# College Completion Coaching: Promising Practices from the College Success Foundation

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# Executive Summary

The College Success Foundation (CSF) provides an integrated system of services and scholarships to help students finish high school, graduate from college, and succeed in life. The organization was founded in 2000 with the goal of increasing access to college education in Washington State and the District of Columbia. CSF serves students from groups that encounter the largest structural barriers preventing them from accessing and graduating from college at high rates: youth from households with low income, youth who are the first in their families to participate in higher education ("first-generation college students"), youth of color, and youth in foster care.

To meet the needs of students, CSF College Services provides one-on-one and small-group coaching to 2- and 4-year college students throughout Washington State. CSF College Services coaching is in its 4th year of implementation. Coaches use the Fostering Success (FS) Coaching Model seven life domains model to assess, prioritize, and teach skills and knowledge to achieve personal and professional goals. This model uses a strengths-based perspective, fostering student ownership in the development of goals and actions. Coaching is tailored towards students' individual needs instead of being prescriptive.

This report synthesizes lessons learned from a multi-year evaluation to inform the field on how a third-party college coaching service can effectively support college students. Conducted by RTI International, the purpose of the multi-year evaluation was to inform improvements to CSF's College Services, specifically the coaching model, by exploring how coaches helped students navigate their college campus and prepare for careers. This report relies on three data sources to explore students' experiences with coaching and other services as part of the CSF College Services model: annual student surveys; annual student, coach, and CSF staff interviews and focus groups; and administrative records gathered by coaches about their coaching interactions with students.

## Promising Coaching Practices to Support College Students

Coaches and students outlined numerous promising practices that support student engagement and growth in coaching interactions.

1. **Practices that promote student engagement with coaching**. In order for students to take advantage of coaching, they must know that coaches are an available resource. To prompt students' first meeting with their coach here are some suggested practices:
    - Coordinate handoff between high school and college
    - Concentrate outreach at the beginning of the year
    - Target messaging through multiple channels using different types of messages
    - Engage in continuous communication

Once students experienced one or two sessions with their coach, they continued to sign up for additional meetings because of their positive experience. Promising practices to prompt students' subsequent meetings with a coach:

- Provide relevant information, resources, and/or advice at every meeting
- Demonstrate care and empathy
- Be responsive and reliable
- Continue to reach out and create a system to prioritize outreach

2. **Practices that build a caring trusting environment between coaches and students.** Because coaching is student driven, it is up to students to decide what to discuss in meetings. Students may not have felt comfortable having in-depth discussions about personal topics or challenges. Coaches used a few strategies that made students feel comfortable so they could trust coaches enough to open up:
    - Ask questions and be a good listener
    - Be relatable and empathize by connecting coaches' own experiences to students' challenges or situations
    - Interact without judgment and express care, encouragement, and enthusiasm
    - Follow up on students' concerns or issues
3. **Practices that build students' knowledge, skills, and awareness**. The main goal of CSF coaching is to develop students' knowledge, skills, and awareness in the seven FSM domains for students to be successful in college and career. CSF coaches supported students' knowledge and skill development, such as time management, awareness of campus resources, and understanding of financial aid systems. They provided tools and resources to support students with decisions about academic major and career path. Coaches also developed students' mindsets such as confidence and self-awareness, so they could navigate situations that arose. Coaches did this by engaging in these practices:

- Ensure students drive interactions by focusing on their concerns or needs
- Talk through a situation using reflective and probing questions
- Ask for students' ideas
- Provide information, tools, and resources to meet students' learning needs
- Walk students through a strategy, task, or tool
- Connect students with other people
- Coplan steps and problem solve
- Follow up and engage students in self-reflection about their development

## Infrastructure to Support Coaching Services

Our findings suggest that three sets of infrastructure are needed as a foundation for a successful third-party coaching service: training and development for coaches to ensure high-quality coaching, a data system to evaluate and monitor coaching interactions, and partnerships with higher education institutions to understand and connect with campus resources

1. Coach training and development. Ongoing coach training and support ensures that coaches continually develop their practice and hone strategies to meet the evolving needs of students in their particular college context. All CSF coaches receive their FSM certification within their 1st year of service. Offered by the Fostering Success Coaching Institute, this includes the Level I (24 hours) and Level II (36 hours) training. Some coaches also participated in a specific training on how to coach for equity offered by a non-profit organization.
2. Data system to evaluate and monitor coaching. CSF College Services uses a virtual platform in which all coaches can access and log information on their students and coaching interactions. Through the platform, coaches may view information collected by CSF on each student, see updated information on who is in their coaching load, and record information on each interaction they have with students. This type of data system is useful for two main reasons. Data on interactions is key for coaches to track student progress and understand real-time trends in coaching interactions. In addition, accessible, reliable data are vital to conduct internal and external evaluations on program impact.
3. Partnerships with higher education institutions. A key enabling condition to a successful coaching model is establishing partnerships with higher education institutions. Coaches connect students to other service providers or resources at the campus. This can only happen if coaches are aware of the services at the campuses and if they have personal connections with campus resources.
    - To build personal connections coaches should continue to reach out to campus resources until the relationship is established. Connections can also be made through regional associations or boards.

