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Contact:

Linda García

Executive Director

Office: 512-232-8428

Cell: 512-541-8365

linda.garcia@cccse.org

Alternate Contact:

Courtney Adkins

Associate Director of Publications

Office: 512-475-6142

adkins@cccse.org

Report Examines What Helps Community College Students Persist

AUSTIN, TX –

Roughly 40 percent of community college students do not persist from their first fall enrollment to the following fall.* A new report released by CCCSE, *Listen to Me: Community College Students Tell Us What Helps Them Persist*, shares the voices of students to highlight the triggers that might lead to student attrition as well as the leverage points that can change those outcomes.

Community colleges across the country are working toward redesigning the student experience using the guided pathways framework. As national thought leaders and colleges continue to refine the implementation of guided pathways, it's essential to understand where work needs to be focused.

To this end, CCCSE conducted longitudinal focus groups with the same group of students at three points during the fall 2021 semester and once in the spring 2022 semester at three community colleges in Texas.

Key takeaways from the focus groups:

- Students relayed that stepping onto a college campus for the first time can feel confusing and terrifying.
- Students expressed wanting to receive more information—and more easily decipherable information—about front door processes such as registration, orientation, and payment.
- Students reported very different experiences with academic planning and guidance. Some described having an academic plan in place and knowing what to take the next term and some had no idea.
- Students said they want to engage with their instructors and their fellow classmates, but some students felt like they were not given this opportunity.
- Students who had participated in success courses, study groups, and tutoring understood their value and were grateful for the experiences. Some students reported not being aware of these services.

In the final interview, students were asked if they were as confident they would complete college as when they started, and many shared that their confidence levels had dropped. Many also said they had thought about dropping out.

When students were asked what helped them persist, they underscored connections with others, engaging instructors, support services, and clarity about their academic goals and what they needed to do to achieve them.

“As the work of guided pathways evolves, it will be important to continue to listen to what students have to say about the things that help them stay enrolled,” said Linda García, CCCSE’s Executive Director. “Many things happen in students’ lives that colleges have no control over, but if we can widen the safety net by focusing on what students tell us work, we can increase their chances for success.”

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.

*National Student Clearinghouse Research Center. (June 2022). *Persistence and retention: Fall 2020 beginning postsecondary student cohort*. <https://nscresearchcenter.org/wp-content/uploads/PersistenceRetention2022.pdf>