

SAMPLE PARTICIPANT GUIDE

**SUCCESS IS WHAT COUNTS: A COMMUNITY CONVERSATION
TO HELP ALL COMMUNITY COLLEGE STUDENTS ACHIEVE**

PARTICIPANT GUIDE

Success Is What Counts: A Community Conversation to Help All Community College Students Achieve

Community colleges serve a wide variety of students with a wide variety of goals. For example:

- They offer a first step into higher education, often the best step for students who can't afford tuition at a four-year college or who don't have the necessary grades
- They are an option for students who prefer to stay close to home
- They provide marketable job skills to both recent high school graduates and older students who want to upgrade their careers

Like all community colleges, our college has some students who are struggling. In other words, we have some achievement gaps—and we want to do something about them. Our goal in this dialogue is to think about how the college and community can work together to close achievement gaps and help all students succeed.

We'll begin by describing three areas that the college and community could focus on to achieve these goals:

- Making sure students are able to do college-level work
- Helping students deal with the pressures in their lives
- Ensuring a rigorous and engaging academic experience

Of course, each of these approaches to student success may be of value. And you may have other ideas to add. But, it's also important to set some priorities so that we can put our resources to the best possible use.

We'll begin by reviewing these three approaches in greater detail. Which do you think is likely to have the greatest impact on student success, and why?

Approach 1: Focus on making sure students are ready to do college-level work

For a variety of reasons, too many community college students arrive without a solid enough academic foundation. With adequate preparation, these students are better able to take advantage of the educational opportunities the college has to offer, and less likely to be thrown off course by the pressures in their lives.

Therefore, we should do things like:

- Strengthen remedial education and tutoring to help struggling students catch up
- Support improvements in K-12 education and the transition from high school to college
- Offer English as a Second Language programs for non-native English speakers

Those who like this approach say,

“With many students arriving at community college without the academic skills and attitudes it takes to succeed, it’s critical to make sure they’re ready for college-level work.”

But others say,

“The college has a big enough task providing a quality education once students arrive. It’s not practical to expect it to make up for things students should have learned before they get there.”

Approach 2: Focus on helping students deal with the pressures in their lives

Community college students tend to be busy people with busy lives. Most have jobs, many have children, and few have a great deal of money. As a result, there are many pressures in their lives that can make it difficult for them to stick with their studies and meet their goals.

Therefore, we should do things like:

- Ease the burden on lower-income students by providing scholarships and childcare
- Encourage employers to allow flexible work schedules to help students balance college and work
- Mentor students who need support and guidance in managing the challenges in their lives

Those who like this approach say:

“By helping community college students cope with the pressures that can derail their studies, we can increase their chances of success.”

But others say:

“These are adult college students who need to take responsibility for their personal lives, however complicated they may be. The college should keep its focus on teaching and learning.”

Approach 3: Focus on ensuring a rigorous and engaging academic experience

The most important thing we can do to promote student achievement is provide a quality educational experience, one that is challenging and engaging, and gives students the skills they need to meet their educational and career goals. If we do that, we'll be able to help every motivated student to succeed.

Therefore, we should do things like:

- Raise academic expectations and standards
- Train faculty in effective teaching strategies, including those that help less successful students
- Invest in up-to-date technology

Those who like this approach say:

“Having high academic expectations for students and providing them with a rigorous and engaging course of study is the key to student achievement.”

But others say:

“Community colleges serve many different kinds of students, and we shouldn't assume that all of them need or want an equally rigorous academic experience. Some have more immediate and practical goals.”

Helping All Students Succeed

Recap

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