- Coaches use a variety of strategies to learn about services and resources available to students on college campuses as well as policies that impact students' journey, such as creating an eco-map that identified campus and community contacts for all seven FSM life domains and joining online social media groups for campus staff.
- Coaches situated on a college campus have ongoing meetings with campus staff to facilitate collaboration. They collaborate by sharing information about students' needs or circumstances to better serve those students
- Creating formal or informal data sharing agreements between CSF and the college or university allows coaches to access information about students' academic standing that helps tailor their coaching approach for each student. For example, having access to student information allowed coaches to tailor their outreach to student. Access to information also helped coaches address students' challenges quicker.

## Conclusion

These practices and strategies mentioned by CSF coaches and students can inform the field on how a third-party college coaching service can effectively support college students in a remote environment. Although some practices were specific to the FSM framework, such as the assess, prioritize, and teach strategy, or FSM's focus on a variety of life domains, the practices themselves are agnostic (e.g., demonstrate coaching instead of teaching about a model or using effective adult learning practices when teaching skills to students). Practitioners in the field can use these strategies and tailor them to their campus context and student population to best serve their students. The infrastructure outlined to support coaching services can also be applicable to other coaching models as they begin to establish their programs at different campuses.

# Introduction

The College Success Foundation (CSF) provides an integrated system of services and scholarships to help students finish high school, graduate from college, and succeed in life. The organization was founded in 2000 with the goal of increasing access to college education in Washington State and the District of Columbia. CSF serves students from groups that encounter the largest structural barriers preventing them from accessing and graduating from college at high rates: youth from households with low income, youth who are the first in their families to participate in higher education ("first-generation college students"), youth of color, and youth in foster care. To meet the needs of students, CSF College Services provides one-on-one and small-group coaching to 2- and 4-year college students throughout Washington State.

## Overview of CSF Coaching

The College Services model serves two groups of students in 51 2- and 4-year colleges across Washington State. The first group of students served by CSF coaching are students who participated in CSF's high school programs. These students enroll to receive summer transition and college supports, including personalized coaching. CSF high school advisors specifically promote these supports to students typically underrepresented on college campuses. The second group of students served by CSF coaching are CSF scholarship recipients. These students are automatically enrolled in coaching. CSF College Services coaching is in its 4th year of implementation.

CSF coaching involves one-on-one or group sessions in which coaches use the Fostering Success (FS) Coaching Model seven life domains model to assess, prioritize, and teach knowledge, awareness andskills to achieve personal and professional goals. The seven life domains are education or academics, cultural and personal identity, finances and employment, housing, life skills, physical and mental health, and community connections and social relationships. This model uses a strengths-based perspective, fostering student ownership in the development of goals and actions. CSF chose this model because it is student centered and the domains are applicable to all student populations that CSF serves, especially youth in foster care. Coaching is tailored towards students' individual needs instead of being prescriptive.

CSF coaches prioritize working with incoming 1st-year students to build trusting relationships that motivate students to engage whenever they need support during their college journey. Coaches continue to serve students throughout their college career if students continue to reach out. Some coaches only coach through virtual means, while other coaches do so both in person and virtually, depending on their physical location. From 2019 to 2022 CSF employed 4–5 coaches every year. Starting in fall 2022, CSF will expand its cadre of coaches to 17 to meet the growing demand for their services. This will allow CSF to serve over 4,000 students. Currently 750 students are being served.

## Purpose of This Report

This report is the culmination of a 3-year evaluation partnership between RTI International and CSF. The purpose of this partnership was to inform improvements to CSF's College Services, specifically the coaching model, by exploring how coaches helped students navigate their college campus and prepare for careers. The feedback gathered in the last 3 years helped CSF understand how to build students' awareness of its services, support the development of relationships between coaches and students, especially in a virtual environment, and unpack how, if at all, coaches develop students' knowledge and skills to succeed in college and career. This report synthesizes lessons learned to inform the field on how a third-party college coaching service can effectively support college students.

This report relies on three data sources to explore students' experiences with coaching and other services as part of the CSF College Services model: annual student surveys; annual student, coach, and CSF staff interviews and focus groups; and administrative records gathered by coaches about their coaching interactions with students. The data were mainly collected from students attending 4-year colleges. The topics of student focus groups and surveys varied across years to cover different aspects of the coaching experience. The evidence in this report comes from all years of data collection to detail promising practices.

- Year 1 (Y1): Survey (170 students) and focus groups (40 students) with students who did and did not participate in coaching, interviews with 12 CSF staff, and administrative records
- Year 2 (Y2): Survey (416 students) with students who did and did not participate in coaching and focus groups (51 students) with students who participated in coaching, interviews with 10 CSF staff, and administrative records
- Year 3 (Y3): Survey (174 students) and focus groups (18 students) with students who participated in coaching, interviews with 3 CSF staff, and administrative records

## Organization of This Report

The reports starts with a description of promising practices used to promote students' engagement with coaching. For coaching to make an impact, students must be aware of the opportunity for coaching and sign up for sessions. In the next section, we explore how coaches built relationships with students by creating a trusting and caring environment where students felt comfortable opening up about their challenges and concerns. Then we describe strategies that coaches used to build students' knowledge, awareness, and skills. Finally, we describe the infrastructure and supports needed to implement a third-party coaching program.

