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A Promising Idea

Many efforts across California, including Cal-PASS Plus' Regional Learning Collaboratives, and the entire United States are developing initiatives that create defined pathways for students to more successfully transition from high school to colleges and universities. Often called College Promise or Guided Pathways initiatives, these efforts hold great potential for increasing student success.

New college promise initiatives are incubating in places like Oakland, Butte County, Sacramento, Kern County, Los Angeles and at Skyline College in the Bay Area. Some are already established like the collaboration among Long Beach USD (and other districts now), Long Beach City College and CSU Long Beach called the Long Beach College Promise and its associated Promise Pathways with remarkable success. Most commonly, College Promise programs focuses on increasing access to and receipt of financial aid, or free tuition/scholarships. More, however, needs to be done to truly fulfill the promise to students to ensure successful transitions, completion and entry into living wage jobs.

Student Focus
It is tempting for faculty and leaders across K-12, community colleges and universities to focus efforts on packages of programs or interventions. However, designing College Promise initiatives from the student perspective, or with the student at the center, helps to ensure that students will gain the most benefit. What is the student experience in K-12 towards envisioning that all students have the capacity to succeed in college? What does a student experience when applying and enrolling in a community college? Do we foster the belief that college is for them and that they are part of an important cohort of

students where the K-12 and college faculty and staff are doing everything possible to help them succeed?

Removing Barriers as Well as Providing Support
Increasing student persistence and success in college is partially about better student preparation (academic and social/emotional). It is also about making college affordable and having appropriate support structures for students. However, it is just as important to identify and break down institutional behavior and structure that creates multiple friction points for students, slowing their momentum and sometimes even stopping their progress.

An example of this started in Long Beach and is a critical component of Long Beach City College's Promise Pathways. From a single college, this type of effort has grown to encompass efforts at more than 60 California community colleges and their K-12 partners. These colleges are taking a critical look at how they place students into their foundational skills courses in English, mathematics, reading, and ESL and are working to use more predictive measures of students' capacity to succeed in college coursework. Sometimes referred to as Multiple Measures or evidence-based placement, Long Beach City College and many others are considering high school performance (GPA, courses and grades) in addition to the regular placement tests to place many more students directly into transfer-level coursework and others far higher in the basic skills sequence of courses. This greatly increases students' likelihood of completing and succeeding in gateway courses in those disciplines and finishing their academic goals. Without addressing this institutional barrier, many other components of College Promise efforts may fail to have much impact on improving outcomes for our students.

Don't Let Requirements Have the Opposite Effect
One important caution is to not over complicate the steps, deadlines and actions a college puts in place for students to join the "promise" program or continue their participation to gain certain benefits. In other words, requirements while well-meaning and helpful to steer certain student behavior (i.e., early enrollment, registering full time, completion of forms or verification of transcripts and financial standing) can also lead to opposite effects of pushing students towards giving up, should a detail or requirement slip. Balancing these requirements, or making them soft requirements, is important to keep in mind for making sure the right behavior is encouraged and students stay on track. After all, the goal is to provide students with a suite of activities and supports that colleges believe will help students be far more successful. Taking those away from students for failure to meet a requirement, rather than seeking more effective ways to support students in meeting the desired requirements, often would have a negative impact on the students and the college's outcomes far in disproportion to the magnitude of the missed requirement.

Effective Elements of College Promise Initiatives
Below is a summary of additional elements to consider for effective College Promise programs, in addition to those that focus on free tuition, scholarships and or early

college savings plans. This is by no means a definitive list, but a suggestion for elements that might be put together into a coherent program for students that they can identify with and understand.

