Caring Campus
Faculty Leadership in Student Success

By Elisabeth A. Barnett and Selena Cho

Caring Campus is a program developed and administered by the Institute for Evidence-Based Change (IEBC)[1] to engage both academic and nonacademic staff in improving interactions with students and in creating a culture of caring at community colleges. IEBC initiated the program in 2018. It involves two related approaches. Caring Campus/Staff engages nonacademic staff from across a college in the identification and implementation of a set of behavioral commitments designed to increase students' connection to the college.[2] Caring Campus/Faculty, the focus of this report, brings together a group of college faculty whose students are already experiencing high levels of success and involves them in coaching sessions during which they identify similar behavioral commitments that can be employed in the classroom. These faculty then engage with other faculty at their college to expand the number who are willing to employ the commitments.[3] Colleges may elect to implement Caring Campus/Staff, Caring Campus/Faculty, or both. Caring Campus is currently being implemented at over 100 colleges nationwide, most of which are community colleges.

> **Caring Campus/Faculty brings together a group of college faculty to develop a set of behavioral commitments they can engage in to increase students' connection to the college.**

The reasons that colleges undertake this work are compelling. Research suggests that students are more likely to persist in college when they feel a sense of belonging and are validated as members of the college community (Barnett, 2011; Felten & Lambert, 2020; Rendón, 2002; Strayhorn, 2019). In addition, students benefit from understanding the expectations of college, forming relationships with people who can help them navigate college, and knowing that they can recover when they make mistakes or fall behind. This may be especially important for racially minoritized, first-generation, and international students (Booker, 2016; Hurtado & Carter, 1997). Caring Campus/Faculty is designed to support these aspects of the student experience, leading to improved course completion and persistence.

While this support can help postsecondary students in general, community college students, who are typically commuters who spend only part of their day on campus, are poised to benefit markedly from them. Many community college students have jobs and family responsibilities that limit their time at the college. Their most extensive and meaningful interactions are likely to be in the classroom and with faculty (Tinto, 2006). Faculty thus have the potential to:

- help students to feel like they belong in college and in their courses;
- show students that they care about them as people;
- provide students with clear guidance on what it takes to succeed academically;
- take into account challenges students are facing as they set expectations for course performance; and
- connect students to the help they need while in college.

Caring Campus is designed to play a role in actualizing this potential, ultimately improving student outcomes. Participating faculty and the broader college community may also benefit. In this report, we discuss implementation and early outcome findings from a study of Caring Campus/Faculty we conducted in 2020-22.[4]

Study Design, Methods, and Circumstances

To better understand Caring Campus/Faculty, we undertook a variety of research activities. At four community colleges selected for having begun implementation of the initiative in earnest—the Community College of Rhode Island, Delta College, Oakton College, and West Valley College—the CCRC research team conducted in-depth virtual site visits, speaking with administrators, faculty, staff, and students. In addition, we interviewed Caring Campus liaisons (those who coordinate implementation at each college) from 13 community colleges[5] as well as four IEBC coaches via Zoom. Interviews were typically an hour in length and were recorded and transcribed.

At two of the four colleges where we conducted site visits, we also administered surveys to both faculty and students, which were to be completed by faculty members participating in Caring Campus[6] and students enrolled in courses taught by a faculty member implementing the behavioral commitments.[7] A total of 38 faculty and 356 students completed the survey. We also observed coaching sessions at three Caring Campus colleges in the fall of 2020 and the fall of 2021. In addition, we studied coaching reports, research reports, and other artifacts from a range of colleges. Finally, we reviewed documents assembled by IEBC describing the coaching activities at a number of colleges.

We analyzed interview transcripts, key documents, and observation notes for themes related to (1) the colleges' reasons for joining Caring Campus/Faculty, (2) how faculty were selected to participate in coaching, (3) Caring Campus coaching, (4) the behavioral commitments, (5) how colleges engaged additional faculty, (6) communication to the wider campus, (7) structural supports and sustainability, and (8) preliminary evidence of effectiveness.

It is worth noting that implementation of Caring Campus at the colleges began in 2020-21, with the exception of Oakton College, which began its work (called the Persistence Project) in 2016. Thus, our research was conducted while most colleges were still in the early implementation phase of their efforts. What is more, implementation at the colleges as well as our research occurred during the COVID-19 pandemic, which affected college practices and our approach to fieldwork. The colleges' interactions with students and the research team's interactions with interviewees took place largely online.

Nevertheless, as will be discussed, the colleges worked closely with IEBC to make sure that behavioral commitments were developed for both face-to-face and virtual interactions. IEBC also modified the coaching sessions to be delivered virtually. These adaptations have allowed Caring Campus to smoothly transition to different environments as needed, which will likely be valuable going forward.

How Caring Campus/Faculty Works

With Caring Campus/Faculty, coaching participants identify a set of behaviors that faculty implement to make students feel welcomed and cared for. The aim is to create an improved experience for students that will positively affect their persistence and success. Given the pandemic, faculty have selected both in-person and virtual approaches to each of the commitments, usually based on those suggested by IEBC (see Table 1).

Table 1.

Behavioral Commitments Suggested by IEBC

COMMITMENT	TYPICAL APPLICATION
Learn and regularly use students' names	Colleges develop different strategies to help faculty learn student names. In some cases, faculty commit to also learn students' preferred pronouns.
Communicate clearly about the course	Faculty develop syllabi with clear explanations of course content and expectations. They often draw on a book by O'Brien, Mills, and Cohen titled *The Course Syllabus: A Learning-Centered Approach*.
Create moments that matter	Faculty meet with each student individually at the beginning of the semester to get to know their interests, needs, and wants.
Provide frequent assignments and assessments	Faculty provide quick and early feedback to students to help them understand course expectations and ways to improve their learning and performance.
Practice situational fairness	Faculty encourage students to discuss individual challenges with them so that they can provide extra help and/or flexibility on assignment due dates.

Caring Campus/Faculty, currently implemented in 28 colleges nationwide, involves a set of steps focused around the selection and enactment of behavioral commitments by faculty:

1. IEBC engages with college leadership to make sure that Caring Campus is a good fit for the college. This involves a written readiness assessment, an application process, and meetings with the president and other leaders. Most colleges' participation is funded through grants, while a few colleges pay a fee to participate.

2. In collaboration with the colleges' institutional researchers, IEBC identifies faculty who have high levels of course success and shares this information with college leaders. College leaders then conduct interviews with faculty using an IEBC protocol to see if they would be willing and able to participate in coaching and follow-up activities.