Many strategies mentioned in the first three sections overlap. For example, strategies that encourage students to sign up for a second meeting also helped establish a trusting environment where students felt comfortable opening up. We discuss each practice in each section, note overlaps, and summarize promising practices in the conclusion.

# Section 1: Practices That Promote Student Engagement With Coaching

In this section we share practices and strategies that encourage students to participate in coaching. We use feedback from coaches and students to describe practices that inform students about available services and encourage them to sign up for a first meeting as well as practices and strategies that prompt students to continue meeting with their coach.

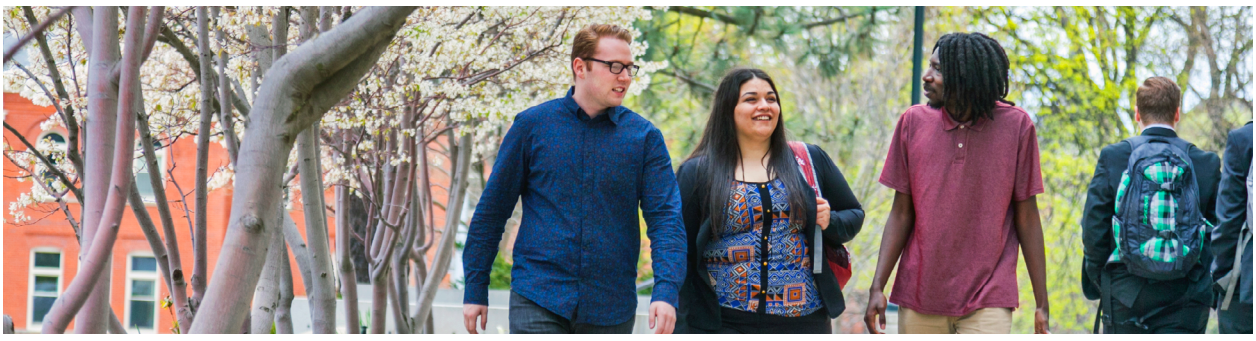
## Prompting Student Sign-Ups: Strategies to Inform Students About Coaching Services to Jumpstart Engagement

In order for students to take advantage of coaching, they must know that coaches are an available resource. Students reported that it can be overwhelming to know who to go to for different needs, especially on campuses that offer numerous resources or supports. Promising practices for outreach noted by multiple coaches and students are as follows:

- **Handoff between high school and college.** Because CSF provides services to high school students in Washington State, a handoff at the end of high school or the summer before college could be an effective strategy to inform students about coaching. Many students reported that they learned about their coach through a CSF high school staff person (called a College Prep Advisor). **CSF coaches intentionally worked with their high school counterpart to coordinate these handoff**s. For example, coaches located at a college visited nearby high schools during culminating senior activities or met with high school students during college visits. When CSF students were attending college at a campus that was not in their immediate area and/or when working with a remote coach, high school staff facilitated the handoff by informing students about the coach.

**Promising practices to build a caring and trusting environment between coaches and students:**

1. Ask questions and be a good listener
2. Be relatable and empathize by connecting coaches' own experiences to students' challenges or situations
3. Interact without judgment and express care, encouragement, and enthusiasm
4. Follow up on students' concerns or issues



- **Concentrated outreach at the beginning of the school year**. Some coaches found concentrated outreach at the beginning of the school year helpful in making initial connections with students. For example, one coach spent much of the summer cold-calling new students to get to know them. Some coaches also scheduled summer meet and greets with 1st-year students to introduce themselves and make the connection so that students knew that they could reach out when they faced a concern or needed advice. One coach mentioned having greater success scheduling follow-up sessions with students who participated in the summer meet and greets.
- **Targeted messaging through multiple channels.** Students learned about their coach through email, text, or phone communication. This was an effective practice because different students prefer different modes of communication. A majority (64%) of students initiated their first coaching session after receiving a message highlighting the importance of outreach from coaches over email and text (Y2 survey.) **However, coaches and students recognized that not all messages are created equal. Messages must have four characteristics to encourage students to schedule their first meeting**. Messages must be personal, relate to students' situations, clearly articulate how coaches can help, and connect to students' immediate needs.
  - **Personal messages**. Students requested personalized messages from their coach to help them break through the barrier that prevented them from reaching out to the coach. Coaches also recognized that personalized messages resulted in more responses from students. Even though students reported knowing that they understood that the coach was there for them, they were shy about reaching out and appreciated a personal connection. One student (Y1) said, "I appreciate when things are personal. Like my [track] coach messages me personally. That would provide more of a conversation than an email to everybody." Another student (Y1) said, "I just kind of assume they're automated emails, but if it feels more clearly personal I'd pay more attention to it." A coach (Y2) shared that a message like "Hey, it's been so long since I've heard from you. I just really want to check in and see how you're doing" generated more responses from students than generic messages like "Hey, I'm your coach, I'm here if you need me."
  - **Relatable messages**. Coaches found that relatable messages, as opposed to generic emails about coaching services, generated a response from students. For example, one coach created a series of six email messages sharing personal stories about the coach's own college journey as a first-generation college student and sent these emails every 2 weeks. Thirty percent of students from the coach's caseload signed up for an appointment after the series of emails. Email messages ranged from sharing personal anecdotes to demonstrate how the coach understood what students were going through (e.g., their experience during their first semester at school) to encouraging messages like "I was where you were one time. Here I am 3 years later."
  - **Messages that articulate how a coach could help**. Messages that articulated how a coach could help a student were mentioned as being effective in encouraging students to engage with coaching. When students were not clear about how coaches could help them and had no prior experience with CSF to inform their understanding, they were less inclined to seek coaching through CSF. Messages with specific examples of how coaches could help were upheld as

