

# What is Student Support (Re)defined?

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

## What are the six factors for success?

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

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

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

**NURTURED:** Students feel somebody wants and helps them to succeed

**ENGAGED:** Students actively participate in class and extracurricular activities

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

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

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

## What have we discovered?

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

Five distinct themes emerged:

### 1. Colleges need to foster students’ motivation.

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

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

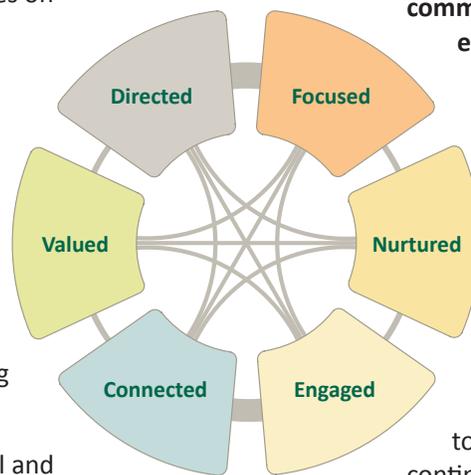
### 2. Colleges must teach students how to succeed in the postsecondary environment.

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

### 3. Colleges need to structure support to ensure all six success factors are addressed.

Participants (a) confirmed the six success factors were important to their progress and achievement and (b) indicated that the factors interact with each other in various ways. Students noted how

- CONTINUED



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

— Focus Group Participant

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

— Focus Group Participant

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

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

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

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

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

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

## What will Student Support (Re)defined do next?

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

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

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

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

For more information . . .

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



**“Give Students a Compass,  
Phase II”  
Overview – March, 2014**



**Background** - “Give Students a Compass, Phase II” (“Compass”) is an initiative to increase the relevance, integration, and real-life application of the general education (GE) transfer curriculum in California by infusing it with high-impact educational practices such as service-learning, learning communities, first-year experiences, and collaboration with faculty on research. Through such engaging pedagogical practices, we hope to improve student success, as measured by rates of student persistence and graduation and by evidence of deep learning, especially among historically underrepresented populations: students of color, the economically disadvantaged, and those whose parents did not attend college. It builds on Phase I work (2008-2011) as part of a project of the Association of American Colleges and Universities (AAC&U) Liberal Education and America’s Promise (LEAP) campaign.

The California State University (CSU) invited campuses to partner with local California Community Colleges (CCC) to test new approaches to make the GE transfer curriculum more engaging. Six pilots projects were funded, along with 12 additional networking partnerships that are part of a statewide learning community to help shape potential change that takes into account the needs of students, faculty, administrators, and staff, so that promising practices can take hold for the long term. Forty campuses – 14 CSUs and 26 CCCs – have been involved. Compass II is guided by a Steering Committee that includes faculty, students, and administrators from both systems.

**Emerging themes** – One high-impact practice that appears to be a particularly promising way to improve GE is thematic GE pathways on interdisciplinary issues such as sustainability, social justice, and health and wellness. Another engaging approach, public sphere pedagogy, connects class-based readings, discussions, and research on contemporary issues with a public event involving dialogue with diverse campus and community members. Other successful strategies include bringing student support services like advising and tutoring into the classroom and using e-Portfolios to help students demonstrate proficiency and develop metacognitive skills. First-year seminars, learning communities, and service-learning have also shown promise.

**Current status** – Compass support has ended for 3 of the 6 pilots and 10 of the 12 networking partnerships. The remaining projects will complete their work by mid-2014. We are now focusing our efforts on distilling “lessons learned” from initiative through evaluation and dissemination activities. We are identifying effective practices that can be institutionalized, scaled up, and adapted at other campuses.

**For more information** – We have created a web-based “teaching commons” site on GE and student engagement, including project information, related resources, links, a listserv, and discussion forum. The URL is:

<http://teachingcommons.cdl.edu/geengage>

**Support for Compass II is provided by grants from: Arthur and Rosalinde Gilbert Foundation; Walter S. Johnson Foundation; James Irvine Foundation; William and Flora Hewlett Foundation; and Lumina Foundation (subgrant from AAC&U).**

# Student Support (Re)defined

Equitable  
Integrated  
Cost Effective

## Six Success Factors Defined

As part of Student Support (Re)defined, the RP Group reviewed leading studies on effective support practices and interviewed both practitioners and researchers to identify “six success factors” that contribute to students’ achievement. We list them below in order of importance according to those participating in our research.

