on somebody a little bit. Make a joke here and there. And, connect us to outside resources and extra tutoring.

— Focus Group Participant

What will Student Support (Re)defined do next?

A key goal of Student Support (Re)defined is engaging practitioners with the study's findings and providing structures for exploring and acting on these results. Activities include:

COLLEGE CONVENINGS: In spring 2013, we convened the 12 colleges that participated in the student phone survey to help practitioner leaders examine study findings, explore how their college presently approaches student support and identify ideas for related institutional change. We will continue connecting with these colleges in the coming year to determine how they are using the research.

PRESENTATIONS: We are also continuously sharing findings through multiple venues throughout the state, from individual college meetings to association conferences and system-level discussions. In 2012-2013, the RP Group conducted 22 presentations reaching hundreds of faculty, support professionals, administrators and policy makers.

RESOURCES: We are currently developing an action guide to assist colleges in (a) using study findings to reflect on their own student support policies and practices, (b) considering how to address changes mandated through the Student Success Act and (c) developing campus plans for strengthening support. In 2013-14, we will also profile a series of colleges and practitioners that have pursued change initiatives to improve student support.

For more information . . .

Find more information and all project resources at: www.rpgroup.org/projects/student-support or contact Dr. Darla Cooper, Director of Research and Evaluation, dcooper@rpgroup.org.