3. Colleges select a liaison who coordinates coaching, is the point of contact with IEBC, and often plays a substantial ongoing role in implementation.

4. Selected faculty participate in a set of coaching sessions—three in person or six virtually—to select behavioral commitments, develop college-specific
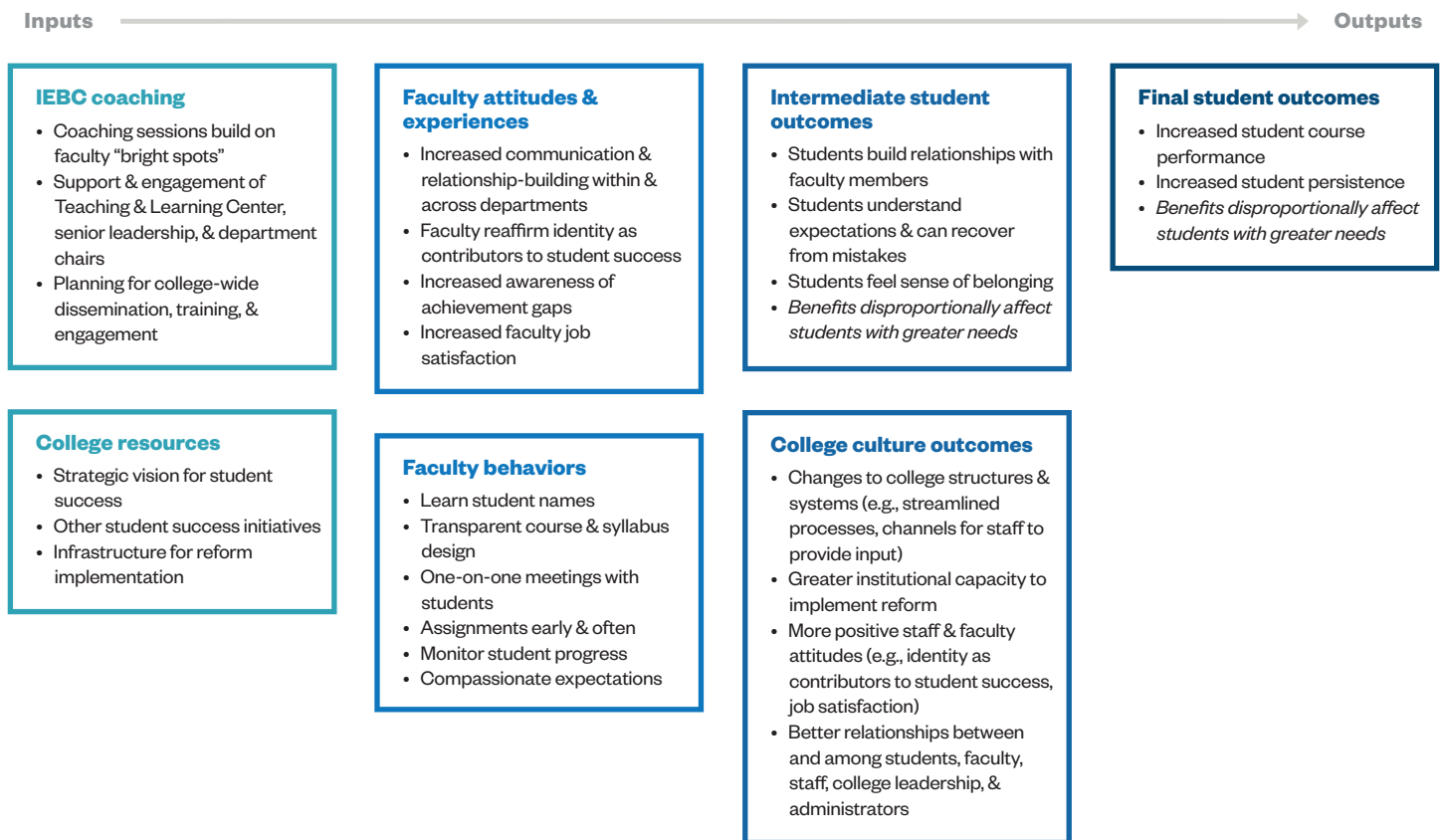
    implementation strategies for each commitment, and create a plan to involve increasing numbers of faculty in enacting them.

5. After coaching ends, faculty participants typically form a working group to oversee efforts toward engaging additional faculty, communicating about the initiative across the college, monitoring progress, and sustaining the initiative. IEBC remains involved to support institutionalization.

6. While the work is led by faculty, college leaders stay informed about and support the effort.

A key idea underlying Caring Campus is that the institution has the capability and responsibility to help students feel belonging and validation—that instead of leaving students to fend for themselves in college, the institution can and should engage in concrete ways to support and care for students. In addition to its intended effect on student outcomes, Caring Campus/Faculty is designed to influence college culture in ways that are supportive of students, staff, and faculty more generally. It is also framed as an equity initiative in that college leaders and others contend that traditionally underserved students are especially likely to benefit from the kinds of behaviors practiced by Caring Campus faculty.

The Caring Campus/Faculty theory of change (see Figure 1) can be summarized as follows: (1) Colleges have a strategic vision that drives their student success initiatives, but faculty may be an underutilized resource in these efforts. (2) IEBC provides coaching to a team of college faculty identified as already attaining good student outcomes. Participating faculty develop a set of behavioral commitments as well as plans for engaging additional faculty and overseeing implementation of the commitments. (3) The new behavioral commitments help students develop relationships with their faculty. As a result, students are more likely to understand college expectations and feel that they can recover from mistakes. Students also develop a sense of belonging and being cared for that leads to better outcomes, especially related to course success and persistence in college. (4) The experience of learning, working collaboratively, and positively interacting with students enhances college culture and increases the college's ability to take on other student success initiatives.