Awareness, identification and preparation (Middle and High School)
- Elementary school to college visits (to begin to plant the seed that students like you go to and are successful in college)
- Middle school college pledge for students, peers and parents (not just pledge to, but pledge how)
- Long-term college/educational plans (for example Get Focused Stay Focused curriculum)
- Collaboratively-designed 12th grade coursework between college and high school faculty (such as the CSU expository reading and writing courses in English or co-designed 12th grade math courses that articulate with college level math)
- Dual enrollment or early college programs (that increase college credit accumulation and decrease remediation)

Transition to College
- More accurate assessment and placement for in-coming students (multiple measures that better assess student capacity and reduce repetition of coursework students have already successfully completed)
- Pre-college advising (for example major/meta-major guidance)
- Summer bridge or boost programs (that help build college mindset and increase academic skills)
- Financial aid and enrollment deadline reminders and other early warning systems
- Events and support that mitigate loss (sometimes referred to as "Summer Melt") between application and enrollment
- Guaranteed early enrollment or priority enrollment

College Success and Support
- Curricular changes such as accelerated basic skills courses, co-requisites and differentiated instruction
- Blended learning and different modalities for student skill development
- Lay-theory interventions (short experiences that build students' sense that they are not alone, that many students just like them struggle and hit early challenges but still succeed, and they are, in fact, college material)
- Programs to meet un-met financial need (often tuition is only part of the story)
- First year experiences/student success courses
- Early alert systems/just in time advising
- Supplemental instruction and tutoring (including embedded peer tutors)
- Personal advocates/point of contact

Guided Student Pathways
- Clear educational/degree pathways for students (that provide structure but not inflexibility)

- Improved and coordinated enrollment management/institutional planning
- Alignment to labor market (so student can see the connection to a good job)
- Early entry into a program of study
- Guaranteed "seats" at the local university for students who reach transfer

With all of these, there are meta-components to consider, including a well thought out communication plan, marketing materials so students understand they are part of something important, and an on-going evaluation plan to check for effectiveness of the program and its components, celebrating successes and adjusting when needed. Many collaboratives take the extra step to launch College Promise initiatives with ceremonies where segment leaders in a region sign a "compact" or promise commitment to provide certain parts of the promise plan for students. Whether starting with some of the components or a more comprehensive approach out of the gate, College Promise initiatives provide an excellent opportunity to increase both student and institutional success.

2015-2016 CAASPP Data

The 2015-2016 California Assessment of Student Performance and Progress* data is now available on Cal-PASS Plus. Users can access the data on the Public Performance Data Page or from any of the K-12 metrics on the Education-to-Workforce Pipeline.

* 2016 CAASPP Science Results will be provided in the next release of summary results later this fall from The California Department of Education.

Tools and Tips: Foster Youth Dashboard

If you have not yet familiarized yourself with the Foster Youth Dashboard, now is the time! The Foster Youth Dashboard is a shared measurement system that empowers partners to make informed decisions regarding policies, programs, and practices that impact the college and career success of foster youth. The Dashboard, currently available to all community colleges and additional universities that participate, serves as a targeted set of data on key milestones and momentum points, as well as bright spot colleges that perform the best on each metric, to support shared learning and promote a culture of continuous improvement and reduction in equity gaps between foster youth and non-foster youth. Like the other Cal-PASS Plus tools, the Foster Youth Dashboard is always evolving and improving based on user input.

How to View the Foster Youth Dashboard (Community Colleges and Participating Universities Only)
1. Go to http://www.calpassplus.org/, log in, and then select the appropriate tab for "Community Colleges" or "Universities" in the center of the web page.
2. Then select "Helpful Reports" from the drop down menu to be directed to the Foster Youth Dashboard.

3. Select parameters using the buttons at the top of the Dashboard, then hit "Refresh" to run the report on the foster youth population at your institution. Open up each section to view the data.
4. You may then view the data through the Dashboard or export the data to a spreadsheet for internal use, or to share with partners.

Digging into the data

California College Pathways supports the college and career success of foster youth. The initiative's agenda is to support foster youth in achieving four important milestones: Equip, Enroll, Earn, and Embark. The reports on the Foster Youth Dashboard are organized according to those milestones and can be searched accordingly. In addition, there is a Top Comparable option to see comparable colleges to yours that seem to be getting the best results for each metric. The "cohort" filter option at the top allows for colleges and universities to upload data on Foster Youth students in a particular program (such as Guardian Scholars) then see those students' outcomes specifically. If it says no cohort available, it simply means that the college has not uploaded data to take advantage of that option.

Contact Us!

Tweet us directly at @ERP_Learn

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Want to learn more about how your school or district is doing?

Contact us at outreach@calpassplus.org.