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Contact:

Linda García, Executive Director

Office: 512-232-8428

Cell: 512-541-8365

linda.garcia@cccse.org

Caring Is Key: New CCCSE Report Identifies Essential Conditions for Student Success

AUSTIN, TX –

The Center for Community College Student Engagement (CCCSE) has released *Essential Conditions for Community College Student Success: Maximizing Student Engagement by Fostering a Culture of Caring*.

Drawing on data from more than 54,000 students at 127 community colleges responding to the Community College Survey of Student Engagement (CCSSE) and nearly 10,000 entering students at 58 colleges responding to the Survey of Entering Student Engagement (SENSE), the report finds that a culture of caring is closely related to success.

The report explores five components of caring: sense of belonging, self-efficacy, stigma and help-seeking behaviors, basic needs support, and mental health and well-being.

When students feel supported, seen, and connected at their college, their engagement levels and GPAs are higher. Many respondents, however, fall into a group experiencing a “mixed” culture of caring, illustrating that there is work to be done to expand the umbrella of support for all students.

Key findings include the following:

- The majority of CCSSE respondents reported feeling seen by faculty and staff, but 16% of students said they feel invisible.

- While 78% of *SENSE* respondents agreed that their instructors have high expectations of them, 22% disagreed.
- More than one in four *CCSSE* respondents said they were intimidated to ask their instructors for help.
- Among the 26% of *SENSE* respondents who indicated they needed assistance obtaining food, nearly half said they had not been asked about it.
- Over one-third of *CCSSE* respondents said they would not know where to go for mental health support.

“Connections have always been at the heart of student success,” said Linda L. García, Executive Director of CCCSE. “These findings confirm that when caring becomes an institutional practice—not just an individual act—students are more likely to stay, learn, and complete.”

The report highlights colleges nationwide implementing *Caring Campus* strategies developed by the Institute for Evidence-Based Change (IEBC). These include a college that hosts “Ask Me Anything” welcome weeks to help new students connect and feel a sense of belonging and a college that uses warm referrals—personally escorting students to support offices to ensure they receive the help they need. These actions, though simple, demonstrate how everyday caring behaviors create more inclusive and effective learning environments.

The full report is available at cccse.org/culture-of-caring/report.

[CCCSE](#) is a service and research initiative in the Department of Educational Leadership and Policy in the College of Education at The University of Texas at Austin.