Figure 1.
Caring Campus/Faculty Theory of Change

Inputs →→→ Outputs

IEBC coaching
- Coaching sessions build on faculty "bright spots"
- Support & engagement of Teaching & Learning Center, senior leadership, & department chairs
- Planning for college-wide dissemination, training, & engagement

Faculty attitudes & experiences
- Increased communication & relationship-building within & across departments
- Faculty reaffirm identity as contributors to student success
- Increased awareness of achievement gaps
- Increased faculty job satisfaction

Intermediate student outcomes
- Students build relationships with faculty members
- Students understand expectations & can recover from mistakes
- Students feel sense of belonging
- *Benefits disproportionally affect students with greater needs*

Final student outcomes
- Increased student course performance
- Increased student persistence
- *Benefits disproportionally affect students with greater needs*

College resources
- Strategic vision for student success
- Other student success initiatives
- Infrastructure for reform implementation

Faculty behaviors
- Learn student names
- Transparent course & syllabus design
- One-on-one meetings with students
- Assignments early & often
- Monitor student progress
- Compassionate expectations

College culture outcomes
- Changes to college structures & systems (e.g., streamlined processes, channels for staff to provide input)
- Greater institutional capacity to implement reform
- More positive staff & faculty attitudes (e.g., identity as contributors to student success, job satisfaction)
- Better relationships between and among students, faculty, staff, college leadership, & administrators

Study Findings: Implementation

Reasons for Joining

The colleges we studied generally joined Caring Campus because they believed that it has the potential to increase student persistence and completion. As one liaison said, "In spite of marketing or all of the other things we do externally, the best recruitment for students and the best support for students is what happens with their faculty." And, as another liaison said, "It's the old adage about it's not what you say to people, it's how you make them feel."

Most college leaders also felt that Caring Campus has the potential to increase equity and equitable outcomes. They often considered Caring Campus to be a key aspect of college diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) visions and strategies. In interviews, they highlighted their expectation that the behavioral commitments would be especially meaningful to traditionally underserved student groups and also noted that a more positive college culture would be conducive to greater equity.

Caring Campus often fit into other organizational priorities, especially in relation to developing and supporting faculty. Some college leaders wanted to improve work culture and working relationships at their college. One leader explained, "We do many good things. We have some real challenges also, particularly with faculty trusting each other and administration and really learning from each other." Others saw an opportunity to strengthen faculty knowledge and skills in the classroom. Connecting these ideas, one college leader stated,

> I would like for this to [relate] to our equity plan that kind of focuses on enhancement of faculty development specific to culturally responsive pedagogy and overall work around remote learning. And this also relates to our inception of the Center for Innovation in Teaching and Research.

Caring Campus also appealed to the colleges because it is a relatively low-cost initiative that has the potential to increase revenue if students actually do persist in increased numbers. Aside from the cost of coaching (often covered by grant funds), the main costs to the college were associated with personnel time to coordinate the initiative, participate in coaching, and conduct follow-up activities. In a limited number of colleges, extra costs were incurred for the assignment of program managers to help lead the initiative or the provision of stipends to part-time faculty. However, college leaders were clear that they considered these costs affordable and justifiable.

Selecting Initial Faculty Participants

The colleges generally used the procedures set up by IEBC to select a group of faculty whose students were already experiencing high success rates in their classes. Based on experiences with prior colleges, IEBC contends that such faculty are likely practicing some version of many of the behavioral commitments already and are thus ideal Caring Campus participants.

Each college's institutional research office was asked to send an anonymous data set to IEBC that included course success rates by faculty member and course section. IEBC then conducted analyses to identify faculty who would be good candidates based on these data points (those with course retention rates above 90% and course success rates above 75%). Interviewees appreciated that the starting phase of the faculty selection process was data driven.

Colleges often refined the list to ensure diversity of representation of departments and the desired balance of full- and part-time faculty, among other criteria. As one liaison said, "So, I think the plan of action was to ensure . . . a nice diversity of both full-time and part-time instructors. Right now, our participants are roughly 60% full-time and 40% part-time."

The next step involved conducting individual interviews with potential faculty participants to identify those with leadership potential and enthusiasm and without major logistical barriers to participation. IEBC provided colleges with a list of suggested questions[8] to use in these interviews, which were generally conducted by academic leaders at the vice-presidential level. A college leader stated,

Our vice president of academic success and our director of our teaching and learning center interviewed those staff to determine . . . their responses to questions, their passion, their enthusiasm, what they shared as their practices in the classroom, [and] who would ultimately be the best fit for the faculty training.

Notably, a number of those who conducted interviews found them to be engaging and enjoyable, providing insights into the experiences of faculty with whom they might not otherwise have in-depth conversations. In the words of one college leader,

Interviews for me were really refreshing because . . . as an administrator, you're not in the classroom. So, you kind of felt like you were getting that sense of being there again, thinking about all those great strategies that I would've implemented as a faculty member.

At many of the colleges involved in our research, faculty were pleased to be selected and willing to invest the time required to participate in coaching and follow-up activities. However, faculty at some colleges were more reluctant for various reasons. Some were concerned about the extra effort and time required, especially as many faculty members felt stretched enough by the strain and demands of teaching through the pandemic. Other faculty members were concerned about how participation might affect relationships—that is, the selected faculty members worried about coming across as the administration's favorites or as know-it-all faculty leaders tasked with telling their peers what to do. And still others were discouraged by the sense that the same few faculty members participate in and lead many college initiatives or working groups, resulting in feelings of burnout.

We observed that IEBC coaches intentionally addressed faculty members' potential hesitations about Caring Campus during the coaching sessions. For example, coaches emphasized that the faculty members were invited based on data and not based on administrators' personal feelings. Coaches also emphasized that, though the behaviors recommended by Caring Campus might be obvious to the high-performing faculty members selected to participate in coaching, they may not be as obvious to the broader faculty body or especially new faculty members. Coaches presented the work not as telling colleagues what to do but as developing a framework and tools to make it easier for more faculty members at the college to engage in behaviors that benefit students.

The number of faculty who ultimately participated varied by college, with most colleges having 7–12 faculty members who went through IEBC coaching sessions as a group.

Caring Campus Coaching

IEBC closely coordinated the coaching sessions with each college's designated liaison. The liaison is named by top leadership and may be a college leader, such as a provost or vice president for academic affairs. The liaison typically participated in the coaching and then played a role in leading subsequent activities.

Most of the Caring Campus colleges involved in our research underwent virtual coaching as necessitated by the pandemic. Under this model, each faculty group participated in coaching sessions led by one of IEBC's coaches.[9] The sessions were 2–4 hours

long, thematically organized, and designed to be highly participatory. The coaching normally began with a review of institutional data to understand student demographics, enrollment rates, and short- and long-term outcomes. This was followed by the development of behavioral commitments and an implementation plan and concluded with a presentation to deans and department chairs. The coaching program typically spanned the course of one semester.

