

(RE)DESIGNING FOR STUDENT SUCCESS:

Applying Lessons and Resources from Student Support (Re)defined and Completion by Design



Many community colleges around the country are actively seeking to increase completion for more of their students. Two recent RP Group projects – *Student Support (Re)defined* and *Completion by Design* – examined ways to advance student success from two different perspectives (the student and the organization respectively). **When taking a collective look at these initiatives, five integrated themes emerge that can guide colleges pursuing substantive change at all levels of the institution designed to strengthen student achievement.** This summary offers highlights from each project, followed by a brief introduction to these key considerations for redesign.



the Research & Planning Group
for California Community Colleges

www.rpgroup.org

The RP Group conducted Student Support (Re)defined with support from The Kresge Foundation (2011-2014) and participated as a key partner in Completion by Design (2011-2013), an ongoing initiative of the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation.

The RP Group | 1102 Q Street, Suite 3500 | Sacramento, CA 95811 | 510-527-8500

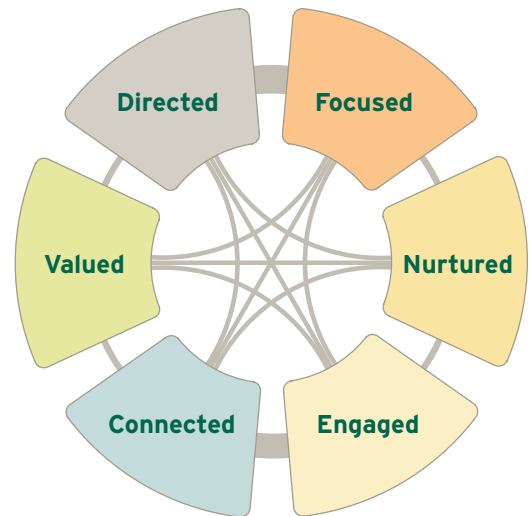
Student Support (Re)defined

Equitable
Integrated
Cost Effective

Student Support (Re)defined aimed to understand how community colleges can feasibly deliver support both inside and outside the classroom to improve success for all students. We asked nearly 900 students from 13 California community colleges what *they* think supports their educational success—paying special attention to the factors African Americans and Latinos cited as important to their achievement.

Six Success Factors: Through 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:

- **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



Five Themes: When we examined what these students told us helps their success in totality, 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.
- 2 Colleges must teach students how to succeed in the postsecondary environment.** Students need assistance building the specific skills and knowledge vital to navigating and thriving in their community college, particularly those who are new to higher education or who arrive without a specific goal.
- 3 Colleges need to structure support to ensure all six success factors are addressed.** Students noted how 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 should 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 academic, financial, social and personal need identified by African-American, Latino and first-generation participants in this study. Colleges must find a way to provide comprehensive support to these student groups—at scale.
- 5 Everyone has a role to play in supporting student achievement, but faculty must take the lead.** Participants 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.



Completion by Design (CBD) supports cadres of community colleges in Florida, North Carolina and Ohio working to increase success for large groups of students by developing coherent pathways of study while containing institutional costs, maintaining open access and ensuring the quality of programs and credentials. The RP Group provided technical assistance to the initiative during its planning and early implementation phases and continues to bring this national work to California's community colleges.

Preventing Loss, Creating Momentum Framework:

A foundational tool of the CBD initiative is the Loss/Momentum Framework, which organizes the student experience into **four key phases**:

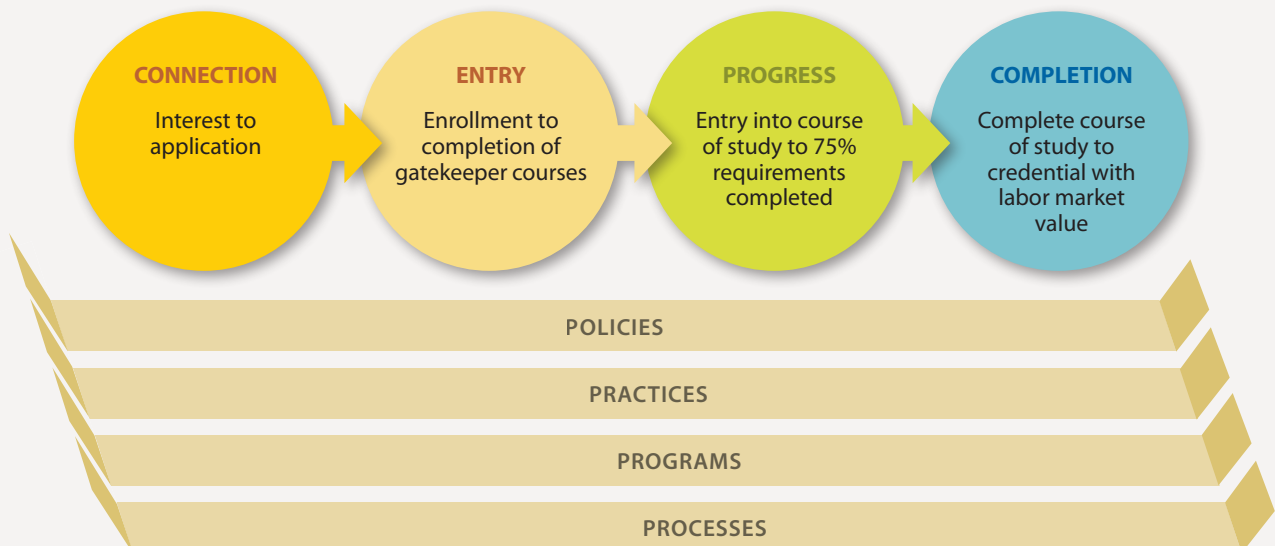
1. **Connection:** Movement of students from interest to application
2. **Entry:** Completion of gatekeeper courses and other requirements leading to students' enrollment in their program of study
3. **Progress:** Engagement of students in their program of study to the completion of up to 75% of program requirements
4. **Completion:** Achievement of the last 25% of the program of study that includes securing a credential with labor market value

