Student Support (Re)defined

Equitable
Integrated
Cost Effective

Action Guide

Exploring Ways to Strengthen Student Support at Your College
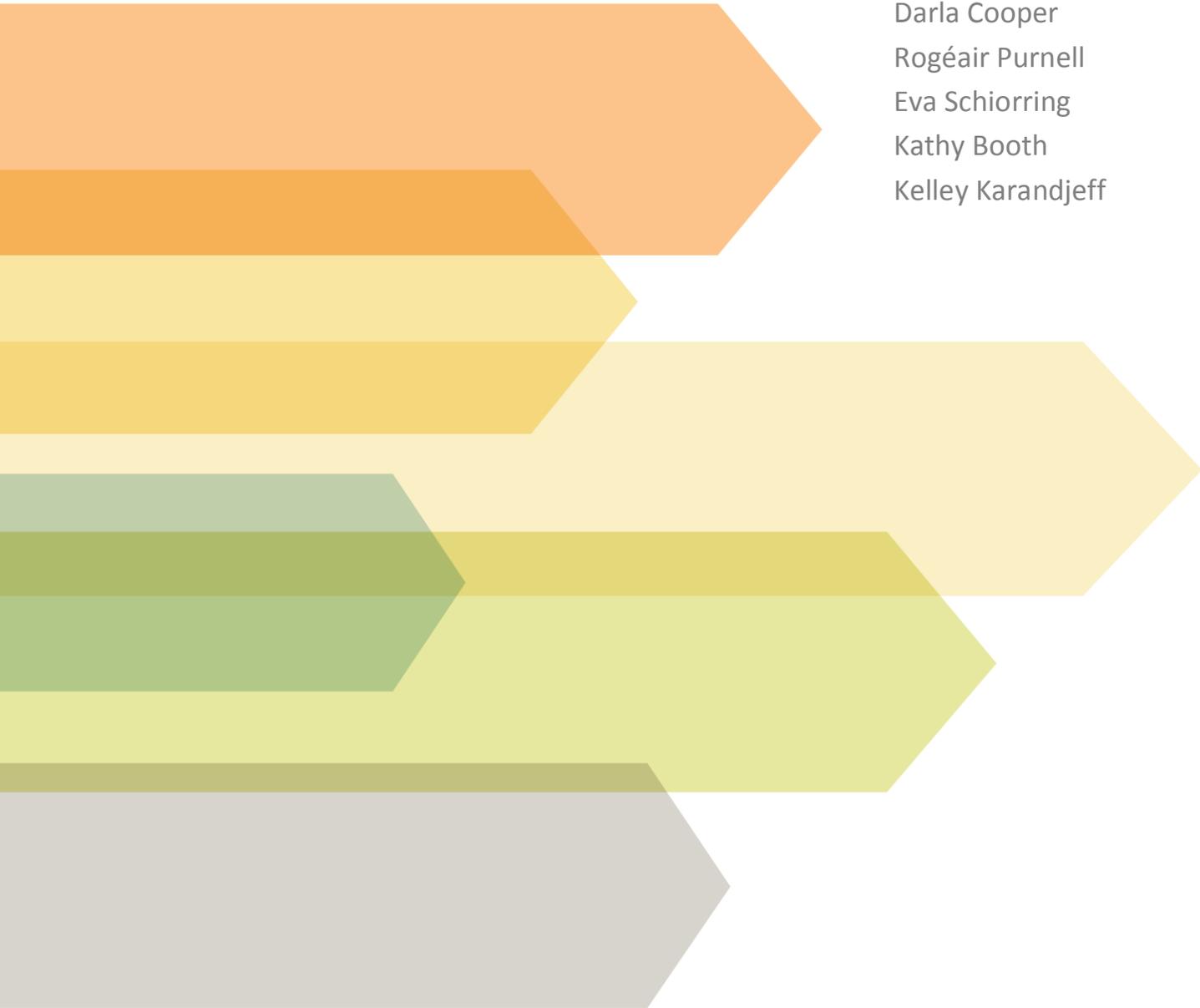
Darla Cooper

Rogéair Purnell

Eva Schiorring

Kathy Booth

Kelley Karandjeff

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What Is an Action Guide?

An action guide is designed to assist practitioners who are currently facilitating an existing change process at their college or considering a new reform effort. It provides tangible resources and ideas for working with colleagues to review and explore evidence and plan for informed action. This particular action guide aims to aid colleges working to help more learners achieve their educational goals—particularly through the provision of intentional, integrated support that reaches students both inside and outside the classroom, from entry to exit.

From using this guide, you will be able to:

- Gain a basic understanding of the Student Support (Re)defined research and key findings

- Engage with other practitioners in structured discussions about critical student support needs on your campus

- Produce a specific action plan that is focused on enhancing support and improving completion and that is reflective of the unique priorities, needs, opportunities and limitations of your local context

Introduction

Community colleges across the country are working to increase completion and improve student success. The RP Group developed this action guide to provide practitioners like you with a tool for (1) taking a fresh look at the support your institution provides to students—both inside *and* outside of the classroom—and (2) identifying and planning for improvements that help more students achieve their educational goals.

In California, several efforts are afoot to advance achievement, chiefly the Student Success Act. This new legislation is prompting colleges to consider significant changes in how support services are delivered and how they structure clear pathways through their institutions from entry to exit. Chances are you and your colleagues are spending many hours thinking about and discussing support, who provides what services and how these efforts are connected across college programs and functions. But how do students view and experience this assistance and which supports do they believe are most important to their success?

The RP Group set out to examine this question in a study called Student Support (Re)defined. This action guide is based on answers we collected from almost 900 California community college students in the first phase of this investigation. It suggests ways to integrate these findings into student-focused conversations about how to increase student success at your college, including how to address changes in Title 5 triggered by the Student Support Act or how to utilize Basic Skills funding. It offers one way to examine the supports your college currently provides and how they may be strengthened to reflect students' own suggestions about what they need to succeed. We aim for this resource to complement existing planning processes as well as aid those who are attempting to initiate a new change effort.

Readers' Guide

This action guide begins with a brief overview of Student Support (Re)defined, the "six success factors" that served as a framework for our student perspectives research and a high-level discussion of what makes this study different from other explorations of support you may have already seen. We then demonstrate how to use this study to aid change efforts at your college. We lay out a three-phased process for engaging in a dialog about the study's findings, exploring their meaning in your own local context and determining what action to take to advance student support on your campus. We conclude with a set of appendices that contain resources, activities and tools to aid readers in enacting this process at your institution.

What Is Student Support (Re)defined?

Student Support (Re)defined is a multi-year study (2011–2014) designed to understand how community colleges can feasibly deliver support both inside and outside the classroom to improve success for _all_ students. The RP Group purposefully designed this study to bring student perspectives to the growing body of research on how to increase completion through strategic support. In Year 1 (2011–2012), we asked students what _they_ think supports their educational success, paying special attention to the factors African Americans and Latinos cite as important to their achievement. We engaged 13 colleges that represent the broad geographic and demographic diversity of the California community college system, reaching 785 students through phone surveys and connecting with another 102 participants through focus groups on these campuses.[1]

Another 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. In January 2013, we widely disseminated a full report of the study's key findings and a brief highlighting key themes emerging from the research. In spring 2013, we convened 12 of the project's colleges to help practitioner leaders examine study findings, explore their own campuses' approach to support and identify ideas for related institutional change. We are continuously sharing the research through multiple venues throughout the state, from individual college meetings to association conferences to system-level discussions. We are also generating a range of resources designed to promote reflection and action at the college level. In addition to developing this action guide, we are profiling practices designed improve student support in alignment with the study's findings.

What Are the "Six Success Factors"?

To begin this work, the RP Group conducted a literature review and engaged in preliminary discussions with community college practitioners and researchers to (1) place our study in the context of existing research and current initiatives to strengthen student support and (2) inform the development of our own project's activities. When reviewed collectively, the

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[1] Survey participants included a mix of respondents including "current students", "completers" and "leavers." "Current students" are those who enrolled in the fall 2011 term, "completers" are those who had obtained a certificate or degree between fall 2010 and spring 2011 and "leavers" are those who were enrolled in spring 2011, but not enrolled in fall 2011 and had not earned a certificate or degree prior to fall 2011. For a full description of the study's methodology, including how we selected participating colleges, what criteria we used to create the student sample and how we performed the data analyses, please visit: http://www.rpgroup.org/content/research-framework.