Table 2.
Typical Coaching Schedule

ACTIVITY	DURATION	
	IN-PERSON	VIRTUAL
Leadership kickoff (with participation of college president and welcome statement)	2 hours	2 hours
Objective 1: Orientation and development of behavioral commitments (with welcome by president if possible)	4 hours, combining objectives 1 & 2	2 hours
Objective 2: Development of implementation plans		2 hours
Objective 3: Development of monitoring plans	4 hours, combining objectives 3 & 4	2 hours
Objective 4: Development of communication plans		2 hours
Joint final session (with participation of president if possible)	3 hours	2 hours

Note: Table based on IEBC documents.

Liaisons we interviewed stated that the coaching sessions were well received and were "engaging" and "well organized." Attendance was generally high. At the two colleges where faculty surveys were conducted, 15 of 16 respondents (94%) who had attended coaching agreed with the statement, "The Caring Campus coaching experience gave me tools to improve the way I interact with students in general." One reason that faculty appreciated coaching was the opportunity for interaction with peers, which also influenced their willingness to stay involved over time. One faculty participant stated how much she valued "being able to have just kind of a frank conversation; folks being able to be transparent, open, and engaged with colleagues that are outside of their department; and to engage with colleagues in a virtual setting."

Working in the COVID Environment

Caring Campus/Faculty started at participating colleges either right before or during the COVID-19 pandemic. This has been challenging both because people on campus had their hands full dealing with the pandemic itself and because the behavioral commitments had to be adapted to an online learning environment. While most often presenting a challenge, these circumstances also offered opportunities for positive change.

In most cases, the pace of implementation slowed. Coaching sessions were sometimes postponed for considerable periods of time, and faculty committees responsible for Caring Campus implementation decided to move at a slower speed. One interviewee said that faculty asked to "slow down just a little bit because we were still in the prime heat of [COVID]. They were managing a lot in the classroom with students."

Faculty recruitment became challenging in many cases. As one liaison explained, "Everyone is just overloaded with everything that's been happening during the pandemic. We have folks having to kind of relearn their teaching practices and adjust to a virtual setting."

However, the pandemic also opened some doors. Interviewees at several colleges reported that faculty were hungry for interaction and relished the chance to work closely together, especially after the pandemic reduced opportunities for peer-to-peer connection, relationship-building, and collaboration among faculty. And while some interviewees mourned the loss of in-person interaction, most interviewees agreed that holding meetings on Zoom, as became the norm during the pandemic, was often more convenient.

Selecting Behavioral Commitments

A primary purpose of coaching is to select behavioral commitments, and most colleges chose commitments similar to those suggested by IEBC. However, they were also encouraged to select commitments that would be appropriate to their own contexts. Some of the choices required more discussion than others, and language often had to be carefully hammered out. Even the word *commitment* was tricky. A coach shared that at one college, the faculty members disliked this word to describe the behaviors because they were particularly averse to any kind of top-down mandate. Alternative vocabulary was identified at some colleges to avoid unnecessary conflict. The final list of selected behavioral commitments varied from college to college. Table 3 describes those chosen at one college.

Table 3.

Behavioral Commitments Selected at One College

BEHAVIORAL COMMITMENT	EXAMPLES OF IN-PERSON IMPLEMENTATION	EXAMPLES OF VIRTUAL IMPLEMENTATION
Welcome students to the course and each course session	• Use welcome activity to engage students the first day of the course • Greet students by standing at the door, especially on the first day • Spend a few minutes before class begins to talk informally with students • Greet students with enthusiasm	• Send welcome letter via email and by posting in virtual classroom • Use welcome activity to engage students the first day of the course • Be online a few minutes before class begins to talk informally with students • Greet students with enthusiasm
Learn and use students' names	• Have students create plaques with their names and put them on their desks at each class; perhaps include a photo on the plaque • Ask each student how to pronounce his/her name; write a phonetic version of the name for your use and review this with the student • Pair students to learn one another's names; walk around to learn names and pronunciations • Greet students by name as they enter classroom	• Have students put their names on their Zoom videos • Ask each student how to pronounce his/her name; write a phonetic version of the name for your use and review this with the student • Pair students in breakout rooms to learn one another's name; visit breakout rooms to learn names and pronunciations • Greet students by name as they enter the virtual classroom
Create mentoring moments	• Meet with each student individually to learn about him/her as a person, not just as a student; for example, ask about career goals, current employment, family (but be careful not to intrude on student's privacy) • Learn what the student thinks may get in the way of his/her success and how you can help	• Meet with each student individually to learn about him/her as a person, not just as a student; for example, ask about career goals, current employment, family (but be careful not to intrude on student's privacy)—can be done via Zoom or phone • Learn what the student thinks may get in the way of his/her success and how you can help
Use compassionate coaching and situational fairness	• Treat students with understanding and compassion; know that from time to time students will not turn in assignments and assessments on time due to factors outside of their control • Handle each incident on a case-by-case basis; send reminders with encouragement • Consider using before-class time to ask students to talk about how things are going, especially with COVID-19 or other current issues impacting their lives (make participation optional so as not to be intrusive)	• Treat students with understanding and compassion; know that from time to time students will not turn in assignments and assessments on time due to factors outside of their control • Handle each incident on a case-by-case basis; send reminders with encouragement • Consider using discussion post to ask students to talk about how things are going, especially with COVID-19 or other current issues impacting their lives (make posting optional so as not to be intrusive)

With regard to specific commitments, there was widespread agreement that learning and using student names was important. Many colleges also encouraged faculty to use students' preferred pronouns. Providing frequent, low-stakes assignments was generally seen to be a good practice to help students understand the expectations of the course. Moreover, most colleges chose to implement some version of the commitment, *Create moments that matter*. This usually involved setting up short meetings with each student at the beginning of the semester, but it was handled in different ways depending on the college and the individual faculty member. One liaison commented,

> I remember one of the biology faculty said he asked students to schedule a 15-minute time with him anytime during the semester, but preferably early on and just to meet and greet and learn more about them and their goals. And somebody else talked about having groups of two or three meet together

and asking the students to tell her something important about themselves that they would like the professor to know.

Interviews conducted with students suggest that individual meetings with faculty were meaningful and allowed them to make a personal connection with faculty. One said,

I think it was helpful. I got to find out things about my teacher. She went to the same college I'm trying to transfer into, and she was telling me about that. I would've never known without that one-on-one meeting. . . . I think it was beneficial.