successful. One student (Y1) said, "When I think of problems, [CSF coaches] are not my first go-to choice. I don't really know. I see a text that says, 'Oh we are here for you, oh talk to us.' I didn't have enough reminders why I need to talk to them. The last time I called her she said, 'Here are the topics I can talk about' and it reminded me, oh I do need help in those areas."

  - **Messages that meet students' immediate needs to connect with a coach**. A method coaches found successful in encouraging students to sign up for coaching was understanding students' immediate needs and sending messages explaining how coaches could help with those needs. For example, coaches knew that students would need help completing their Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) and did a round of outreach explaining that they could support students with this task. As a result, students set up sessions to complete their FAFSA. Providing information about other resources such as scholarships or CSF's emergency fund resource, in which students could receive up to $500 when experiencing unexpected or unavoidable financial emergencies, were other ways for coaches to connect with students to establish a first session.

- **Continuous communication throughout the school year**. Students need continued communication about coaching resources since they may not have a reason to take advantage of coaching right away. Only when students have a specific issue do they sign up for a meeting. Therefore, continued communication is key. For example, a coach sent emails every few weeks, as mentioned above.

Other strategies reported by a single coach that encouraged students to sign up for a meeting include

- clear instructions on how students could sign up for a meeting, such as a link to a calendar;
- use of raffle or gift cards to encourage students to sign up for a session; and
- communication of expectations that students meet with a coach on a regular basis. While coaching was not mandatory, one coach sent messages once a quarter telling students that it was time for their quarterly check-in, as opposed to leaving it open to students to sign up if they had a need. Many students signed up for sessions after these messages.

**Many of these strategies overlap and no one strategy is clearly the most successful**. But what is clear is that coach outreach and handoffs alone are not enough to encourage students to sign up for a meeting; students need a personal motivation to sign up. Survey findings indicate three different reasons why students sign up for the first meeting with their coach:

- Fifty-five percent of students signed up for their first coaching session because they had a specific issue and reached out to the coach for support ($N = 137$, Y2 survey). In interviews, students reported that they reached out to a coach when they had issues with their financial aid, wanted to learn more about scholarships, or had issues with enrollment or admissions.

- Forty-seven percent of students signed up for their first coaching session because they wanted to learn more about coaching but did not have a specific issue or problem to address (*N* = 137, Y2 survey). Many students who had interacted with CSF in high school knew the importance of having multiple support systems in college and wanted to establish a relationship with a coach because they knew eventually they may need a coach's support. For example, one student (Y2) said, "When I first connected with [the coach] … it was mainly to get to know each other so that if I did ever need help in the future, [the coach] knew my situation, and it was mainly going over things for college… It was mainly to get to know me."
- Twenty percent of students signed up for their first coaching session because they thought the sessions were mandatory. They provided two reasons why they thought the sessions were mandatory: meetings with their high school CSF advisor were mandatory so they thought the same was true of the college meetings or students who received CSF scholarships thought that ongoing meetings were a condition of their scholarship (*N* = 137, Y2 survey). One student (Y2) commented, "The very first time, I thought it was like something that was required by CSF, and if I didn't do it, then I'd be kicked out or something like that. I don't know why I thought that, but that's the way my brain worked at that time. And so, I went in just, like, expecting … just very light questions about college and stuff. And then, after that first meeting, it made me want to have the second meeting just because [the coach] had helped so much with where I was."

## First Impressions Are Key: How First Interaction Supports Students' Understanding of Coaching

It is critical for students to have at least one meeting with their coach. Through this first meeting, they learn more about the coach role and how their coach may support them differently than other staff or advisors at their campus. CSF students reported that their understanding of coaching and the role of their coach changed after the first meeting. Prior to meeting with a coach, only 48% of students said they had a good understanding of coaching, but after meeting with a coach, 77% of students said they had a clearer understanding (N = 194, Y2 survey). Some students believed that their coach was only available for academic or financial matters and, through their first meeting with their coach, learned that the coach could support them in a variety of areas. CSF's holistic approach to coaching recognizes that various factors beyond finances and academics impact persistence. Recent research highlights that the ability of students of color to build relationships and connections influence sense of belonging (Museus, 2014) and mental health challenges impact academic performance (Lipson et al., 2022).