literature and research on support indicates that students are more likely to succeed when "six success factors" are present:
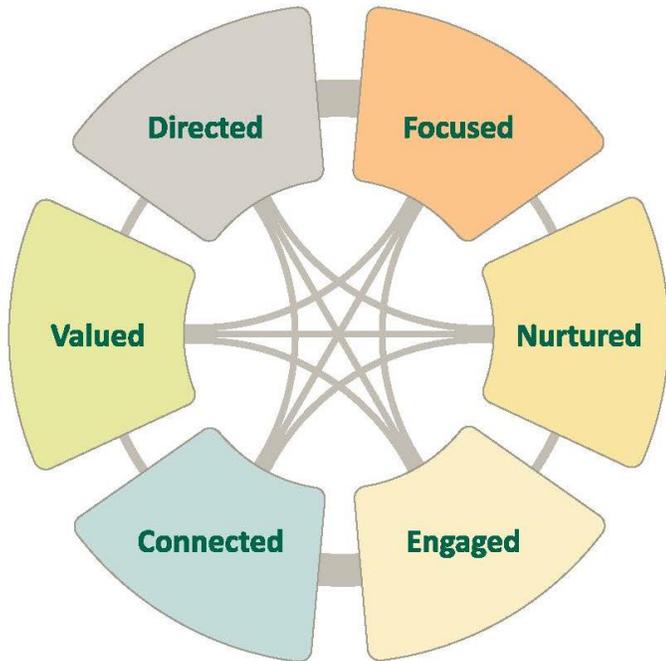
- **Directed**: students have a goal and know how to achieve it

- **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 extracurriculars

- **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

We used these six factors as the foundation for our study, asking students about the role that each factor played in their success. Interview and focus group results confirmed that *all* six factors have an important role to play in promoting students' achievement and that attention to each one of them is more likely to ensure learners reach their goals. Moreover, students often reported that they did not experience the factors in isolation. As an illustration, students who have a clear goal often feel more connected to the college; similarly, students who have opportunities to be nurtured and feel that their success matters to others will almost certainly feel focused, engaged and connected.

By framing our own inquiry with students based on the six success factors, the RP Group was able to discover how students see and experience support. Through this process, we began to identify opportunities for colleges to take action and further advance students' success—drawing on both student recommendations and our own observations. We additionally learned that the six success factor framework can be used to engage practitioners in both guided conversations about our study's findings and in an examination of how student support can be strengthened both inside and outside the classroom. This document will outline for you three phases for launching and guiding such a process of inquiry and action at your college.

What Makes Student Support (Re)defined Different?

Student Support (Re)defined is different because its findings challenge educators to see something familiar in a completely new light, something that most of us think we know very well. Ask one of your colleagues what kind of support is offered to students at your college. Chances are that person will identify counseling, financial aid, or perhaps mention a particular program such as EOPS, Puente or Umoja. These examples represent how those of us who work in colleges have come to think of student support—as services that "live" in particular institutional functions and that are the primary responsibility of people with titles such as counselor or specialist. However, students do not experience support the same way, as depicted in *Figure 1. Different Perspectives on Student Support* .

Where faculty, staff and administrators see divisions, departments, functions and job descriptions, students see *people*. Our research uncovered that, for students, support providers include faculty members who are interested in what they think and ask them a lot of questions, as well as staff who help them find their way to the financial aid office. They include administrators who advocate on their behalf, counselors who share information about which courses to prioritize and fellow students in their study groups who helped them stay on track with their course assignments. In short, students have a very broad definition of support and, in their minds, everyone on campus is—or can potentially become—part of a system that helps them reach their goals. The student quotes below, all from the Student Support (Re)defined focus group sessions, illustrate this point:

> *I started to feel valued when I helped out with clubs. I'm big into clubs on campus and I inspire other students to go and run for office. To me, that's being valued, being a resource for someone else. . . .*
>
> —Student Focus Group Participant

> *The first time I felt actually engaged is when the professor would select students to . . . say something that's on [their] mind, which allowed them to actually think about the topic that is being discussed in class or giving the students a chance to . . . speak out. . . . In my math class, we're able to go up and do problems and get worksheets and help out other students. And most math classes . . . that I've taken on campus, it's more like here's the lesson, everyone be quiet. . . . This is more like a social class and I've never actually engaged in math. I'm not confident in math. So yes, I'm actually learning a lot.*
>
> —Student Focus Group Participant

The first day I came to campus to register, I was lost and didn't know where to go. I unintentionally ended up in DSPS office and there's a lady that sits in front. . . . She was very helpful to me. She actually told me exactly what I have to do. . . . She even sat down with me on the computer to help me finish my registration. And she has been very helpful since then. I really feel that . . . when somebody cares about you, it makes you more responsible. Because she's been taking care of me, I think that I have to do my best. Whenever she talks about me she says, "This is the student that I helped and he's so successful."

—Student Focus Group Participant

As these quotes begin to suggest, there are both micro and macro ways to help students experience the six success factors. In addition to highlighting actions that individuals and programs can take immediately to help improve students' achievement, the study findings point to the need for faculty and instructional administrators, counselors and other student services professionals, staff and administrative leaders and students themselves to move beyond individual efforts and to collaboratively explore and develop new structures that lead to *systemic* change. The research also encourages practitioners to expand institutional conversations so they not only explore how to replicate specific support structures—such as learning communities or student success courses—but also examine locally-grown efforts that could help students achieve all six success factors at scale.

Figure 1. Different Perspectives on Student Support

What we see...

Student Services

Instruction

Special Populations Programs
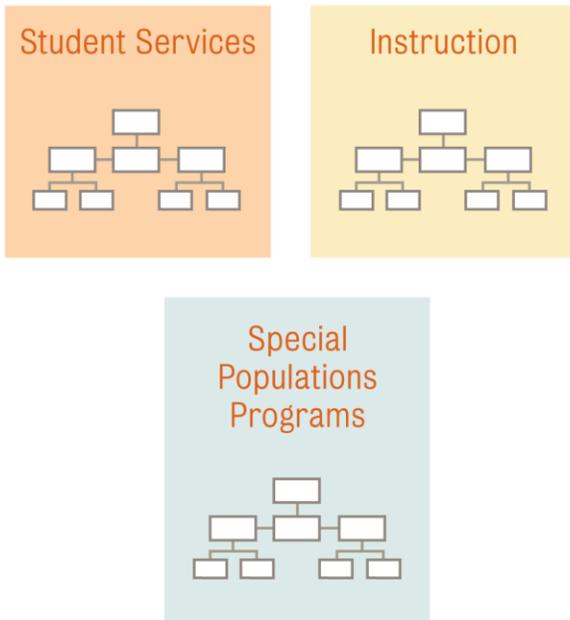
What the student experiences...

the teacher who believes in me

the dean who helped me get into Math 1A

student

the counselor who helped me with my ed plan

the students I study with

the patient tutor

the nice woman in financial aid

the man in the cafeteria who asks how i'm doing
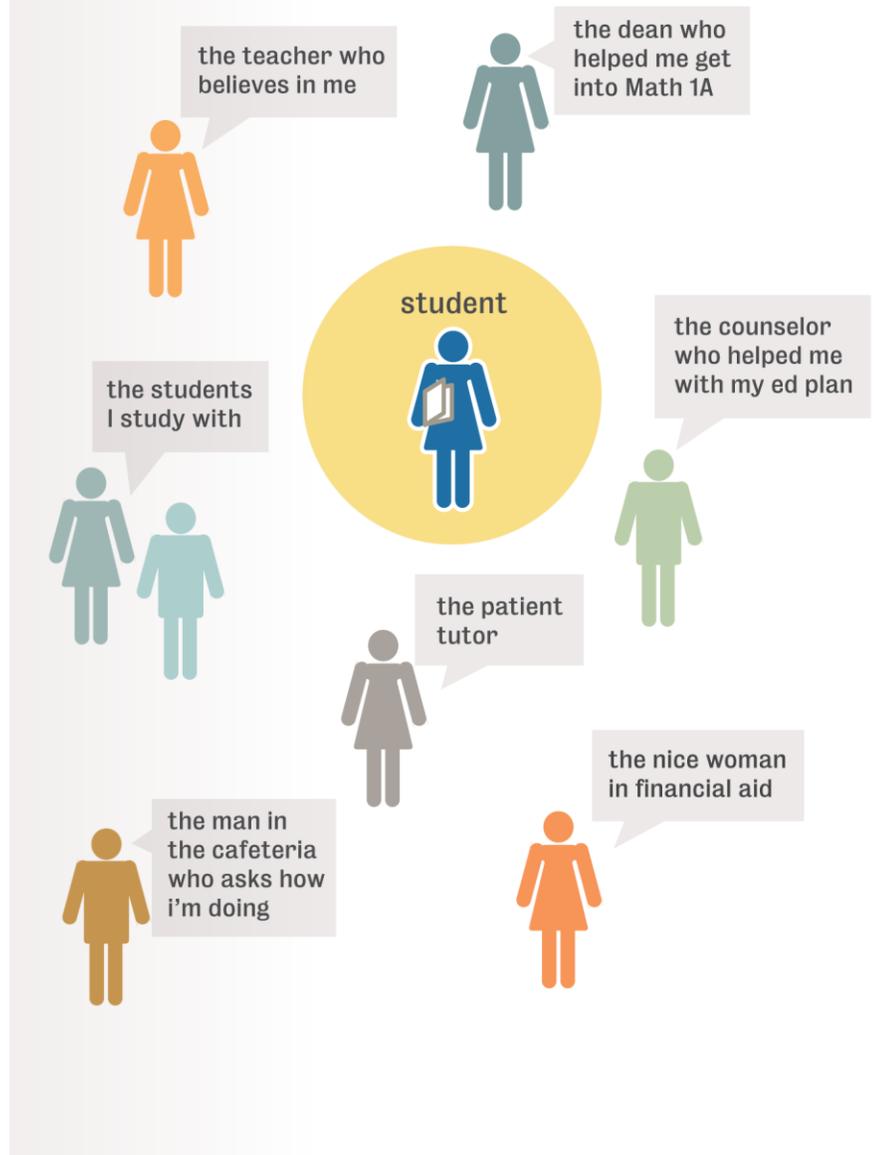
How Can I Use Student Support (Re)defined Findings to Facilitate Action on My Campus?