Students also commented on other ways that faculty show caring. A student shared that her faculty member began each class with a chance for personal conversation and that this demonstrated the instructor's concern for students:

Every time we have class, she always asks what we did throughout the week. She picks each of us individually and talks to us for about, like, two minutes. And I believe she is doing it to be kind, but she genuinely wants to know.

Practice situational fairness, another commitment suggested by IEBC, was more controversial. This commitment involves allowing students a certain amount of flexibility in completing assignments when life circumstances make it difficult to submit work by the original deadline. This became a larger concern due to the extenuating circumstances of the pandemic, but there was also growing awareness of other issues that have long affected the time that community college students can dedicate to assignments, such as caring for family members and working one or more jobs.

While faculty wanted to address this concern, a number of them worried about the fairness of offering flexibility to some students and not to others, believing that all students should have equal access to any advantages offered. This highlighted the challenges around distinguishing equality in education, the idea that all students regardless of their background or circumstances should receive the same treatment, from equity in education, the idea that students should receive the treatment that best meets them where they are based on their background or circumstances.

Interviewed students frequently mentioned situational fairness, especially flexible deadlines, as an important way that faculty members could help students feel more like they belong in the classroom and reduce their stress. In one student's words,

During this year, I moved out of my house, and I was going through some issues at home with family problems and stuff. And I'm usually the type of person that just keeps going. But I was talking to my teachers. They were like, "Okay, we'll extend deadlines. Just take this week for yourself, make sure you're doing okay, make sure you are taking care of yourself first."

At the two colleges where student surveys were administered, most students agreed that their Caring Campus instructor had implemented the behavioral commitments, which were somewhat different at each college. At one college, 88% agreed or strongly agreed that the instructor used their preferred name, and 85% agreed or strongly agreed that they were given a clear and easily understood syllabus. Eighty-six percent agreed or strongly agreed that they felt welcomed in class. At the second college, 97% of students reported

that instructors used their preferred name and personal pronoun, and 86% reported that instructors practiced situational fairness.

Engaging Additional Faculty

Colleges strive to spread Caring Campus beyond the coached group so that ultimately all or most of the faculty will practice the behavioral commitments with their students. To this end, participants took time during coaching to develop a plan to engage more faculty at the college in Caring Campus practices. However, these plans were often modified once colleges were on their own after coaching had ended. [10]

Responsibility for implementation of next steps varied by college. At most colleges, a working committee was formed comprising faculty who participated in the coaching; the committee took responsibility for leading the work going forward. In other cases, typically at colleges where it was less customary for faculty to assume leadership roles, the liaison became the de facto leader of the work.

To identify additional faculty to participate, several strategies were used. One interviewee mentioned that it had been very easy to recruit new faculty members into Caring Campus. Those who participated in the coaching sessions each invited two to three colleagues to implementation meetings. Some colleges had an open call, inviting faculty to apply to join the initiative after attending workshops that the lead faculty group offered to introduce the behavioral commitments. College leaders also played a role in recruitment. One stated,

> I also think that my role is to engage faculty in general into the initiative. So, I've sent numerous communications about it, spoken at different meetings, committees, events all across campus to build up awareness of what's going on, to share the data, to get more faculty involved.

There appeared to be differences in the readiness of additional faculty to participate depending on college culture, who was seen as leading the work, perceived workloads, the extent to which COVID had imposed added burdens, and incentives offered (e.g., stipends, reduced workloads, recognition events). There were also faculty who hesitated to participate for other reasons—some thought it unnecessary because they were already implementing the kinds of behaviors recommended through Caring Campus, while others resisted being asked to do more.

Another challenge at some colleges was figuring out how to engage adjunct faculty members. Adjunct faculty members' contracts often make it more difficult for them to participate in activities outside of their teaching duties because their hours may be capped and/or their contracts require the college to provide additional pay for extracurricular involvement. Also, adjunct faculty members often lack a dedicated office space, which is important for implementing one-on-one meetings with students.

Training and Support for New Faculty

Training and support for faculty new to Caring Campus took a variety of forms. Several colleges planned workshops for new groups of faculty interested in participating, with sessions often structured around the individual behavioral commitments. For example, one session might focus on situational fairness and involve faculty talking about how they could practice this in different classrooms and circumstances. In other settings, the focus of sessions broadened from the behavioral commitments to pedagogy. One college decided to introduce the behavioral commitments through communities of practice, an approach already in use at the college, in which small groups of faculty work on a particular teaching practice or problem. A faculty member described what they had in mind:

> At the end of the spring, we're going to start messaging all faculty about [the communities of practice] and creating buzz and energy about joining one of them. The week before the semester, [the communities of practice] have what's called a launch. And so, they have a kind of mini-retreat that's just a morning or an afternoon where the community gets together, meets each other, starts to learn about the material. Then it'll fall into synch with our regular communities of practice, where they meet about once a month.

At another college, the structure was informal, allowing for free-flowing conversations around topics of interest, including the behavioral commitments. A college liaison described this approach:

> A couple of us decided we want to do some "coffee-and-caring" sessions where people could just drop in and just chat with us. We don't want it to be formal. We don't want a formal presentation, but we want to be able to have some time where we can just say, "Hey, we're going to have coffee. We're here. Let's just talk as colleagues."

Spotlight on New Faculty Participation at Delta College

After Delta College completed coaching, faculty who did not participate in the coaching were invited to join peer teams of 4–6 members. Each team has been led by one or two peer facilitators and meets over Zoom every other week. The facilitators are Delta faculty members who participated in the Caring Campus coaching sessions, and they guide discussion around one of the behavioral commitments, which the Delta faculty members have renamed *investments*. The peer facilitators try to make connections between the topics participants raise and ways to support student success. The teams at Delta College began in the fall of 2021 with 13 faculty members split into three peer teams.

There is no fixed or formal curriculum for the team meetings; the peer facilitators foster organic and candid conversation about classroom-related issues. Questions for discussion include:

- How is it going in your classroom?
- How are you using the investments?
- Which investments are working for you? Which ones are not working for you?

The flexibility and openness of the team meetings create space for faculty members to connect with and support each other, whether emotionally through expressing empathy and encouragement or practically through exchanging advice. As one faculty member reflected,

> There's been a lot of problem solving at our little group sessions, and most of it centers around communicating with people. I get this message from a student, how do I handle that? The student is doing this, how do I handle that? So we've really worked on how do you approach this and try to … foster positivity.