The first meeting is important to students understanding the value and benefits of a CSF coach relative to other available supports. No matter how many messages a coach sends to students, they still may not grasp how their CSF coach is different from an academic advisor or a coach they may have interacted with during high school through CSF. Sixty-five percent of students reported valuing CSF coaching more after having participated, indicating the importance of coach interactions in helping students learn about how coaching could benefit them ($N = 134$, Y2 survey).

> Student: *"So basically, before I met [the coach] I did not know [the coach] existed or was a resource to me and so I feel like it definitely took at least one or two Zoom meetings to understand what [the coach] was going to do. Probably just the first one. And that first one is usually you get to know [them] a little bit, and then [the coach] describes to you what [they] can help you with. Some people [in the focus groups] were saying the financial aspects of college, meaning scholarships and stuff. But I felt that the more and more I meet with [them], I'm able to talk to [them] about just, I mean, life stuff, the results around colleges, but college, but just life in general. So, I feel like [they're] able to go outside of the college realm a little bit too" (Y2).*

### Promising strategies in the first meeting to promote understanding of coaching include the following:

- Instead of spending time explaining what coaching is, demonstrate it by engaging students in conversations and asking questions using the FSM model. Coaches realized that it was not important to fully explain the coaching model and the purpose of the coach in their first meeting with students. What was more important was to engage students right away and learn about their needs and how they envision the coach supporting them. At the beginning of implementation of the coaching model, one coach started the first meeting with a PowerPoint presentation about coaching, the FSM model, and the seven life domains. However, this presentation did not resonate with students and the coach saw them disengage. The coach pivoted to using questions to assess students' excitement about starting college, their interests, and how they saw the coach helping them to improve their understanding of the role of a coach. Asking these questions also helped the coach assess students' motivations and goals to better support them later on.

  Students reported shifting their understanding of coaching and how the coach could help them after the coach started to ask questions and support them in other aspects of their life in relation to the different FSM domains (e.g., mental health or employment). Students realized that the coach could support areas outside the domains of academics or finances and could discuss more personal topics (see text box) and that they could develop a personal relationship with the coach over time.

> Student: *"Yeah, because I was part of CSF in high school, I knew what a CSF advisor was. I had one. And so, going into it, I was just expecting [the coach] to just stick to questions about college and stuff like that. And I'm glad that [the coach] worries more about like, 'Oh, how's work going? Do you enjoy where you're living right now?' That kind of stuff. Because for me, it makes it feel like, 'Oh, I have a trusted adult that I can talk to if there's ever something that I need work-wise, living-wise" (Y2).*

- Leverage students' needs to initiate a coaching relationship. Some students signed up for a coaching session because they had an urgent need and thought that coaches' support was limited to that topic. An effective way to encourage sign-ups was to connect with students' immediate needs, such as making the FAFSA deadline. Coaches noted that even when students signed up for a specific resource or task, the coaches would weave in elements of coaching. For example, if students signed up for help with their FAFSA, the coach would ask questions like "How are your classes going?" to learn more about students, start building a relationship, and share how they could support students through their college journey. Noted above, students reported that when their coach asked questions about how they were doing that went beyond the initial topic, they realized that the coach could help them with other topics such as mental or physical health.

**Promising practices to prompt students' subsequent meetings with a coach:**

1. Provide relevant information, resources, and/or advice at every meeting
2. Demonstrate care and empathy
3. Be responsive and reliable
4. Continue to reach out and create a system to prioritize outreach

## Coaching Practices That Motivate Students to Continue to Meet with their Coach

Once students experienced one or two sessions with their coach, they continued to sign up for additional meetings because of their positive experience. While a minority of students signed up for subsequent meetings because of continued coach outreach, many students continued to sign up regardless of coach outreach practices because coaches provided helpful information, were more responsive and reliable than other staff, and showed empathy and care.

- **Provide relevant information, resources, and/or advice at every meeting.** Students continued to engage in coaching because coaches provided helpful information and resources that students found valuable. **About 77% of students said they continued to sign up for coaching sessions because coaches were helpful, and 53% continued to meet to receive support (*N* = 137, Y2 survey)**. Students appreciated that coaches were informed and knowledgeable, especially about how to help first-generation college students. Students realized they could ask coaches a variety of questions and coaches were able to help them. One student commented, "I think [my coach] is just really knowledgeable in anything

college related. [The coach] has firsthand knowledge on just college and working with people. If I have any concerns or questions about anything, I just know that [the coach is] there to help me achieve or help me through that and then help me achieve whatever goal I'm trying to achieve." A student (Y3) explained, "[The coach is] someone that you trust and is pretty informed. [The coach does] this for a living. [The coach] tries to help us college students. So [the coach] knows more than somebody random or just going to my friend about it."