This guide offers an inquiry process and resources organized around the six success factors to help campus leaders engage their colleagues in discussions to (1) examine support approaches currently in place, (2) outline what more could be done to increase student achievement and (3) prioritize a plan of action. By considering the questions and completing the activities highlighted throughout this guide, a small group of leaders will have a framework and related tools to plan for and engage their colleagues in efforts to strengthen student support.

Who Can Use the Guide?

Depending on the culture of a campus, we recognize that change can start with one person—an instructor or counselor interested in improving their own students' achievement; a department chair, program director or dean working to enhance the impact their area has on students; a researcher who sees in the data an opportunity for improvement; or a top college leader with global concerns about student success and institutional effectiveness. At the same time, the process we offer is inherently collaborative. Regardless of your vantage point or college experience, we recommend that individuals interested in using this action guide join forces with a few other key colleagues to form a small leadership team (for more information, see p. 11, *Phase 1: Preparation*). This leadership team may be an existing group of colleagues working on student success issues on your campus or a new collaboration based on a set of common needs and interests. We particularly recommend partnering with campus leaders who can help ensure this process is linked with institutional planning and resource allocation and/or other change initiatives already underway. We also suggest including those who connect with students at different points along their educational journey than you do and who can bring a different perspective on the issues of student support and success.

How Can the Guide Help You?

Examining the Student Support (Re)defined research will be most impactful when the conversation is tied to a broader institutional dialog. We anticipate that many readers might use this guide to reinforce and complement existing institutional planning processes and/or student success initiatives already in place at your college. While we recommend reviewing the guide in full, you might want to pick and choose the pieces that will be most useful to your existing local efforts. If your college is starting from scratch, you may want to take a more holistic approach to using the inquiry process, activities and resources offered in the guide.

What Does the Guide Include?

We divide the inquiry process in this guide into the following three phases:

Phase 1: Preparation. In this phase, a core group of leaders will become familiar with the evidence, which will enable them to serve as persuasive and credible spokespeople for students, identify the assistance needed to reach your goals and map out specific steps in the inquiry process.

Phase 2: Engagement. In this phase, the core leaders will identify a cross-functional team of colleagues and involve them in a series of focused conversations. In these discussions, the team will explore (1) the current state of support on your campus, using input and suggestions from participants in the Student Support (Re)defined study and operationalized in the six success factors and (2) ways to strengthen support at your college.

Phase 3: Action. In this phase, the team will decide which changes to pursue and embark upon a planning process that identifies the discrete action steps needed to achieve the desired change. This phase also includes determining how to integrate this action planning into other planning structures and initiatives on your campus.

Each of these phases is described in detail below. You can also find optional activities and tools in pull-out boxes that run alongside the discussion of each phase and in the appendices. Feel free to use these resources as needed to support your planning efforts. While these phases are laid out in a linear fashion, the work will most likely proceed through an iterative process, particularly as you work to bring in additional perspectives, which may cause you to refine your approach.

Preparation

This stage focuses on:

- Forming a core group of leaders who will guide this inquiry process

- Invite a team to explore and act on findings

- Collectively familiarizing yourselves with the Student Support (Re)defined research

Form a Core Group of Leaders

One way to encourage broad participation in the inquiry process is to identify a team of three to four advocates. You may already have a leadership group in place on your campus that can be readily activated to direct this process. However, if you are building a group of core leaders from scratch, we recommend including individuals who represent different aspects of students' experience at your college. Leaders might include instructional faculty; someone representing student services such as a counselor or program director; an administrator such as a dean in instruction or student services; a researcher; and/or a vice president of instruction or student services. You might also consider who has the trust of faculty and student services providers, as well as who has the capacity to drive this conversation forward so that it will result in action.

We recommend this group of core leaders take responsibility for the following over the course of the action planning process:

- Becoming well-versed in the Student Support (Re)defined findings with particular focus on the students' suggestions and insights

- Assessing existing student success initiatives or planning processes on your campus that might serve as a practical venue to anchor this inquiry process

- Identifying how existing efforts could be leveraged to engage a team of administrators, faculty, staff and students to examine and improve student support activities

- Scheduling and facilitating regular meetings of the group

- Developing and monitoring a work plan that both guides your efforts and measures if your intended action is achieved

Invite a Team to Explore and Act on Findings

Once you have identified a core leadership group, form a larger engagement team by reaching out to others on your campus interested in examining ways your institution might improve support delivery. You might consider the following when inviting others to join you in this process:

● Linking to a pre-existing group on your campus (e.g., representatives from a student success committee)

● Including a range of stakeholders and leaders, including faculty (e.g., academic senate and/or committee chairs); vice presidents, deans, directors, and department chairs; counselors and other student services staff; institutional researchers; staff and student leaders (e.g., classified senate, associated students, student trustees); and those who might be interested in developing leadership around the issue of student support inside and outside the classroom

● Ensuring participants represent diverse areas of the college, including general education, career and technical education, basic skills, student services and administrative services

When performing this outreach, consider outlining the specific commitment you are asking these individuals to fulfill and what you generally hope to accomplish through this effort. To do so, we recommend that core leaders specifically review the Engagement and Action phases of the guide in order to plan how many meetings you would like to hold. If you are leveraging an existing group or venue to conduct this inquiry, discuss the most appropriate way to fold the Engagement and Action phases into existing agendas. If you are forming a new group, schedule your first meeting.

Please note that the entire inquiry process will most likely require more than one meeting. See *Appendix A: Sample Email to Invite Team* (p. 20) for draft language to use when contacting potential participants.

Familiarize Yourselves with the Student Support (Re)defined Research

Once you have identified who will lead and take part in this effort and before your first meeting with the entire team, it will be helpful for all involved to review the three primary Student Support (Re)defined resources that are the foundation of this inquiry process.

Research Brief and Report: Ensure that the individuals who will be engaged in this process are familiar with the study's student perspectives research and results. To this end, we recommend all team members read both the study's brief and full report, found at:

http://www.rpgroup.org/content/reports-presentations-and-resources. Since the content presented in each of these documents is distinct and separate, we strongly recommend reviewing both resources.

Webinar: Next, we recommend viewing the webinar that presents highlights from the study. This webinar was designed so it could be used by a group to help facilitate a conversation around the findings, with discussion questions placed at key points throughout the presentation. You will find instructions for accessing this resource and a link to the accompanying handout of the PowerPoint slides at http://www.rpgroup.org/content/reports-presentations-and-resources.

Finally, consider looking into other resources and research on your own campus that can provide insight into how students experience support at your college and what factors facilitate or impede their success. Institutional researchers may be particularly helpful in linking you to these resources and helping you draw connections between your local context and the Student Support (Re)defined results.

Engagement

This stage focuses on:

- Coalescing your team

- Establishing a common definition for student support

- Selecting success factors and exploring them in your own college's context

Coalesce Your Team

Since your team will likely identify ways to change your college's approach to supporting students—an activity that can be both exciting and daunting—a strong sense of community and trust within the group is essential. This rapport will allow you to talk more readily about difficult issues, take bigger risks and support each other through the implementation process. If you are linking this action planning to an existing group, you may already have this critical foundation in place. If you have formed a new team to take on this effort, we recommend taking the time to get to know each member of the group.

We also recommend that team members have a common understanding of the work you are collectively undertaking and the context in which this work will take place. If you are using this guide as part of an existing student success initiative or planning process, you might consider articulating to your group how you will use this guide to strengthen your current effort. If you are forming a new team, we suggest that leaders establish a clear scope of work by being explicit about what you intend to accomplish, how and by when. Team members can then help ground this scope of work by identifying opportunities and challenges that may impact your collaboration and how you can best work together (see *Activity 1: Breaking the Ice*).

Activity 1:
Breaking the Ice

If you are seeking an ice breaker for your first team meeting, consider asking all team members about their motivation for participating in this work and the expertise they bring to the process. Or, you could outline a specific plan for what you want to accomplish and ask the group to identify key challenges, opportunities and allies.

Activity 2:
Defining Student Support as a Team

One way to encourage reflection on the concept of student support is to ask everyone to share their definition of the concept, addressing who provides it, where and how it is provided, what it looks like, and who receives it or should receive it. This exercise can be done either in a round robin format or with anonymous answers that can then be read aloud to the group.

Activity 3:
Relating Your Own Work to the Six Success Factors

Team members may find it easier to apply the six success factors if they can relate them to their own experience.

