

2025

NATIONAL
REPORT

OCTOBER 2025



ESSENTIAL CONDITIONS

for Community College
Student Success

Maximizing Student Engagement
by Fostering a Culture of Caring



Caring Campus in Action

Across the country, colleges participating in Caring Campus are creating transformative experiences that improve student success by building stronger connections between students and the faculty and staff at their college.

Caring Campus, developed by the [Institute for Evidence-Based Change](#), focuses on embedding care into everyday practices. Through Caring Campus, colleges are changing campus culture in tangible ways. The result is not only improved outcomes, but also stronger relationships between students and the institution.

The following profiles demonstrate how three different institutions emphasize simple, intentional acts of caring that make a lasting impact.

At a community college in Southern California, faculty and staff noticed that students often seemed lost during the first few weeks of the semester. In response, the college implemented a Welcome Week as part of its Caring Campus strategies. Years earlier, the college had developed a first-week experience, but with Caring Campus support, the work became more robust and intentional. Staff volunteers in “Ask Me Anything” T-shirts stood in common areas, offering directions, handing out campus maps, and answering questions. Faculty held office hours in the quad and invited students to informal coffee chats. One student shared that after being

welcomed by three different people on her first day back on campus, she felt like she finally belonged at college—a feeling she had never experienced before. Her attendance improved, and she joined the student government to help others feel the same way.

In Texas, a college serving a largely rural population began implementing Caring Campus practices. For example, staff adopted the Caring Campus practice of *warm referrals*. Instead of simply pointing students to resources, they would walk students to the financial aid or counseling office, call ahead to make an appointment, or follow up afterward to ensure that the student got the help they needed. One staff member recounted how a student who had considered dropping out due to financial challenges returned to the staff member’s office months later to say thank you because she was on track to graduate.

At a Midwest college, faculty embraced the idea that a simple connection with a student could make a meaningful difference. Professors began arriving 10 minutes early to class to chat with students informally and staying after class to answer questions. One instructor started each class by asking students to share one good thing that happened that week, building a sense of community and care. A student who had been struggling with anxiety and isolation later wrote in a course evaluation that it was the first time she felt seen and supported by a professor.



These stories are not isolated—they are examples of how Caring Campus, implemented by faculty and staff, fosters an environment in which students are more likely to stay, succeed, and complete their educational goals.

Caring Campus is not about creating new programs; it is about being intentional with what already exists—walking a student to the right office, greeting them by their preferred name, or showing up early just to listen. These actions are small, but the effect is profound. As these colleges show, when students feel cared for, they are more likely to believe they belong. And when students believe they belong, they persist and complete.



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