Faculty members who participated in these teams reported that, as valuable and productive as it is to spend time working on the behavioral investments, it is equally valuable to be able to connect with peers and support each other:

> The small-team atmosphere has really just sort of engendered a collegial family. You feel like—I've got this group and this is who I'm taking it to. With the two semesters that I've been involved with teams, it just feels like you've got somebody who's going to be there who's going to understand and help you through. That collegial support, I think, has allowed more mental bandwidth to be supportive for our students.

The teams are engaging in conversations about how to bring in new facilitators to keep the work "fresh and moving," but the faculty members who participate in these groups enjoy them so much that the current plan is to continue running them until the interest falls away.

Communicating to the Wider Campus

Most colleges considered it important to share information about Caring Campus with the broader college community. College leaders played a central role in this, although liaisons and faculty were often involved as well. Liaisons often sought to inform different college groups about Caring Campus and to tie it to work already underway. One said, "But I also operate as an ambassador to share to our broader college community about the work that we're doing that's focusing on enhancements to faculty development."

Large campus gatherings such as convocations and professional development days were a key setting for communicating to the broader college community about Caring Campus, as well as for encouraging participation by additional faculty. These gatherings were often an opportunity for presidents and other college leaders to recognize the effort and the people involved, which the interviewees found very motivating. As one liaison shared,

> At the development day, there was a general presentation with both the staff Caring Campus and the faculty Caring Campus together for the general groups before they broke into their separate groups for their more specific work-group professional development. And then the faculty group did a longer, more detailed presentation for the faculty.

Some colleges also used marketing strategies such as the showing of videos to publicize the initiative, although this was more common with Caring Campus/Staff. One college had developed a video featuring college faculty talking about how they care for students and how they enact the Caring Campus commitments (the video may be used in future student recruitment campaigns as well as for internal communication at the college).

Structural Supports and Sustainability

Sustaining Caring Campus is very much on the minds of those involved with this effort at the colleges. A number of approaches are encouraged by IEBC and enacted at the college level, including: (1) leadership engagement, (2) faculty ownership, (3) the integration of Caring Campus with other priority initiatives, (4) using data to monitor progress, and (5) finding ways to incentivize participation.

Leadership engagement

Both institutional leaders and faculty leaders typically participate in the IEBC coaching sessions. However, the level of involvement varies across colleges. At some colleges, presidents are present for some or all coaching sessions. At other colleges, a different college leader attends.

In addition, many presidents and vice presidents make it a point to publicly express their personal commitment to Caring Campus early and often. As one president said,

> I do think that keeping [Caring Campus] on my radar and on the radar of deans and chairs and giving positive reinforcement and check-ins about it— both to get information back and to continue to support and encourage and highlight—I think are important. I don't do it on a weekly or regular basis, but probably at least every couple of weeks . . . just to remind them that this is important work and it's valued.

Leadership also plays a key role in explaining how Caring Campus fits into the college's strategic direction so that it makes sense to sometimes over-burdened faculty. Another strategy used by leadership to keep Caring Campus top of mind is "agendizing," that is, making sure that there is a specified time to discuss it in key meetings. As one liaison said, "I'm usually giving updates at our cabinet meeting and at our executive council, which includes people who are directors of financial aid and the deans and so forth."

Spotlight on College Leadership at Oakton College

College leaders' vision for Caring Campus can play an important role in maintaining the momentum of the initiative by giving direction and demonstrating both symbolic and practical support. At Oakton Community College, the president expressed passion for and commitment to the institutionalization of Caring Campus at Oakton:

> I do think from all the outcomes we've seen consistently, from the initial pilot and beyond, that students who are in those sections feel a sense of connection and belonging. They persist term to term, and particularly for students from minoritized communities, the impact has been most significant. . . . So, my hope is that it just becomes a part of what we do here—that it's no longer a project but this is the way we teach at Oakton.

One concrete way that Oakton's leadership has demonstrated support for Caring Campus is by creating space for regular discussion of Caring Campus at the leadership level and offering faculty members leading the initiative an open line of communication with college leadership. There is a student success team at Oakton led by the vice president for student affairs and the provost and vice president for academic affairs and composed of the co-chairs of all the college's student success initiatives. At monthly meetings, the co-chairs report on initiative progress to the president, vice presidents, and deans. Caring Campus is a regular agenda item at those meetings.

Another concrete way that Oakton's leadership has demonstrated support is through the hiring of two project implementation coordinators in 2018 to provide logistical and administrative support for faculty to implement their ideas. They report to the assistant vice president for academic affairs. Faculty members' time and bandwidth are already stretched thin by their teaching and advising responsibilities, so the project coordinators play an important role in maintaining the ongoing implementation and momentum of Caring Campus. As a college leader stated,

> [The Caring Campus committee] built a beautiful outline of what they wanted to do. I think it was very large and ambitious. I think they felt they needed to do it all at once. And so the project managers have really helped manage their expectations in terms of what's realistic in the timeframe. . . . [They] have helped a lot to manage the timelines and the committee to get some of these smaller projects that are associated with it done.

Faculty ownership

As noted, most colleges formed a faculty committee to manage the work, usually led by individuals who underwent the IEBC coaching. While committee formation has been largely left to colleges in the past, moving forward, IEBC will ask that those who participate in coaching form a committee in charge of implementation.

A number of liaisons talked about the importance of faculty "driving" or "owning" the work, a factor that is helpful in attracting participation of other faculty as well as avoiding the perception that it has been imposed by the college administration. Relatedly, several college leaders talked about taking steps to make sure that faculty do not feel like they are being "managed." As a college president said, "My perception is that [the vice president for

instruction] and I, we haven't really directed the work. [The faculty] check in with us, but this is really a faculty-owned, administration-supported approach."

It is widely viewed as helpful when a faculty member who is highly respected by their peers leads Caring Campus. College leaders often made a point of ensuring that one or more of the faculty selected for participation fit into this category. As one leader said, "First of all, I think it's [important] who we have championing the work. [Faculty name] is a very engaging faculty member; she's well respected."

Spotlight on Faculty Ownership at the Community College of Rhode Island (CCRI)

At CCRI, the six faculty members who participated in IEBC-led Caring Campus coaching organized a series of workshops led by faculty, for faculty, that focused on the behavioral commitments. These faculty worked closely with instructional designers at CCRI's Learning Design Center, who provided advice on best practices and logistical support for tasks such as branding, developing PowerPoint presentations, and translating the presentations and workshop curriculum into formats compatible with Blackboard, the college's learning management system. Instructional designers also reviewed and designed workshop materials for faculty members.