For example, you could put six pieces of poster paper around the room, each listing one of the success factors and its definition (see page 5, *What are the "six success factors?"*). Ask participants to go around the room and individually write examples of what they do to help students related to each factor. Examples could include what they do personally as a practitioner or what the college does as a whole. Then, review the results as a group.

Alternatively, facilitate a group conversation one factor at a time beginning with the definition and asking attendees to share what they do to help students related to each factor.

Activity 4:
Selecting a Success Factor for Exploration

To select or prioritize which factors you will explore, you could consider the following questions as a group:

- How well does your college already help students experience each of these factors? Generally, what policies, practices or programs exist? In which factors do students seem to need the most support? The least?

- What new initiatives or proposed budget or workload changes are on the horizon that may impact student support, keeping change efforts like the Student Success Act or the Basic Skills Initiative in mind?

- Which factor(s) might inspire the greatest interest and/or get the most traction for change among your colleagues?

Establish a Common Definition for Student Support

Since student support is so closely associated with student services divisions and specific campus programs, your efforts might benefit from a common understanding of the term "student support." Specifically, given the emphasis that students in our study placed on support provided by instructional faculty, your group might start by thinking about ways to integrate support inside as well as outside the classroom. You might anchor this discussion by asking team members to reflect on and share their own understanding of and experience with providing support to learners (see p. 14 for *Activity 2: Defining Student Support* and/or *Activity 3: Relating Your Own Work to the Six Success Factors*).

Select and Explore the Success Factors in Your College's Context

Once you have established a common context for discussing student support at your college, we suggest identifying a few of the six success factors to explore in greater depth. Several considerations may go into selecting these factors (see *Activity 4: Selecting a Success Factor for Exploration*).

While the Student Support (Re)defined research indicates that attention to all six success factors is critical to students' achievement, study participants also prioritized some factors over others and indicated that particular factors have stronger links with each other. Moreover, students shared a number of ideas for how colleges might address multiple factors at one time (see p. 16 for *How do the factors relate to one another?*). Keeping these student perspectives in mind might aid in your selection.

Narrowing how many factors you are examining may be particularly helpful if your

How Do the Factors Relate to One Another?

While the Student Support (Re)defined study underscored the value of having each of the six success factors present in a student's experience, participants placed higher priority on certain factors and made connections between specific drivers of success. For example, students made direct linkages between having direction and being focused—the two factors that were most highly ranked. Nurtured followed in order of importance and students frequently described how having someone care about their success led them to experience the other factors. Engaged and connected came next in order of priority and were strongly linked to each other. Students often reported that being engaged led them to feel more connected, and conversely, that developing a connection with a particular person, course, or program encouraged them to become more engaged. Finally, students recognized that adding value as a member of their campus and/or local community through both formal and informal channels, and being recognized for those contributions, was important to their achievement.

Students also frequently cited how different actions helped them experience multiple factors at once and contributed to their success. These approaches ranged from simple gestures made by faculty in the classroom to more comprehensive institutional strategies. Here is a sampling of suggestions made by students participating in the study for how to address multiple factors at the same time:

- Recognize students' potential and encourage them to use their skills and abilities to help others (engaged, nurtured, valued)

- Support college policy that encourages mandatory enrollment in student success courses and/or educational planning that specifically addresses how to make and track progress toward goal achievement (directed, focused, engaged, connected)

- Widely promote opportunities for students to get involved in clubs, extracurricular activities and campus leadership (engaged, connected, valued)

- Ask students for their feedback and opinions about their experience in both formal and informal ways (engaged, valued)

college is already engaged in initiatives that address one or more of these factors. You may want to use this action guide to help advance those efforts. Alternatively, you may want to use this guide to address one or two factors for which little activity has occurred.

Picking a limited number of factors may also help to align efforts with expectations that community colleges increase completion in very specific ways. In California, the Student Success Act now requires that students go through orientation, identify education and career goals and pursue a course of study—activities that have obvious links to the directed, focused and engaged factors. At the same time, colleges are likely to address the remaining factors—nurtured, connected and valued—in *how* they implement these changes. For example, an institution could pursue the implementation of an orientation experience that both helps students find direction and motivation while at the same time intentionally enables them to forge a strong and nurturing peer and instructor network (thereby enhancing their sense of connection to and their value at the college).

When your team has chosen or prioritized the success factor(s), we suggest turning your attention to *Appendix B: Success Factor Discussion Guides* (see p. 21). Here you will find a detailed resource for exploring each success factor. Each discussion guide presents (1) key findings from the study related to a specific factor; (2) discussion prompts for the examination of current policies and practices at your college designed to support students in relation to this particular factor; and (3) student ideas for action drawn from the Student Support (Re)defined study. Each of these sections is paired with a series of questions designed to elicit team members' reactions and ideas. We intend for each discussion guide to help teams identify two to three key activities that could be implemented to strengthen student support on your campus, in relationship to the selected factor(s) of focus.

Action

This stage includes:

- Deciding what change to pursue

- Planning for action

- Reflecting on your process

Decide What Change to Pursue

At this point in your process, your team is likely ready to focus on a specific area for action. As you determine which changes to implement, you might include the following types of questions in your discussion:

- What is the change you want to make and how do you get there from here? What is most realistic? What is required (e.g., personnel, funding, space)?

- Who will this change serve (i.e., which part of the student population and how many students)?

- What is the scale and scope of implementation? Will this change need to occur at an institutional, program/department or individual level?

- What is the intended outcome? What will improve as a result?

- What success factors would you address by implementing this strategy?

Consider using *Appendix C: Opportunity Matrix* (see p. 45) to help weigh these ideas by exploring and comparing the feasibility of each change being considered.

Plan for Action

After deciding what change(s) to pursue, it can be helpful to develop a concrete plan for action. Here is a list of questions that your team could consider as you begin to outline and develop a plan for change:

- What do we hope to happen as a result of making this change?

- How will we know that the change has had its intended impact?

- What other areas, initiatives or individuals at the college need to be included in or consulted about this change?

- Who are the collaborators needed to implement these strategies?

- Who will lead the various activities and tasks?

- What is the timeline for instituting this change?

- What available training/professional development could be used to support this effort?

- What additional training/professional development is needed?

- What available resources could be used to support this effort?

- What additional resources are needed?

- What indicators would you track to monitor progress toward your goal?

- How do we plan to institutionalize this change?

Appendix D: Sample Action Plan Template (see p. 46) offers a framework for addressing issues related to design and development, implementation, research and evaluation, coordination, communication and dissemination.

Reflect on the Process

Once you have started implementing your action plan, it can be worthwhile to reflect on your team's process and what you have learned. Whether you find yourselves at a different point than originally intended or are well on your way toward meeting your stated goals, you will likely have learned many lessons throughout this process. We invite you to set aside times throughout the implementation phase to think about the following questions, both individually and as a group:

- What is working well with our team and with this process? What is not? What would make our collaboration and process work better in future iterations of this work or new endeavors?

- What have we been able to accomplish that we did not necessarily intend or expect to achieve? What more do we have to accomplish?

- Who else needs to be involved in future efforts? What other efforts or initiatives on campus should we either make aware of our work and/or involve in the next round of discussion and planning?

Let Us Know What You Think!

As you use the tools and resources provided in this guide**, please consider providing feedback to the RP Group by completing the survey at https://www.surveymonkey.com/s/ActionGuideFeedback or sending your feedback via email to the project director, Dr. Darla Cooper at dcooper@rpgroup.org.** Your insights and suggestions will be very important in shaping how we can refine and improve our future efforts to engage practitioners with our research and provide practical guidance that can ultimately lead to action. We are particularly interested in knowing:

1. Who participated in this inquiry process on your campus?

2. How long did the inquiry process take, start to finish?

3. How useful was the guide and the tools in helping you launch and coordinate efforts to examine and improve student support on your campus?

4. What additional information and resources would have been or would be useful to you?

5. What were you able to accomplish as a result of using the guide?

6. What key obstacles and challenges did you face?

7. In hindsight, what would you keep the same? What would you do differently?

8. If you were unable to make it through the entire inquiry process, why not?

9. Would you recommend this action guide to others who are considering a similar process?

10. What else would you like to share about your experience?

Appendix A

Sample Email to Invite Team

The sample email below offers you draft language to use when inviting colleagues to join your engagement team. Areas for customization are bracketed and highlighted in yellow.

Dear colleagues,

[College name] is embarking on an exploration of how to effectively support our students–both inside and outside the classroom – in realizing their educational goals. We are inviting a diverse group of leaders from across the campus to participate in a series of conversations to examine this issue. These conversations will be guided by a framework of "six success factors" outlined by the Research and Planning Group for California Community Colleges' (RP Group) Student Support (Re)defined study.

Student Support (Re)defined is a multi-year study that aims to articulate how community colleges can deliver student support in feasible manner with the goals of narrowing the achievement gap for Latino and African-American students and enabling more learners to complete certificates, degrees and transfer. This study, which involved 13 California community colleges, brings student perspectives to the growing body of research on how to increase completion through strategic support. A copy of the brief highlighting key messages gleaned from this research is attached for your review and consideration. For more information about this project, visit http://www.rpgroup.org/projects/student-support.