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

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

**NURTURED:** Students feel somebody wants and helps them to succeed

**ENGAGED:** Students actively participate in class and extracurricular activities

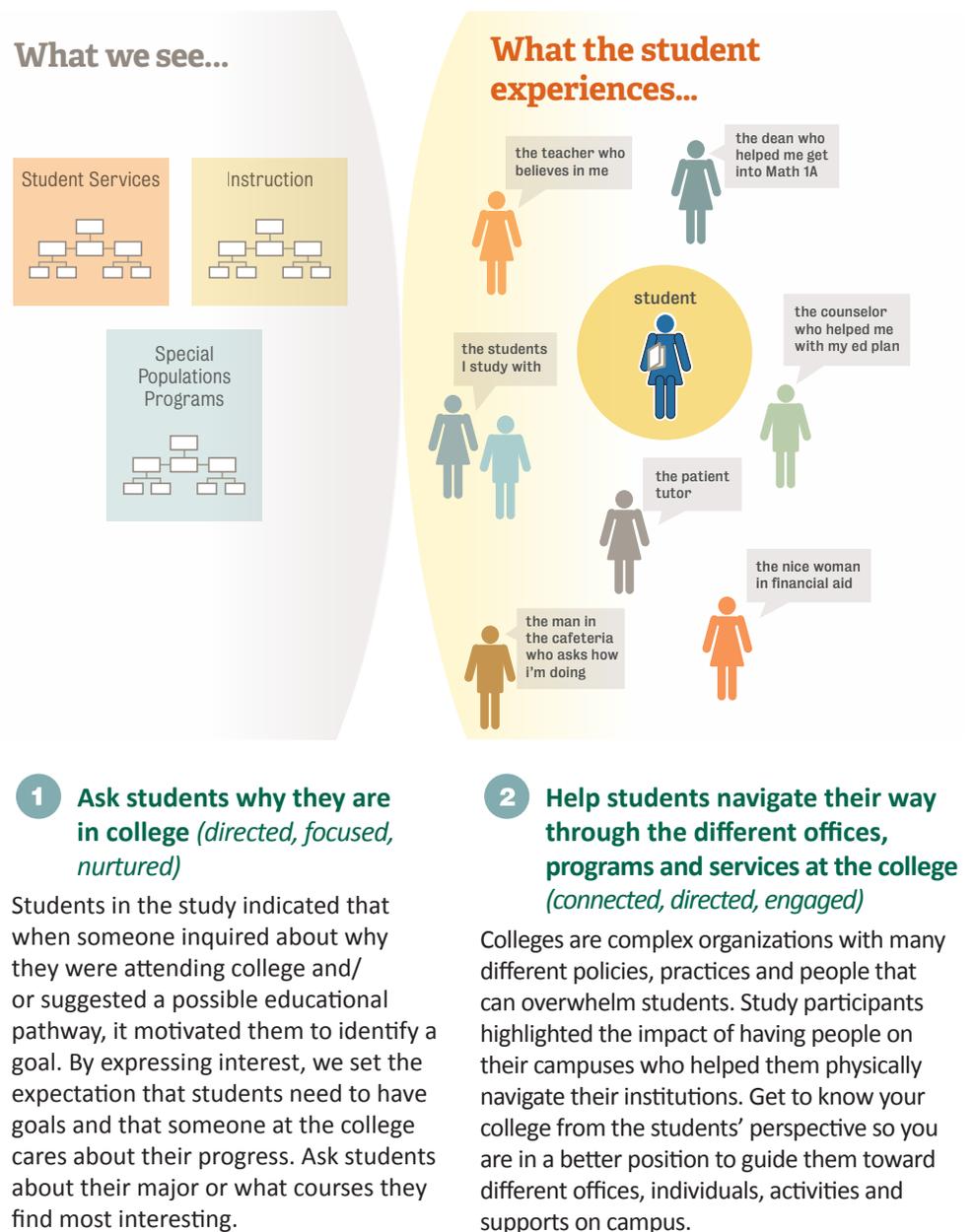
**CONNECTED:** Students feel like they are part of the college community