CCRI also launched Summer Institutes, two-day intensive workshops for faculty members who want to participate in Caring Campus. Two cohorts of faculty, one in fall 2021 and the other in spring 2022, participated in Summer Institutes, with about 20 faculty members per cohort. The college welcomed a third cohort in summer 2022.

Additionally, the Center for Teaching Excellence at CCRI has played an important role in the implementation and scaling of Caring Campus. The center is led by a faculty member who participated in the IEBC-led coaching sessions. This individual has since played a role in recruiting more faculty members to participate in the workshops mentioned above by promoting them in the center's newsletter. In the future, the Center for Teaching Excellence is planning an orientation for new faculty that will introduce the Caring Campus behavioral commitments so that they are baked into "a firmer part of the college culture."

Integration of Caring Campus with other priority initiatives

Many colleges have been integrating Caring Campus with other initiatives focused on student persistence. Most often mentioned was the value of coordinating the work with guided pathways reform practices.[11] Interviewees tended to highlight the opportunity to add a human, caring dimension to changes in structures and curriculum driven by the guided pathways approach. A college leader shared,

> I have been part of the guided pathways paradigm for a decade, probably. I think it's a really great thing—the idea that we get students on the right path. One of the things that I've been really focused on the last three years has been that those are very structural changes. They're not focused on the human element. And the work of higher ed, I think, needs to be more human, basically. Get back to the basics—the connection is how we make a difference.

There were also a number of cases in which Caring Campus was closely tied to efforts to advance equity on campus, as well as to improve faculty professional practice. In the latter case, colleges' centers for teaching and learning often played a role in developing and leading the work.

Spotlight on Initiative Integration at West Valley College (WVC)

At WVC, Caring Campus is connected to two other college initiatives: the Anti-Racism Action Plan and guided pathways reform. One leader explained that all three of these are essential to address equity gaps at the college:

> One of the core things in our anti-racism work and in the Caring Campus work and also in the guided pathways work is eliminating the equity gap. . . . The five behavioral commitments in Caring Campus are also something that [needs] to be happening at scale across our campus if we want to be successful in eliminating the equity gap. I think that's where [these initiatives] most clearly overlap and align.

WVC's Anti-Racism Action Plan is a three-year plan with five goals, the fourth of which is to "create a welcoming, supportive, and inclusive campus climate." Cross-functional teams are working on these goals, and many faculty members who participate in Caring Campus are also serving on these teams.

According to one faculty member, the Anti-Racism Action Plan is ambitious but "doesn't directly say anything about instruction per se." Stakeholders reported that Caring Campus ties into the Anti-Racism Action Plan by providing concrete strategies for faculty members to work toward the broader anti-racism goals. In the words of one faculty member:

> I think the Caring Campus commitments, pretty much all of them, all connect to the students' feeling of safety, right? If they feel safe enough with me, then they're going to ask for an extension. If they feel safe enough with me, then they're going to ask me when they need clarification on something in the course. They're going to address me by my name, and I'm going to address them by their name. . . . Caring Campus is about seeing students as individuals. . . . One of the things I keep telling faculty is: If you do this, you will feel more rejuvenated with yourself and with your students, and the equity work will come easier because it's relational work.

As part of the college's guided pathways efforts, teams are working on a 16-week student engagement map that "tells students the ins and outs of college." The map outlines what students would expect to be completing week-by-week for a semester. There is a faculty version of the 16-week student engagement map that includes checkpoints for faculty members throughout a semester. One faculty member explained,

> If you think about Caring Campus, it's about retaining and helping students along their pathway, right? . . . Okay, it's week zero. Did you publish your Canvas course four days before the start of the semester? Did you send your students an email that welcomes them to the course? Did you learn your students' names this week? . . . And the only reason we can get guided pathways to work is if faculty have relationships with their students.

Using data to monitor progress

While many of the colleges analyze data as part of their general management practice, it was not common to use student outcome data in monitoring progress on the

implementation of Caring Campus during our fieldwork. Notable exceptions were at Oakton College and Delta College. At Oakton, a Caring Campus faculty subcommittee focuses on data and monitoring. This group meets monthly with staff in the Office of Research and Planning to discuss data needs, develop and refine data collection instruments, and discuss takeaways. A goal of the subcommittee is to establish a consistent portfolio of measures tracked for Caring Campus so that data monitoring can become consistent over time.

Finding ways to incentivize participation

Participation in Caring Campus requires extra time and effort, especially for those faculty involved in managing the work. At some colleges, faculty undertake these responsibilities because it is seen as important and meaningful. Other colleges have incentivized participation in a variety of ways:

- A number of colleges have pinning ceremonies in which faculty who have participated in Caring Campus are recognized and given pins.
- At one college, participation in Caring Campus allows faculty to earn points toward promotion. Faculty who implement high-impact practices and engage in teaching and learning enhancement projects earn points; the Caring Campus behavioral commitments are seen as related, and points are awarded accordingly.
- At the same college, part-time faculty can get paid for participation in Caring Campus. The pay for part-time faculty is not much, but, according to a faculty member, "That institutional recognition is really important for the institution to show that it cares about [Caring Campus] and values this project."

Study Findings: Outcomes

Student Outcomes

Colleges joining Caring Campus were primarily focused on its potential to improve student persistence. As one interviewee said, "Caring Campus is a retention effort. It's a completion effort. It's just a different way of going about it." Many interviewees also saw it as having the potential to improve equity. In the words of one,

> *I think many students of color can have a sense of feeling a bit disenfran-chised. What Caring Campus does is put that little thing on our shoulder that reminds us that we do need to make sure that we are intentional about everything that we do.*

Survey results suggest that faculty believe the Caring Campus/Faculty approach "helps faculty improve student success." At the two colleges where faculty surveys were conducted, 97% of respondents strongly agreed or agreed with this statement.

Most of the colleges only recently began implementation during our research period and thus did not yet have the opportunity to assess Caring Campus's impact. However, as an early adopter of Caring Campus, Oakton College has collected and examined data that sheds light on its effectiveness. Oakton's Office of Research and Planning compared

entering college students from fall 2020 who had participated in any course taught by a Caring Campus faculty member with those who had not. Students were tracked into the spring and fall of 2021. Clear differences were found in the data:

- From fall 2020 to spring 2021, new student persistence rates were 67% for students in non-Caring Campus sections and 74% for students in Caring Campus sections.
- From fall 2020 to fall 2021, new student persistence rates were 48% for students in non-Caring Campus sections and 66% for students in Caring Campus sections.