Our goal is to meet by [date] to form a working committee of six to ten people to help launch and manage efforts to improve student support at [college name]. Please contact [person, email, phone number] by [day, date] to indicate your availability and interest. [Insert any relevant local context such as existing efforts or initiatives related to this work]. [Include next steps]

Please let me know if you can join us in this effort to ensure success for all [college name] students.

In partnership,

[Name, title]

Appendix B

Discussion Guides for Six Success Factors

The following appendix provides a discussion guide for each success factor.
These guides will help you:

- Review the Student Support (Re)defined findings for each factor

- Discuss how these findings fit within your local context, including what practices and policies your college already implements as related to each factor

- Learn what actions Student Support (Re)defined participants suggest to help their success

- Brainstorm your own ideas for change

Use this appendix as part of *Phase 2: Engagement – Select and Explore the Success Factor in Your College's Context* (p. 14).

Success Factor Discussion Guide:

Directed

Definitions

From perspective of the student:

- Students have a goal and know how to achieve it

From perspective of practitioners:

- Helping students clarify their aspirations, select an educational focus they perceive as meaningful and create a plan that moves them from enrollment to goal achievement

The Special Relationship between Directed and Focused

When discussing what contributed to their success, students prioritized and made inextricable links between having a specific educational goal and plan (directed) and staying motivated to achieve that goal (focused). Many participants indicated that having a goal helped them remain motivated while others stated that staying focused on school helped them clarify a direction and establish a specific outcome over time. While students provided unique insights into each factor, many of their perspectives also underscore the interconnectedness of these two factors.

Highlights from Student Perspectives Research

- Students most frequently rated "directed" as the primary factor driving their achievement and often attributed their success to having a specific goal and taking action.

- Over three quarters (79%) of survey respondents stated that making a connection between their success in college and their life goals was very important to their own progress.

- A large majority of survey respondents reported that they either decided on their educational goal before coming to a community college (58%) or within their first year of enrollment (27%).

> *I think being focused goes hand in hand with having a goal. If you don't have a goal, you're not going to be focused.*
> —Focus Group Participant

- Students also emphasized they need:

    o Support—both in the form of tools and people—that helps them establish an end-goal, identify what courses they need to take and allows them to track their progress toward achieving their educational goals

    o Colleges to be more proactive in reaching out to students upon entry and helping them establish a direction

    o Faculty to take an active role in helping them find direction

    o Counselors and faculty to support them with both goal selection and ed plan development and tracking

> *I came here for liberal arts and then I got offered to take several human resources and business classes. I was doing well in these classes and just going along and the professor asked me, "What are you here for? What are you doing?" I said, "Just having fun and stuff." He said, "You really need to focus on something." So it was the instructor that helped me choose a direction.*
> —Focus Group Participant

- Students suggested that undecided and first-generation students may need for colleges to be more intentional in how support services – particularly those designed to help them be more directed – are designed to ensure that these services are attracting and effectively serving those students who need this type of support the most.

- Students also emphasized the importance of students taking initiative, seeking out information that helps them identify their educational and career goals and checking multiple sources to ensure this information is accurate.

Discussion questions (choose *one* to answer):

1. Do you believe these findings reflect the students at your college?
   If yes, how? If not, why not?

2. Which of these findings resonate most with you and your work with students?

3. What additional questions do these findings raise for you as you consider strengthening student support on your campus?

4. What research could you perform at the local level to better understand how directed your own students feel and how you can help them fully realize this factor?

Your College's Current Practice

Keeping these Student Support (Re)defined findings in mind, explore how your college is currently helping students develop direction. Developing direction includes assisting students in clarifying their aspirations, identifying an educational focus and developing a plan that moves them from enrollment to achievement of their goal.

Discussion questions
(choose _one_ to answer):

1. How does your college help students find direction—both inside and outside the classroom?

2. When, where and how are students provided with specific information about how to develop an educational plan? How is that plan revised as needed?

3. What different support approaches and strategies are provided for students with a clear goal in mind versus those who are undecided?

4. What resources and tools do faculty, counselors and other student services professionals have in order to incorporate activities at the course level that help students develop direction?

5. In what ways do faculty regularly incorporate activities that help students see the connection between their education and their long-term goals?

> _Some people just don't know how to start. I didn't … I'm the first in my family to go [to college]. I didn't know how to apply … it was easy but there's a fear, a fear about going somewhere and having no guidance. And that's a big issue, when new students come through the door to see a counselor for the first semester, that's scary. And if a counselor scoffs at you, that right there just breaks your college education, just breaks it for a good year, a good semester. That's why people drop out and why they do badly._
>
> —Focus Group Participant

Student Suggestions for Action

Now, review the following student suggestions for ways different college practitioners can help learners establish direction. These ideas come directly from students; therefore many critical policy and practice suggestions may be missing.

- Help students form a goal by providing discipline-specific guidance and advising as part of the structure of your classes (faculty)

- Based on their goals, provide students with a realistic sense of the time they are likely to spend at the institution; explain that most students spend more than two years and help them

understand the important role their community college experience will play in their educational journey (counselors)

- Integrate career counseling and job considerations into academic advising (counselors, faculty)

- Seek out first-generation and undeclared students to provide specialized assistance (counselors, faculty, administrators)

- Connect as many students as possible to special programs like EOPS, DSPS and home-grown support initiatives that help them identify a direction early (faculty, counselors, staff, administrators)

Discussion questions (choose *one* to answer):

1. What are your initial reactions to the students' suggestions?

2. When you review these suggestions from students, which practices seem most important? Most actionable?

3. What opportunities and challenges do you see to being responsive to the students' suggestions?

4. Given your college's available funding, in what ways could students' suggestions be addressed?

5. How do these suggestions relate to other success factors (e.g., focused, engaged) your college is hoping to address?

6. In what ways can these student suggestions inform how your college responds to the requirements of the Student Success Act, specifically those related to mandatory orientation, assessment and educational planning?

Ideas for Change:

Finally, based on your discussion of these student findings and suggestions for action, identify one to three specific change ideas designed to help more students and/or critical populations find direction at your institution. Ideas might include a new or revised institutional policy, a new college-wide practice, a program-level initiative, a cross-functional effort, a research project, or an inter-segmental partnership. Record these ideas and prepare to use them in the Action phase (p. 17).

Success Factor Discussion Guide:

Focused

Definitions

From perspective of the student:

- Students stay on track—keeping their eyes on the prize

From perspective of practitioners:

- Fostering students' motivation and helping them develop the skills needed to achieve their goals

The Special Relationship between Directed and Focused

When discussing what contributed to their success, students prioritized and made inextricable links between having a specific educational goal and plan (directed) and staying motivated to achieve that goal (focused). Many participants indicated that having a goal helped them remain motivated while others stated that staying focused on school helped them clarify a direction and establish a specific outcome over time. While students provided unique insights into each factor, many of their perspectives also underscore the interconnectedness of these two factors.

Highlights from Student Perspectives Research

- When asked which of the six factors was most important to their achievement, the largest percentage of survey respondents (40%) cited being focused.

- When asked about what motivates them to attend their classes, participants rated several reasons as very important including the desire to pass the class and wanting to get a good grade in the class. When asked why they might miss a class, survey participants most commonly cited as very important the need to care for family followed by the need for work.

> *I find it helpful to see my counselor every semester and several times a semester…. When you talk through your plan it's a good reminder and they motivate you if you're lacking in any area.*
>
> —Focus Group Participant

- While students acknowledged that their own intrinsic drive is important to their progress and achievement, they also emphasized that there are many opportunities for faculty, counselors and support professionals, college leaders and staff to take action and engender students' motivation and movement toward their goals.

- African-American and Latino students indicated that their persistence was particularly impacted by finances.

- Students under 20 or over the age of 44 said it was important to their decision to continue or complete their education that the presence of their friends at the college served as a significant motivator.

Discussion questions
(choose *one* to answer):

1. Do you believe these findings reflect the students at your college? If yes, how? If not, why not?

2. Which of these findings resonate most with you and your work with students?

3. What additional questions do these findings raise for you as you consider strengthening student support on your campus?

4. What research could you perform at the local level to better understand how directed your own students feel and how you can help them fully realize this factor?

> *On my college website, they have a "degree works" system where I can go and check all the classes I've taken. And I keep looking at it when I'm a little down. I think, "Oh, I'm almost there." So, it's kind of a big motivator. I see my grades and what I've accomplished and it lifts my spirits.*
> —Focus Group Participant

Your College's Current Practice

Keeping these Student Support (Re)defined findings in mind, explore how your college is currently helping students stay focused, including helping students to maintain their motivation and develop the skills needed to achieve their goals.

Discussion questions (choose *one* to answer):

1. On your campus, what are some of the specific ways that administrators, faculty and staff help students stay motivated to realize their academic goals?