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

# 10 Ways Everyone Can Help Support Student Success

Students participating in Student Support (Re)defined tell us that everyone on a college campus can play a role in their success. As illustrated below, colleges can sometimes organize support differently from how our learners experience it (see *Figure 1. Support from the Student’s Perspective*). Yet, no matter what your job title may be or where you may sit in your organization, students say you can help them reach their goals. Based on suggestions from nearly 900 study participants, **find below 10 ways everyone at your college can help students experience the “six success factors”**—focused, directed, nurtured, engaged, connected and valued (see sidebar, *Six Success Factors Defined*).

FIGURE 1. SUPPORT FROM THE STUDENT’S PERSPECTIVE



**3 Connect students with services or resources that can help them with career exploration, goal selection and ongoing academic assistance** (*directed, engaged, connected*)

Participants in our study indicated that students are often unaware that help is available, or they simply do not know how or where to ask assistance. Learn about the resources and supports on your own campus. Raise students' awareness about career exploration opportunities (e.g., career center, clubs). Talk to students about your own profession and career path. Encourage learners to meet with a counselor and establish an education plan. Urge students to take advantage of academic supports such as tutoring and learning centers.

**4 Have high expectations for students and hold them accountable** (*focused, nurtured*)

Students in the study indicated that they want to be challenged and held to a high standard. They specifically shared that having someone on campus to whom they are accountable motivates them to succeed. Make sure students know you are aware of their potential and expect them to work diligently toward the goals they have set for themselves.

**5 Ask students for feedback about their experience, including what works, what needs improvement and what's missing** (*engaged, valued*)

Study participants frequently referenced how providing feedback reinforced their sense of belonging and value to their college. Look for opportunities beyond the usual surveys colleges conduct to ask students in both formal and informal ways about their experience and to get their input on what does and does not work well on campus. Consider offering feedback loops at the course, program and institutional levels.

**6 Encourage participation in out-of-class activities** (*engaged*)

Many students in our study did not see the benefit of joining extracurriculars or have the time for traditional activities (e.g., student government). We can help students see how certain out-of-class activities can support their in-class learning. For those students who can fit associations or clubs into their lives, encourage them to get involved. For others, consider broadening their definition of extracurriculars beyond traditional activities to include more informal and off-campus opportunities.

**7 Help students build peer support networks** (*connected, valued*)

Students are a critical and untapped resource of support for one another and participants in this research cited many ways they can help their peers reach their goals. Help learners connect with each other by introducing those with similar interests or goals. Encourage students to form study groups outside of class or engage in peer mentoring. Suggest clubs they might join or direct. Let students know about spaces on campus where they can meet.

**8 Show students that you are proud to work at your institution and that they should be proud to be enrolled at your community college** (*connected*)

Some students do not see their community college as a place of pride. One reason cited by participants was an absence of strong organizational identity among faculty and staff at their institutions. Demonstrating to students your own sense of connection to your institution and sharing why you choose to work in a community college environment can invoke a greater sense of place and pride in students.

**9 Recognize the value of students' talents, abilities, skills and experiences and connect them with opportunities to contribute** (*valued*)

Students indicated they felt most valued when helping other students. Guide students in identifying opportunities to lead and/or assist in class, on campus or in the community. Connect students with on- and off-campus jobs, internships and volunteer activities.

**10 Communicate and demonstrate to students that you care about their success** (*nurtured, valued*)

Study participants spoke about the small but significant gestures that helped them feel more supported on their campus. Learning the names of the students you regularly encounter and asking how they are doing can go a long way to making them feel that they matter. Moreover, we often do things as part of our job that we believe are good for students, but we do not always tell students why we do what we do and how our work supports them. Share your own name and let students know how your work contributes to their success.



**For more information...**

Find more information on Student Support (Re)defined and all project resources at: [www.rpgroup.org/projects/student-support](http://www.rpgroup.org/projects/student-support)

# Student Support (Re)defined

Equitable  
Integrated  
Cost Effective

# 10 Ways Faculty Can Support Students' Success:

## Helping Students Achieve the “Six Success Factors”

### Six Success Factors Defined

Through a review of leading studies on effective support practices and interviews with both practitioners and researchers, the RP Group identified “six success factors” that contribute to students’ achievement. We list them below in order of importance according to the students participating in the Student Support (Re)defined study.