- **Demonstrate care and empathy.** Students were more inclined to reach out to their coach than other staff, friends, or family when they believed their coach could understand where they were coming from and/or care about them. **In some cases, coaches were more caring and relatable than other staff at their campus**. Sixty-three percent of students said that they continued to meet with their coach because they enjoyed it (*N* = 137, Y2 survey). A student (Y2) said, "For me, at my college, none of our counselors are on campus and it's a little bit easier talking to the CSF [coach]… Not trying to offend my counselor but a little bit more human because he uses big words and English is not my first language. So when he uses those big words, I don't understand what he is trying to tell me. But when I talk to my CSF coach, [the coach] uses words I understand." Another student (Y2) said, "[The coach is] really relatable in the sense that we're both first-generation students, so [the coach] understands the struggles that come with that. I'm just comfortable talking to [my coach]. So that's why I keep going back to [my coach] as a resource."
- **Be responsive and reliable.** Students cited coaches' responsiveness and reliability as a key reason why they repeatedly sought help. **Over 50% of students said they continued to sign up for coaching sessions because the coach was responsive (*N* = 137, Y2 survey).** Coaches' responsiveness and reliability was also a first step in establishing a trusting relationship with students (see page 10). For example, one student (Y2) commented, "For me, every time I send [the coach] an email or a text or something of that nature, [the coach] always gets back to me within the hour." Another said, "[The coach is] also a really fast resource to go to. [The coach] responds a lot faster than my advisor."

- **Continue to reach out and create a system to prioritize outreach**. Several students reported meeting with their coach because they were prompted to do so and might not have otherwise reached out. The coach may have been helpful at a previous meeting, yet students still did not initiate a follow-up until the coach reached out. One student (Y2) acknowledged, "Yeah. I don't want to say I forget about it, but I usually wait until [the coach] reaches out."

  All coaches continued to conduct outreach to students, either emailing or conducting cold calls. **Some coaches prioritized outreach to specific students in their caseload**. For example, one coach conducted cold calls on Fridays because that was the day when they got the most responses from students. The coach reached out to students who they had not talked to in a few months or who had not scheduled a follow-up. At institutions where CSF has data sharing agreements, coaches used student data to prioritize outreach to students. For example, a coach was able to prioritize outreach to students who were not registered. Another coach targeted outreach to students on academic probation: "The high-priority students are those on probation, so I spend the beginning of the quarter contacting them, creating a plan with the student, and finding out what's happened."

Coaches used many strategies that motivated students to continue their coaching relationship. But many students still did not have the time or need to engage in coaching and did not sign up for additional meetings. Students may not have time to engage in coaching or have other supports on campus and find it unnecessary to pursue additional support avenues. For example, on average, 42% of CSF students did not meet with their coach during their 1st year, while 36% had one meeting and 14% had two meetings. Only 9% met with their coach three or more times ($N$ = 1,010) (Y3 administrative records). Therefore, coaches should recognize that their strategies will only have an impact if students have the time to invest in these relationships.

# Section 2: Practices That Build a Caring and Trusting Environment Between Coaches and Students

Coaches used a variety of strategies that built a caring and trusting environment where students felt comfortable bringing up different topics. These strategies were also important when coaching across difference. Students already trusted coaches as a support provider because they were reliable and helpful. About 97% said their coach would help them if they had a problem, and 94% believed they could reach out to their coach for support when they needed it ($N = 129$, Y3 survey).

**Promising practices to practices to build a caring and trusting environment between coaches and students:**

1. Ask questions and be a good listener
2. Be relatable and empathize by connecting coaches' own experiences to students' challenges or situations
3. 3Interact without judgment and express care, encouragement, and enthusiasm
4. Follow up on students' concerns or issue to prioritize outreach

However, because coaching was student driven, it was up to students to decide what to discuss in meetings. While coaches used the FSM model that ensured they touched on the different domains if students did not bring them up, students may not have felt comfortable having in-depth discussions about personal topics or challenges. Coaches used a few strategies that made students feel comfortable so they could trust coaches enough to open up:

- **Ask questions and be a good listener.** Students appreciated coaches' listening skills because this made them feel they could trust that coaches cared about them. Coaches gave students the floor, asked probing and clarifying questions, and mirrored what they heard to demonstrate that they were listening. One student (Y2) explained, "Whenever we're talking, like, [the coach] stopped… and [the coach] actually looks at me and [the coach] actually makes sure that I finish my sentence before talking." Even when coaches did not reflect the same characteristics or background of students, they navigated across difference by listening well. Being a good listener also raised students' comfort level so they felt comfortable discussing aspects of their personal identity.

> *"Student (Y2): "[My coach] was very open and created that environment where you could come to [them] … and talk about anything. [They] created that comfortable environment."*

> Coach (Y2): *"The best strategy is open-ended questions. Getting them to talk about themselves,…. I didn't have the one-word answers like 'fine,' 'nothing.' I just asked super open-ended questions, [reiterate] in my own words what I was hearing, validate their feelings."*

**Multiple coaches mentioned the use of open-ended questions and active listening as effective strategies, especially when coaching across difference**. One coach practiced mirroring students' experiences to demonstrate listening. Instead of saying "that sucks," the coach was more likely to pinpoint emotions by saying "that's frustrating." According to the coach, this helped build trust and comfort because the student felt heard. A student (Y1) who identified as American Indian or Native American said, "Even the couple times where [the coach] couldn't relate or understand, [the coach], like, puts in a lot of effort and asks questions… I'd tell [the coach] personal things and how they affect me academically. There are a couple things [the coach] couldn't relate, but once I explain myself … [the coach] feedback wasn't just a nod and 'okay,' but more like a sincerely understood what I was feeling and what I was trying to get through."