2. When are students most likely to become less motivated and what is being done to help them remain focused?

3. How are students being mobilized to help their peers become and stay motivated?

4. What structures are in place to help students monitor and track their progress toward their goals?

5. Are there policies, practices and/or interactions the college has with students that may be negatively impacting students' motivation?

Student Suggestions for Action

Now, review the following student suggestions for ways different college practitioners can help learners stay focused. These ideas come directly from students; therefore many critical policy and practice suggestions may be missing.

- Provide regular, constructive feedback on students' performance and progress (faculty, counselors)

- Connect as many students as possible to special programs like EOPS, DSPS and home-grown support initiatives that help them receive ongoing guidance for reaching their goals (faculty, counselors, administrators, staff)

- Provide mechanisms for students to regularly review their ed plans and academic progress, either online or at a counseling session (administrators, counselors)

- Promote support resources to both students and faculty (administrators, counselors)

Discussion questions (choose _one_ to answer):

1. What are your initial reactions to the students' suggestions?

2. When you review these suggestions from students, which practices seem most important? Most actionable?

3. What opportunities and challenges do you see to being responsive to the students' suggestions?

4. Given your college's available funding, in what ways could students' suggestions be addressed?

5. How do these suggestions relate to other success factors (e.g., directed, engaged) your college is hoping to address?

6. In what ways can these student suggestions inform how your college responds to the requirements of the Student Success Act, specifically those related to mandatory orientation, assessment and educational planning?

Ideas for Change:

Finally, based on your discussion of these student findings and suggestions for action, identify one to three specific change ideas designed to help more students and/or critical populations find direction at your institution. Ideas might include a new or revised institutional policy, a new college-wide practice, a program-level initiative, a cross-functional effort, a research project, or an inter-segmental partnership. Record these ideas and prepare to use them in the Action phase (p. 17).

Success Factor Discussion Guide:

Nurtured

Definitions

From perspective of the student:

- Students feel somebody wants and helps them succeed

From perspective of practitioners:

- Conveying a sense of caring where students' success is important and expected

Highlights from Student Perspectives Research

- Students strongly indicated that feeling nurtured was vital to their success.

- When students shared stories about a time when someone cared about them and their achievement, they were likely to indicate how that nurturing led them to experiencing the other success factors.

- Students are clearly aware that they are active agents in their educational process, but they still indicated a need to feel that others care about them and their success.

- Survey participants most commonly identified nurturing from family (51%) as key to their success.

Nurturing as a Facilitator for Other Success Factors

When we surveyed students about which of the six factors was most important to their achievement, feeling nurtured (22%) was the second most common response (behind being focused). Focus group participants echoed this sentiment, with students across all four colleges indicating that receiving care and concern from others was a critical motivator in their academic progress and success. Moreover, this research suggests that when someone cares about a student and his or her achievement, that student is also likely to experience the other factors for success. Participants often stated that receiving this kind of support led them to develop a direction, maintain focus, be engaged, feel connected, and/or feel valued.

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 me is vital to me pushing myself and being focused, engaged and directed towards success.

—Focus Group Participant

- After family, students indicated that faculty were a top source of nurturing.

- Students said nurturing from teachers was critical to their achievement; an overwhelming percentage (94%) indicated that it was important to them that their instructors cared about them.

- In terms of sources of nurturing, students cited friends, fellow classmates and family members who encouraged them as they pursued their educational goals, providing support and assistance to keep them focused and motivated.

- When asked to recall a time when someone cared about them on campus, 18% of students indicated they could not cite a specific instance.

- Survey participants indicated several actions their instructors could take to make them feel cared for including making sure they understand the course material, making them feel that it is important that they do well and ensuring they have an opportunity to participate in class discussions.

- Students implied that small and informal gestures and symbols of nurturing can go a long way to making them feel that they and their success are important to their teachers and the college community as a whole.

- Nearly two thirds of African-American students indicated that others wanting them to succeed considerably impacted their success in college.

- First-generation students were more likely to indicate that an instructor caring about them was very important to their achievement.

The first day I came to campus to register, I was lost and didn't know where to go. I unintentionally ended up in DSPS office and there's a lady that sits in front. . . . She was very helpful to me. She actually told me exactly what I have to do. . . . She even sat down with me on the computer to help me finish my registration. And she has been very helpful since then. I really feel that . . . when somebody cares about you, it makes you more responsible. Because she's been taking care of me, I think that I have to do my best. Whenever she talks about me she says, "This is the student that I helped and he's so successful."
—Focus Group Participant

Discussion questions (choose *one* to answer):

1. Do you believe these findings reflect the students at your college? If yes, how? If not, why not?

2. Which of these findings resonate most with you and your work with students?

3. What additional questions do these findings raise for you as you consider strengthening student support on your campus?

4. What research could you perform at the local level to better understand how directed your own students feel and how you can help them fully realize this factor?

Your College's Current Practice

Keeping these Student Support (Re)defined findings in mind, explore how your college is currently helping students feel a sense of authentic caring where their success is considered important and expected.

Discussion questions (choose _one_ to answer):

1. What do you currently do to show students you care about them and their success?

2. In what ways does the institution make explicit to students—particularly historically underrepresented and first-generation learners—that someone at the college cares about them and their success?

3. What types of support does the college provide to faculty and staff to help you understand the range of ways—both small and large—to show you care about students and their success?

4. What does the college do to encourage and/or facilitate students nurturing other students?

Student Suggestions for Action

Now, review the following student suggestions for ways different college practitioners can help learners feel nurtured. These ideas come directly from students; therefore many critical policy and practice suggestions may be missing.

● Express to students that you care about their success and that you are there to support their achievement (faculty, counselors, staff, administrators)

● Make students feel welcome on campus (faculty, counselors, staff, administrators)

● Show students you care through simple gestures like knowing their name and asking how they are doing (faculty, counselors, staff, administrators)

● Recognize students' potential and encourage them to use their skills and abilities to help others (faculty, counselors, staff, administrators)

Discussion questions (choose _one_ to answer):

1. What are your initial reactions to the students' suggestions?

2. When you review these suggestions from students, which practices seem most important? Most actionable?

3. What opportunities and challenges do you see to being responsive to the students' suggestions?

4. Given your college's available funding, in what ways could students' suggestions be addressed?

5. How do these suggestions relate to other success factors (e.g., engaged, focused, valued) your college is hoping to address?

6. In what ways can these student suggestions inform how your college responds to the requirements of the Student Success Act, specifically those related to mandatory orientation, assessment and educational planning?

Ideas for Change:

Finally, based on your discussion of these student findings and suggestions for action, identify one to three specific change ideas designed to help more students and/or critical populations find direction at your institution. Ideas might include a new or revised institutional policy, a new college-wide practice, a program-level initiative, a cross-functional effort, a research project, or an inter-segmental partnership. Record these ideas and prepare to use them in the Action phase (p. 17).

Success Factor Discussion Guide:

Engaged

Definitions

From perspective of the student:

- Students actively participate in class and extracurricular activities

From perspective of practitioners:

- Actively involving students in meaningful and authentic educational experiences and activities inside and outside the classroom

The Special Relationship between Engaged and Connected

Like directed and focused, students made strong associations between being engaged and feeling connected to their colleges—often talking about the ways they experience each factor synonymously. While students placed a higher degree of importance on being engaged when discussing what supports their success, they often reported that active involvement both inside and outside their classrooms led to a sense of connection. Students provided unique insights on each factor, yet at the same time, many of their perspectives also highlight the bi-directional relationship between these two factors where feeling connected to the college made students want to be more engaged.

Highlights from Student Perspectives Research

- Students recognized active engagement as integral to their success. When asked about the most important factor to their success, the third largest percentage of survey respondents (18%) cited being engaged.

- When describing engagement, students most commonly reported that having teachers who engaged them in class was key to their success (48%), followed by receiving academic support such as tutoring (16%), taking classes that actively engage students in their learning (9%), being involved in a particular academic program (8%) and

> *For me [engagement] happens in the classroom, outside of the classroom and in activities. . . . For me it's important to do all three. That's just the type of learner I am because I'm not just here to . . . be in the classroom and engage in the classroom and then leave and not engage. I have to because otherwise I'll forget what I just learned or it's a waste of time for me to be here.*
>
> —Focus Group Participant

participating in extracurricular activities (7%).

- Students emphasized that engagement happens both inside *and* outside of class; having both academic and extracurricular engagement was critical to realizing their success.

- Students noted that many learners do not necessarily understand the value and importance of engagement—both in their courses and on their campuses—to their academic success.

- When asked about a time when they learned the most in a class, participants indicated the most important factors were the instructor (1) caring about students, (2) challenging learners to do the best they could and (3) being interested in what their students thought.

- Access to and involvement in academic support programs and experiences also surfaced in survey responses as a key facilitator of students' engagement.

- African-American, Latino and first-generation students were more likely to indicate that working with students of diverse backgrounds and experiences was important to their learning.

- Lack of academic support was a very important factor in deciding not to enroll for 30% of African Americans and 20% of Latinos (versus 7% of whites).

- Among leavers, African-American and older (44 and older) students were more likely than Latinos or whites to indicate that a lack of academic support was very important in their decision not to return.