This tool provides a mechanism for colleges to identify how their **structures, systems, policies and personnel facilitate or impede students' success in each phase.**

Key Pathway Principles: CBD also identified eight principles for a comprehensive rethinking of community colleges' most fundamental challenges and consideration of change at all levels (e.g., classroom, program of study, department/division and institution):

1. **Accelerate entry** into coherent programs of study
2. **Minimize time** required to get college ready
3. **Ensure students know requirements** to succeed
4. **Customize and contextualize instruction**
5. **Integrate student support** with instruction
6. **Continually monitor student progress** and proactively provide feedback
7. **Reward behaviors** that contribute to completion
8. **Leverage technology** to improve learning and service delivery

The Four Phases of the Preventing Loss/Creating Momentum Framework



KEY CONSIDERATIONS FOR (RE)DESIGN

- 1 Always consider the view and experience of students and how what we do and don't do impacts them.** Student Support (Re)defined revealed that students fundamentally see support differently from how we often deliver it at our colleges, broadly viewing everyone on campus as part of a system that can help them reach their goals as opposed to a series of discrete offices, positions/titles and programs. CBD emphasized the need to explore the academic journeys of different types of students rather than thinking primarily about the experience of traditional full-time students seeking transfer or degree. Ultimately, both initiatives underscore that when we look both inside *and* outside our classrooms *and* institutions at the factors that facilitate and impede students' educational experience from their perspective, we may discover unintended barriers to success and unexpected opportunities for improving achievement. Meaningfully engaging students early in our redesign planning and implementation efforts helps create change that will truly impact students' experience.
- 2 Extend the attention paid to students before the first day of class to every semester of their educational journey.** Findings from Student Support (Re)defined indicated that colleges need to help students find direction early in their educational journey—particularly those who arrive without a goal or who are first in their families to attend college—and find ways to help students sustain motivation toward achievement of that goal, while making sure that our policies, practices, policies and interactions with students are not hindering that same motivation. Both initiatives showed that once students establish their educational goals, providing a mechanism for them to track their progress can be motivational; and rewarding “good behavior” can also help learners set small milestones and can reinforce that their successes along the way are meaningful.
- 3 Collaborate across the institution in ways that integrate support and instruction.** These projects commonly emphasized that our colleges are typically structured in a way that requires students to seek out support on their own. The learners who most need assistance are often least equipped to navigate our systems, locate services and ask for help. By bringing key supports into the classroom, we are more likely to provide all students with the help they need to succeed. Moreover, since faculty uniquely reach all students at an institution, instructors have a critical role to play in both strengthening student engagement inside the classroom and building students' connection to the campus community outside of class.
- 4 Build structures that provide students with clear, predictable and finite pathways that help them achieve their educational goals in a timely manner.** Student Support (Re)defined revealed that learners need assistance building the specific skills and knowledge necessary for navigating our community colleges and thriving in this environment. Correspondingly, CBD stressed that providing students with coherent programs of study, clear requirements for success and faster entry into college-level work can aid their progress and goal completion.
- 5 Be transparent and intentional about the relevance and value of everything we do for students both with each other and with students.** These initiatives collectively demonstrate that inside the classroom, providing a meaningful and authentic context for learning and connecting students' academics to their educational, professional and personal goals can serve to motivate and engage. Student Support (Re)defined and CBD also underscore that regardless of where you sit in your institution, how you interact with students in ways both large and small can have positive or negative impacts on their success. Reflecting on how your work contributes to improving achievement and sharing these linkages with colleagues and students alike can help everyone better understand why you do what you do and contribute to a college culture focused on student success.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

Completion by Design:

- Access five inquiry guides and more information on the RP Group's involvement in CBD at www.rpgroup.org/projects/completion-by-design
- Find more information on this ongoing initiative at www.completionbydesign.org

Student Support (Re)defined:

- Find a full report of the student perspectives findings, a research brief on the key themes, an action guide, a practitioner primer featuring practices that demonstrate the key themes, and examples of how educators across the state are using Student Support (Re)defined on their campuses at www.rpgroup.org/projects/student-support-redefined

- Contact Dr. Darla Cooper, Director of Research and Evaluation, dcooper@rpgroup.org