A disaggregated comparison of persistence rates before and after the implementation of Caring Campus also revealed that the positive differences found were greatest for Black students, though persistence rates were also higher for White, Latinx, and Asian American and Pacific Islander students in Caring Campus sections.

It is important to recognize that while these findings are impressive, they are not the result of a causal study design. Further research would be needed to rule out alternative explanations. For example, faculty who participated in Caring Campus could have already been better than their peers at supporting students and encouraging high persistence rates before they got involved with the initiative.

Faculty Engagement

As many of the Caring Campus liaisons are also vice presidents or provosts leading college academic programs, a number of them valued Caring Campus as a vehicle for engaging and better preparing faculty. Some noted that the coaching sessions were an uplifting and inspiring experience for faculty members that allowed them to connect with one another and converse about teaching. One highlighted Caring Campus as a way for faculty, especially new faculty, to have conversations about how to teach effectively and solve problems that arise in the classroom:

> And one of the things that was interesting that they brought up is that they'd like to have part of our sessions devoted to focusing on problems that they don't know how to solve. And we've talked about that. And I think that's really a rather nice evolution in terms of people's willingness to be vulnerable.

A number of faculty interviewees appreciated the chance to improve their teaching practice as part of their Caring Campus activities. Sometimes in conjunction with centers for teaching and learning, faculty participated in workshops, discussion groups, and communities of practice where they had a chance to talk about how to strengthen their skills and better serve students. As one faculty member said,

> I think that Caring Campus has really kind of galvanized my ideas, and it provided me with an opportunity to reevaluate my teaching. . . . [We] are thinking about getting together for our Caring Campus cohort and trying to talk to other faculty. [It really is] worthwhile.

Culture Change

Caring Campus was also seen as a way to make the overall culture of the college more positive, which has been of particular concern to many, given the racial justice movement and the pandemic. A number of college leaders believed that Caring Campus/Faculty, especially when implemented along with Caring Campus/Staff, was contributing to a more positive atmosphere in which both students and staff could flourish. One liaison said,

> *Of all the things that are challenging and difficult at my institution right now, this is absolutely an exciting, happy, joy-filled project. …I think having this opportunity and the way this framework was put together is just something that's brought a very much needed excitement to the work of teaching at our college.*

Faculty who were surveyed believed that faculty relationships have improved. Of the 16 respondents who participated in coaching across the two colleges, 15 (94%) agreed with the statement, "My participation in Caring Campus has strengthened my relationship with other faculty at my college."

Conclusion

Caring Campus/Faculty is an important initiative. It has the potential to provide support to students in the location where they spend most of their time at college—in the classroom—and from the people with whom they most frequently interact—faculty. This kind of support can make a real difference to students who may need extra help and encouragement to persist in college. And it may be an especially important way for colleges to support students of color, first-generation students, and low-income students who may experience structural barriers at their institutions that make it difficult to feel welcome and comfortable in college and to navigate it well. Further, it is also relatively inexpensive.

Importantly, Caring Campus/Faculty is becoming a key avenue for faculty to take leadership in student success efforts. It is also working to support faculty as they seek to improve their ability to teach and support students. It has emerged as a means by which faculty get the support they need, with peers playing an important mutual assistance role. Its structure as a faculty-driven initiative has engendered a great deal of faculty interest and support and is contributing to reduced feelings of isolation among faculty.

Finally, Caring Campus/Faculty is facilitating the development of a positive college climate, which students, faculty, and college leaders have viewed as especially helpful during the pandemic. It is seen by many as contributing to an atmosphere that will make both students and staff more likely to persist.

It will be important in the months and years ahead to continue to refine and evaluate this work. Ongoing improvements to the coaching system are currently underway—IEBC uses the results of research on Caring Campus as well as input from various stakeholder groups to continually strengthen the coaching and support offered to participating institutions. Colleges are trying out different ways to sustain and grow their efforts. Going forward, further inquiry is needed to understand implementation of best practices and the sustainability of these efforts and to assess their impact on students.

Endnotes

1. IEBC is a national nonprofit organization dedicated to helping education stakeholders—K-12 school systems, community colleges, universities, employers, and others—use coaching, collaboration, and data to craft solutions that improve practice and increase student success. For more information on its Caring Campus program, see IEBC (n.d.).
2. For more information on Caring Campus/Staff, see Barnett & Bickerstaff (2022).
3. The development of Caring Campus/Faculty by IEBC was informed by an initiative created in 2010 at Odessa Community College in Texas.
4. This study is part of a three-year research partnership between CCRC and IEBC. As a research partner for the program, CCRC seeks to provide IEBC with data and analyses that can be used in the continuous improvement of Caring Campus. In addition, we share findings of our research in public-facing reports that can serve as a resource to colleges considering engaging in Caring Campus and/or wanting to know how it has been implemented elsewhere. This report is the third publication resulting from our collaborative project.
5. Three of them were also interviewed during our site visits.
6. Not all faculty surveyed had participated in IEBC coaching.
7. We targeted the student survey to those who had taken a course with a Caring Campus faculty member, but we did not have a way to verify whether this was true for all respondents.
8. IEBC-recommended protocol questions included these: (1) What would you say is your philosophy about student learning and success in the courses you teach? (2) What strategies have you developed that you believe lead to increased student success in your classroom? (3) Can you tell me two or three critical aspects of these strategies that are must-dos? (4a) How do you identify students that are performing poorly in your class? (4b) How do you respond to those students? (5a) Do you work in partnership with student support services such as tutoring or counseling? (5b) How do you do so?
9. IEBC coaches are typically recently retired leaders with community college experience. Those chosen to coach for Caring Campus faculty have had positions involving leadership of college academics.
10. While in the past colleges worked independently on carrying out a plan for wider use of the behavioral commitments after coaching finished, IEBC recently decided to offer more support. Going forward, they plan to have the coach join the first three meetings of committees responsible for implementation.
11. Guided pathways colleges redesign their policies, programs, and services to support student success in four major practice areas: (1) mapping pathways to student end goals, (2) helping students choose and enter a program pathway, (3) keeping students on path, and (4) ensuring that students are learning (Jenkins et al., 2021).

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