> *The first time I felt actually engaged is when the professor would select students to actually say something that's on [their] mind which allowed them to actually think about the topic that is being discussed in class or giving the students a chance to . . . speak out . . . . In my math class, we're able to go up and do problems and get worksheets and help out other students. And most math classes . . . that I've taken on campus, it's more like here's the lesson, everyone be quiet. . . . This is more like a social class and I've never actually engaged in math. I'm not confident in math. So yes, I'm actually learning a lot.*
> —Focus Group Participant

> *[An academic support program at my college] gives you a chance to continue studying with fellow students and with a supervised instructor who has taken the course. They can guide you to what the teacher wants.*
> —Survey Participant

Discussion questions (choose _one_ to answer):

1. Do you believe these findings reflect the students at your college?
   If yes, how? If not, why not?

2. Which of these findings resonate most with you and your work with students?

3. What additional questions do these findings raise for you as you consider strengthening student support on your campus?

4. What research could you perform at the local level to better understand how directed your own students feel and how you can help them fully realize this factor?

Your College's Current Practice

Keeping these Student Support (Re)defined findings in mind, explore how your college is currently involving students in meaningful and authentic educational experiences and activities inside and outside the classroom.

Discussion questions (choose _one_ to answer):

1. In what ways do faculty already promote classroom and campus engagement at your college—either in their courses and/or programs? Which educational programs on your campus do this particularly well?

2. What professional development and ongoing support do faculty have to ensure they use engaging, student-centered pedagogical approaches in their courses and programs?

3. In what ways are academic supports structured and offered to reach more students inside and outside the classroom?

4. What opportunities exist on campus for students to be actively involved in experiences and activities that will help them be or become more engaged learners?

Student Suggestions for Action

Now, review the following student suggestions for ways different college practitioners can help learners be engaged. These ideas come directly from students; therefore many critical policy and practice suggestions may be missing.

- Help students navigate their way to offices, services and supports (faculty, counselors, staff, administrators)

- Help students learn about engagement opportunities including extracurricular activities and clubs (faculty, counselors, staff, administrators)

- Widely promote opportunities for students to engage in clubs, extracurricular activities and campus leadership (faculty, counselors, staff, administrators)

- Provide feedback to students on their performance and progress (faculty, counselors)

- Show energy and passion for your subject matter and work at the college (faculty, counselors, staff, administrators)

- Create opportunities for open dialog and engagement in and out of class (faculty, administrators)

- Expect more from students' academic performance (faculty, counselors)

- Reward participation in and out of class with extra credit (faculty)

Discussion questions (choose _one_ to answer):

1. What are your initial reactions to the students' suggestions?

2. When you review these suggestions from students, which practices seem most important? Most actionable?

3. What opportunities and challenges do you see to being responsive to the students' suggestions?

4. Given your college's available funding, in what ways could students' suggestions be addressed?

5. How do these suggestions relate to other success factors (e.g., focused, connected) your college is hoping to address?

6. In what ways can these student suggestions inform how your college responds to the requirements of the Student Success Act, specifically those related to mandatory orientation, assessment and educational planning?

Ideas for Change:

Finally, based on your discussion of these student findings and suggestions for action, identify one to three specific change ideas designed to help more students and/or critical populations find direction at your institution. Ideas might include a new or revised institutional policy, a new college-wide practice, a program-level initiative, a cross-functional effort, a research project, or an inter-segmental partnership. Record these ideas and prepare to use them in the Action phase (p. 17).

Success Factor Discussion Guide:

Connected

Definitions

From perspective of the student:

- Students feel they are part of the college community

From perspective of practitioners:

- Creating connections between students and the institution and cultivating relationships that underscore how students' involvement with the college community can contribute to their academic and personal success

The Special Relationship between Engaged and Connected

Like directed and focused, students made strong associations between being engaged and feeling connected to their colleges—often talking about the ways they experience each factor synonymously. While students placed a higher degree of importance on being engaged when discussing what supports their success, they often reported that active involvement both inside and outside their classrooms led to a sense of connection. Students provided unique insights on each factor, yet at the same time, many of their perspectives also highlight the bi-directional relationship between these two factors where feeling connected to the college made students want to be more engaged.

Highlights from Student Perspectives Research

- Students reported feeling connected when they were involved in their college community—both inside and outside the classroom; joining clubs, making friends, helping peers and forming study groups.

- When asked what made them feel connected, survey respondents most commonly reported faculty (20%), followed by a particular class they took (10%), other students (6%) or a counselor (5%).

This semester, my English teacher started off the class by doing an ice breaker. So, at first, it was like we're all just here to take a class and then it was okay, we're students and we all got to know each other on a better level than we probably would have earlier. To actually know the people and know your teacher more, it felt like we were all kind of connected, and it was like we can actually speak to each other and ask each other questions better than if we had done it two weeks ago and we didn't have any ice breaker

—Focus Group Participant

- When asked if they feel connected to the college, 77% of survey respondents said yes.

- The more time spent on campus outside of class time, the more connected students indicated they felt.

- At the same time, survey findings indicate that students spend little time on campus outside of class and, when they are on campus, they are often alone. Approximately 41% reported spending fewer than five hours a week on campus outside of class, 36% between five and ten hours and 20% more than ten hours.

- When asked how they spent their time on campus when not in class, the most common response was studying alone followed by studying with friends and hanging out alone.

- Some students did not see the need to feel connected to the college because they viewed community college as a stepping stone to bigger and better things, a place to spend a short time, get what is needed and leave.

> *…[Feeling connected] would be a lot more important if we weren't at a community college. If we were at [a university], of course it's important because we want . . . them to know who we are and we want to be able to say, oh, we went to [this university]. But if you're [at a community college], you don't' really care if anyone knows you went there, so you don't really need to be connected. I mean we need to be involved so we can transfer. It's on your application, but the college itself isn't very important to your application.*
> —Focus Group Participant

- Some students also observed that their *faculty* can seem disconnected, particularly part-time instructors, which made their own sense of connection more tenuous.

- First-generation students were more likely to report spending over 10 hours per week on campus outside of class time, to indicate that connectedness was very important to their success, and that it was a counselor who made them feel connected.

- African Americans were more likely to reference other students when speaking of a time they felt connected. That said, African Americans and Latinos were more likely to study alone while on campus than other students. Moreover, African Americans were also more likely to report hanging out alone while on campus compared to other students. These findings suggest that African-American students in particular might benefit from supports that formally connect them with their peers outside of class time.

- Younger students (under 20) were more likely to indicate that feeling connected was important to their success and friends also appeared to have a particular impact on this age group.

- Students 44 and over reported that having a personal connection to other students, staff or instructors factored significantly into to their success.

Discussion questions
(choose *one* to answer):

1. Do you believe these findings reflect the students at your college? If yes, how? If not, why not?

2. Which of these findings resonate most with you and your work with students?

3. What additional questions do these findings raise for you as you consider strengthening student support on your campus?

4. What research could you perform at the local level to better understand how directed your own students feel and how you can help them fully realize this factor?

> *Most of my teachers are part-time and they have 30-minute office hours per week. So I really don't see how accommodating the teachers are, or how much they can be because they're never here. Most of them don't even live nearby or they have so many different students here and at other schools and, so, it's hard for them. The best you can do is email them and get a response back a couple days later. I don't see how anybody graduates here, to tell you the truth.*
>
> —Focus Group Participant

Your College's Current Practice

Keeping these Student Support (Re)defined findings in mind, explore how your college is currently (1) inspiring students to create and cultivate relationships with the institution and (2) helping them understand how their involvement with the college community can contribute to their academic and personal success.

Discussion questions (choose *one* to answer):

1. On your campus, what are some ways that administrators, faculty and staff help students feel a sense of connection to the college?

2. In what ways has the college created spaces where students can build personal connections that allow them to support and encourage each other?

3. How is the time students spend in the classroom structured to help them be more connected to their peers, faculty and the institution as a whole?

4. How does your college help faculty and staff feel connected to your institution and develop an awareness of how their work links to students' success?

Student Suggestions for Action

Now, review the following student suggestions for ways different college practitioners can help learners feel connected. These ideas come directly from students; therefore many critical policy and practice suggestions may be missing.

- Widely promote opportunities for students to engage in clubs, extracurricular activities and campus leadership (faculty, counselors, staff, administrators)

- Consider ways to bolster the community college image not as an educational stop-over but as a place of pride and worth in the students' postsecondary experience (administrators)

- Recognize how your own role at the college contributes directly or indirectly to student success (faculty, counselors, staff, administrators)

- Form study groups (students, faculty)

- Formally or informally mentor fellow students (students)

- Proactively meet people in class and exchange contact information (students, faculty)

Discussion questions (choose _one_ to answer):

1. What are your initial reactions to the students' suggestions?

2. When you review these suggestions from students, which practices seem most important? Most actionable?

3. What opportunities and challenges do you see to being responsive to the students' suggestions?

4. Given your college's available funding, in what ways could students' suggestions be addressed?

5. How do these suggestions relate to other success factors (e.g., focused, engaged) your college is hoping to address?

6. In what ways can these student suggestions inform how your college responds to the requirements of the Student Success Act, specifically those related to mandatory orientation, assessment and educational planning?