- **Be relatable and empathize by connecting coaches' own experiences to students' challenges or situations.** Coaches mentioning having a similar background or experiences, especially in college, to students helped students relate to coaches and created bonds between them. **Students appreciated hearing these similarities because it made them feel safe. They also reported feeling more comfortable opening up**. One student said, "[The coach is] really good at relating to you. I could say my life experience, what I'm going through, and [the coach] was like, 'Yeah, I went through this.' [The coach is] really good at kind of putting in [the coach's] own life experiences so you don't feel alone." Another student (Y2) said, "I was talking to [the coach] about getting a cat for an emotional support animal, and [the coach] was just like, 'Yeah, no. I have a cat. And during this time with COVID and everything, she's definitely been a big supporter, so I can completely understand why you'd want to get one.' And there's just something about every single meeting with [the coach] that [the coach] just makes me feel welcome and safe. And so, that's why I just feel comfortable sharing so many things with [the coach]."

  Connecting to students and empathizing with them was mentioned by coaches as an effective practice, especially becoming more adept at leveraging their own experiences without sharing too much information about their personal lives. One coach used motivational interviewing, with empathy at its core, to guide

the approach. Students with identities or backgrounds different from their coach's appreciated the use of empathy and listening skills to show understanding. One student (Y2) who identified as Black or African American said: "I think [the coach] mentioned that [the coach was] also low income and fist gen and [the coach] related on one of those two things, so I found that cool. [The coach] is very empathetic. So even if [the coach] doesn't know what I'm going through [the coach] empathizes a lot and gives me the best advice given [the coach's] unfamiliarness [sic] with my situations."

> Student (Y2): "*I think sometimes you reach out with what may be, like, a stupid question, you feel, but you don't know the answer… [The coach] was just very kind and accepting of all questions, and so it's been like really helpful in that way because you feel you can bring anything to [the coach].*"

- **Interact without judgment and express care, encouragement, and enthusiasm**. Students believed they could talk to their coach about various topics **because they were not afraid of being judged. Instead, their coach was encouraging and enthusiastic in their interactions, which helped them feel like their coach cared.** This made students willing to share their concerns.

  Coaches demonstrated a nonjudgmental and caring nature in different ways: they used a welcoming tone, demonstrated a positive and upbeat attitude, answered students' questions in full and quickly, were supportive and encouraging of students' decisions, and allowed students to express their concerns or issues.

- **Follow up on students' concerns or issues**. Coaches typically followed up on students' concerns or conversations from previous meetings. They were able to do this because CSF created a database in which coaches tracked student progress and trends in coaching interactions. **When coaches followed up, this demonstrated to students that they were listening and cared for students because they remembered what students were going through**. Students who met regularly with their coach reported that coach always asked questions about what was discussed at a prior meeting, even it was not the main reason for scheduling a meeting. One student explained that, at the beginning of meetings, their coach asked whether the student was still pursuing the same major. This strategy also helped with students' skill development and follow-through (see page 17). One student (Y2) said, "I know with having so many students that [the coach] keeps track of, it could be hard trying to remember what specific things go to which specific student, but [the coach has] never once messed up a little thing about me… Whenever we've talked, [the coach] never once made me feel like, 'Oh, you are thinking of another student.' I know some teachers can be like that."

**Coaches created a trusting and caring environment that encouraged students to open up. But in general students reported feeling more comfort and increased trust with their coach after repeated interactions. Therefore, continual meetings with the coach will develop stronger relationships**. While levels of trust were high among students who had different numbers of coaching meetings, students who had many coaching sessions were more likely to develop a trusting relationship with their coach. Fifty-six percent of students with three or more sessions with coaches said they had developed a trusting relationship with a coach, as opposed to 36% of students with two sessions (*N* = 130, Y3 survey). Students articulated that more meetings allowed them to develop a connection and become more comfortable opening up to their coach. A student (Y2) said, " We've had a handful of [meetings]. Now I'm like, 'Okay, this is happening.' [I can talk about] those little things that I wouldn't tell somebody that I just met." A student (Y2) explained, "When you meet with someone more often, you're getting more comfortable with them. It's like the first meeting I wasn't so open obviously. And then once I got to know her, she just shared a little bit about herself… Then I was like slowly opening up."

# Section 3: Practices That Build Students' Knowledge, Skills, and Mindsets

CSF coaches supported students' knowledge and skill development, such as time management, awareness of campus resources, and understanding of financial aid systems. They provided tools and resources to support students with decisions about academic major and career path. Coaches also developed students' mindsets such as confidence and self-awareness, so they could navigate situations that arose. **Almost half (44%) of students reported walking away with new knowledge or skills after their coach interactions** (*N* = 130, Y3 survey).

Coaching was student driven, which meant that instead of coaches being prescriptive and telling students what to do, they ensured that students' interests and priorities drove the interaction and teaching approach. Once students prioritized the issues or concerns for which they needed support, coaches used numerous strategies to develop students' knowledge, skills, and mindsets to help them navigate those issues. First, we describe how coaches ensured students' concerns and issues were prioritized in meetings. Then we describe three coaching strategies students reported as most helpful in their development.