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

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

**NURTURED:** Students feel somebody wants and helps them to succeed

**ENGAGED:** Students actively participate in class and extracurricular activities

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

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

What can faculty do to help students experience the “six success factors”—focused, directed, nurtured, engaged, connected and valued—during their community college enrollment? (See sidebar, Six Success Factors Defined) Find below 10 suggestions the RP Group gleaned from nearly 900 California community college learners participating in our Student Support (Re)defined study.

#### 1 Ask students about their educational and career goals (directed)

By asking students why they are in college and what their major is, you let them know you expect them to have a reason for enrolling in postsecondary education.

#### 2 Integrate career and educational goal exploration into course assignments (directed, focused, engaged)

Students indicated that their teachers could play a unique role in helping them explore careers given the professional experience and content-specific expertise many instructors bring to their courses. Rooting this exploration in the classroom can help students draw connections between their educational and career goals and coursework, and in turn, find greater relevance in course content.

#### 3 Provide regular and meaningful feedback to students about their performance and progress (focused, engaged)

Students want to know where they stand in their individual classes and whether they are on the right track in meeting their goals. This type of feedback can foster motivation as well as allow students to “course correct” by connecting with additional resources if needed to improve their performance.

*We would work with each other so we would get to know other people in our class, and then we'd get to work on the same problems together. That would make us more engaged and we can learn from each other [as well as] the professor.*

— Focus Group Participant

- CONTINUED

**4 Regularly ask students if they understand the course material and direct them to available assistance when needed (nurtured, engaged)**

Students want faculty to care if they are learning. While it is not possible to provide private instruction to every student in need, help by identifying and referring struggling students to campus resources like tutoring centers for assistance.

**5 Learn your students' names and ask them how they are doing (nurtured, connected)**

Knowing every student's name can be a challenge, especially in large classes, yet there are techniques such as name tags or plates that can prove useful. Recognizing someone by name is a small gesture that can go a long way in making a student feel like an important and valuable participant in your course. For students who approach you, learn their name, ask them how they are doing, and wait for the answer.

**6 Create opportunities for students to provide feedback on their experience in your course throughout the term (engaged, valued)**

Students said that being asked for their feedback in both formal and informal ways made them want to engage more in their classes because they felt like their input and experience mattered. In addition, being asked for their opinion helped students feel they had something worth offering that could help improve the course, which made them feel valued.

**7 Show students that you are proud to work at your institution and that they should be proud to be enrolled at your community college (connected)**

Some students don't see their community college as a place of pride. When asked why, participants referenced an absence of strong organizational identity among faculty and staff at their institutions. Other students indicated that there was no value in establishing ties with what they perceived to be "just a two-year

*I like having conversations with my teachers. . . . [I'd like] if I'm having a hard day or something where I could open up [to] them and share my feelings . . . and it not just be about, "Oh sorry, I didn't complete the homework." . . . That's definitely something I think is very beneficial to have, [to] talk with them and know that they genuinely care about you.*

— Focus Group Participant

college," reporting plans to make these connections upon transferring to a university. Illustrating with students your own sense of connection to your institution and sharing why you choose to work in a community college environment can invoke a greater sense of place and pride in students.

**8 Provide opportunities for and encourage students to connect with and support each other (connected, nurtured, engaged)**

Students are a critical and often untapped resource of support for one another. Help students connect with each other by creating study groups, assigning project work, instituting a buddy system and facilitating peer mentoring opportunities.

**9 Incorporate opportunities for students to share their personal and family history and culture in class assignments (valued, engaged)**

Many students in the study, especially African-American, Latino and first-generation participants, indicated that they appreciated being provided with opportunities to share their backgrounds and experiences in ways that showed their perspectives and contributions were valued.

**10 Connect or provide students with opportunities to help their peers (valued, engaged)**

Students felt most valued when they were helping other students. Create opportunities inside the classroom through group and other assignments where students assist each other. Guide students in identifying opportunities outside the classroom where they can volunteer or work in the local community or on campus.

For more information . . .

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