Ideas for Change:

Finally, based on your discussion of these student findings and suggestions for action, identify one to three specific change ideas designed to help more students and/or critical populations find direction at your institution. Ideas might include a new or revised institutional policy, a new college-wide practice, a program-level initiative, a cross-functional effort, a research project, or an inter-segmental partnership. Record these ideas and prepare to use them in the Action phase (p. 17).

Success Factor Discussion Guide:

Valued

Definitions

From perspective of the *student:*

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

From perspective of *practitioners:*

- Providing students with opportunities to contribute to and enrich the college culture and community

Highlights from Student Perspectives Research

- Nearly three quarters of survey participants stated that it was somewhat or very important that they added value to their college.

- When asked if they felt like they contributed to their campus community, 68% said yes.

- When asked about specific activities that were likely to make them feel valued, roughly three quarters of survey participants cited giving back through community service and providing feedback to instructors as key opportunities.

- Many students said they had participated in these activities, with the most (84%) reporting having provided feedback to instructors and the least (26%) having participated in leadership roles.

I was approached by another student, not because a professor got involved but because we were in the same class. They felt I was friendly enough so they asked me to show them how to do an online class, what to look at, where to go, where to answer . . . they were confused. So I definitely felt valued because I'm not a paid tutor and I'm not a professor yet this student felt comfortable enough [with me] to ask for help.

—Focus Group Participant

- Students highlighted feeling that they added value when they were able to help others, in particular their peers.

- African-American, Latino and first-generation college students were more likely to indicate that feeling as though they added value to their campuses was important to their success.

- For African-American, Latino and first-generation students, having the opportunity to share their family history and culture made them feel proud of who they were.

- Taking on leadership roles at their college surfaced as particularly important to African-American and Latino students' sense of worth.

- First-generation students were more likely to prioritize the opportunity to provide feedback on college happenings.

- The older the student, the more likely they were to place high importance on adding value to their institution. Survey participants 44 years and older were more likely to report that adding value to their college was a significant contributor to their success.

- Both older (44 and older) and younger (under 20) students also noted that having their culture respected was also particularly important to their achievement.

- Older students spoke about the merits of sharing their knowledge and experience, particularly in an effort to help younger students make efficient and effective use of their time in college.

> *I worked in a particular field so I bring my professional experience to the classroom and I feel that's valued. I've been told I bring an enormous professional background, specifically in debates and in answering questions about my professional experience and organization . . . . I'm able to make arguments about why you don't do certain things . . . So, yeah, In that sense, I feel very valued.*
> —Focus Group Participant

> *I started to feel valued when I helped out with clubs. I'm big into clubs on campus and I inspire other students to go and run for office. To me, that's being valued, being a resource for someone else . . . .*
> —Focus Group Participant

Discussion questions (choose *one* to answer):

1. Do you believe these findings reflect the students at your college? If yes, how? If not, why not?

2. Which of these findings resonate most with you and your work with students?

3. What additional questions do these findings raise for you as you consider strengthening student support on your campus?

4. What research could you perform at the local level to better understand how directed your own students feel and how you can help them fully realize this factor?

Your College's Current Practice

Keeping these Student Support (Re)defined findings in mind, explore how your college is providing students with opportunities to contribute to and enrich the college culture and community.

Discussion questions (choose *one* to answer):

1. In what ways are students being connected to leadership, mentorship and service opportunities both on campus and in the larger community?

2. What opportunities already exist that allow students to provide constructive input and feedback on what happens at the college, both inside and outside the classroom, and through formal and informal means?

3. Where has the institution created safe spaces where students can share their cultural, family and work experiences and learn from those of others?

4. How has your college encouraged faculty and staff to look for and recognize students' unique talents, skills, abilities and experiences and empowered you to link students with opportunities to share these with others?

Student Suggestions for Action

Now, review the following student suggestions for ways different college practitioners can help learners add value on their campus and feel recognized for those contributions. These ideas come directly from students; therefore many critical policy and practice suggestions may be missing.

- Widely promote and help students learn about engagement opportunities including extracurricular activities and clubs (faculty, administrators, counselors, staff)

- Offer opportunities for students to share input on your course(s) (faculty)

- Call on students in class and offer opportunities for open dialog (faculty)

- Offer ways for students to incorporate and honor their own culture, history and traditions (faculty)

- Encourage students to connect with peers and offer in-class opportunities to do so (faculty, counselors)

- Reward students' participation in class (e.g., with extra credit or as part of their grade) (faculty)

- Recognize students' potential and encourage them to use their skills and abilities to help others (faculty, administrators, counselors, staff)

- Inform students of opportunities for them to contribute to the college or local community (faculty, administrators, counselors, staff)

- Formally or informally mentor students (students, faculty)

Discussion questions (choose _one_ to answer):

1. What are your initial reactions to the students' suggestions?

2. When you review these suggestions from students, which practices seem most important? Most actionable?

3. What opportunities and challenges do you see to being responsive to the students' suggestions?

4. Given your college's available funding, in what ways could students' suggestions be addressed?

5. How do these suggestions relate to other success factors (e.g., nurtured, connected) your college is hoping to address?

6. In what ways can these student suggestions inform how your college responds to the requirements of the Student Success Act, specifically those related to mandatory orientation, assessment and educational planning?

Ideas for Change:

Finally, based on your discussion of these student findings and suggestions for action, identify one to three specific change ideas designed to help more students and/or critical populations find direction at your institution. Ideas might include a new or revised institutional policy, a new college-wide practice, a program-level initiative, a cross-functional effort, a research project, or an inter-segmental partnership. Record these ideas and prepare to use them in the Action phase (p. 17).

Appendix C

Opportunity Matrix: Examining and Prioritizing Implementation Opportunities

Across the top, replace A, B and C with your top three potential activities, policies, practices, approaches or strategies you would like to implement related to the selected success factor. Do a separate matrix for each factor, if appropriate. For each activity, indicate your level of agreement with the list of statements related to the feasibility of each activity. We would suggest the following scale: 1 = Strongly disagree, 2 = Somewhat disagree, 3 = Somewhat agree, and 4 = Strongly agree. Tally each column to determine which activities offer the greatest opportunity for successful implementation. Those activities with the highest totals indicate the greatest level of agreement.

Indicators of Feasibility	**Activity**		
	A	B	C
This activity, practice, approach or policy will engage and attract those students who need this type of support to be successful			
Resources – personnel, funding, space – are available to support this work at a large scope and scale			
I am clear about what my role will be in implementing this activity			
Capacity exists within the institution to implement this activity			
Totals			

Opportunity Matrix (adapted from the *Nonprofit Strategy Revolution,* Copyright © 2008, David LaPiana)

Appendix D

Sample Action Plan Template

We provide this template as a model that can be used or adapted to concretize your planning efforts. Please feel free to use planning documents at your college or district to guide your work to improve student support and success.

Tasks	Person(s) Responsible	Timeline	Status	Notes

Regardless of what planning documents you use, the following overarching activities need to be a part of your action planning process. We offer these questions to help you prepare, identify, prioritize, develop and implement activities and strategies to improve student support on your campus.

Design and Development

- What is the change we want to achieve (as outlined in *Phase 3: Action*)?

- What do we want to result from this change?

- What is needed for change to be achieved?

Implementation

- Who will lead the various activities and tasks?

- Who are the collaborators needed to implement these strategies?

- Who will take the first steps to implement the action plan?

- What available training/professional development could be used to support these efforts?

- What additional training/professional development is needed?

- What available resources could be used to support these efforts?

- What additional resources are needed?

- What is the timeline for instituting the proposed changes?

Research & Evaluation

- What information is needed to assess the current situation?

- What do we hope to happen as a result of making this change?

- What information do we need to collect/access to know that the change has had its intended impact?

- What indicators should we track to monitor our progress?

- How often do we need to examine available data?

Coordination

- Who is going to track our progress?

- Who is going to assist with group communications?

- Who is going to ensure key tasks and activities are completed within the agreed upon timeframe?

Communication and Dissemination

- Who has a stake in these changes and should know about and/or be engaged in this work?

- How, when and with whom do we want to share what we are learning from this work?

- In what ways should we gather feedback from key stakeholders about our plans and progress?

Research and Planning Group for California Community Colleges

The Research and Planning Group for California Community Colleges (RP Group) strengthens the ability of California community colleges to undertake high quality research, planning and assessments that improve evidence-based decision making, institutional effectiveness and success for all students.

Student Support (Re)defined

Equitable
Integrated
Cost Effective

Project Team

Darla Cooper

Michelle Barton

Kathy Booth

Priyadarshini Chaplot

Rob Johnstone

Kelley Karandjeff

Michael Large

Nathan Pellegrin

Rogéair Purnell

Diane Rodriguez-Kiino

Eva Schiorring

Vinod Verma

Terrence Willett

Adore Davidson

Loann Solem

Who supports this study?

theRPgroup