**Promising practices to develop students' knowledge, skills, and mindsets:**

1. Ensure students drive interactions by focusing on their concerns or needs
2. Talk through a situation using reflective and probing questions
3. Ask for students' ideas
4. Provide information, tools, and resources to meet students' learning needs
5. Walk students through a strategy, task, or tool
6. Connect students with other people
7. Coplan steps and problem solve
8. Follow up and engage students in self-reflection about their development

> Student (Y3): *"Generally … [the coach will] ask how that academic quarter's going, whatever I'm up to, if I'm good mentally, what's going on, stuff about the major. I don't know, take my temperature a little bit. That's how it would start. Generally, usually I'll know the stuff that is really important for me to figure out. If it's something financial or if it's something to do with classes or whatever the case is … I'll explain, like, 'Oh, this thing I could use some help on.' And then we'll just go back and forth on it."*

- **Ensure students drive interactions by focusing on their concerns or needs**. The coaching model used by CSF emphasizes student-driven learning and interactions, in which students do most of the talking and identify and prioritize their area of learning based on their concerns or issues. Coaches ensured that students' concerns drove the focus of meetings. When students scheduled a meeting, they were prompted to list what they wanted to talk about. Regardless of whether students identified a concern, coaches started meetings with a general check-in to assess how students were doing, including how they were in the moment, how the quarter was going, and, if they met with the coach multiple times, how they were doing since the last meeting.

Once coaches checked in with students, they moved on to the reason why students made the appointment or used items that surfaced during the check-in to prioritize an area to discuss. One student (Y2) explained how the coach ensured that students' needs drove the conversation: "With the questions [the coach] does ask, [the coach is] just, like, 'I'm going to ask you these couple questions. But if at any point within the question something comes up that you want to talk about, feel free. We don't have to stick to them.' And so, [the coach will] ask a question, and then I'll just start talking. And then, I'll remember something. And I'll go, 'Oh, and then this thing as well.'"

> Student (Y3): *"[The coach] just asked me guiding questions, just things like where do you think you're doing well? And then I'll go, 'Okay, I think I'm doing X, Y and Z well.' 'Okay well, where do you think you're struggling? Or do you need help in anything?' And sometimes it's simply 'No, I think I'm doing really well, I think I'm handling things really well,' but sometimes it's, like, 'I think I haven't been able to get to this so how are we going to do that?'"*

- **Talk through a situation using reflective and probing questions**. One way coaches supported students' knowledge and skills was by talking through a topic or situation with a student. This strategy was mainly mentioned by students who meet with their coach three or more times a year (69%, *N* = 58) than students who met with their coach only once (13%, *N* = 23) or twice (39%, N = 44). **Coaches talked through students' concerns and asked questions to better understand the situation to be able to support them**. For example, one student talked about wanting to change jobs. The coached helped the student think through what to do next by asking questions such as "Okay, let's look at the broader picture. Where do we want to go? And a year over the summer, are you thinking of staying at the same job? Are you looking at getting a different one? How can I support? How can I help you with that?" Students appreciated talking through a topic and responding to reflective questions because these questions helped them take a step back and assess where they could grow or develop or better understand a situation and gain self-awareness.
- **Ask for students' ideas.** Students reported that coaches built their skills and knowledge by asking them for their ideas or next steps rather than telling them what to do or how to solve a problem. **Through this strategy, coaches were not imparting advice or knowledge but teaching students how to harness their own knowledge and experience to tackle an issue.** For example, a student who was having trouble with classes one semester said that the coach asked, "What are you going to do for the next quarter? How are you going to manage your time?" One coach (Y3) said, "When people come up with something on their own, talk it through and how to plan and listen/be a sounding board, those just tend to be the more successful coaching sessions." Coaches only stepped in and tell students what to do in cases when students were completely unaware of options. For example, a student did not know it was okay to email a professor and ask for an extension on an assignment,

so the coach told the student that this was an appropriate action thought the request could be rejected. As with talking through a situation, this strategy was mainly mentioned by students who met with their coach three or more times (62%, *N* = 58) than students who met with their coach only once (17%, *N* = 23) or twice (36%, *N* = 44).

- **Provide information, tools, and resources to meet students' learning needs.** A method coaches used to develop students' knowledge and skills in areas students identified was by providing information, tools, and/or resources. **Before coaches provided this information, they ensured that it would be valuable to students and asked the student permission to share the information**. Coaches mainly used this strategy with students who met with them once; these students overwhelmingly cited this strategy as the main way coaches built their knowledge and skills in meetings. About three times (78%) as many students reported that providing resources or information was an effective strategy used by their coach (*N* = 23, Y3 survey). **Coaches provided financial resources, academic or job-related resources, and tools and strategies. They made students aware of existing resources and supports on campus and how to take advantage of those opportunities**. For example, one student shared that their coach shared strategies or tools to help with time management, such as studying for 50 minutes for one class and then studying for 50 minutes for another class.

  **Some students who had access to other resources through their college campus shared that the CSF coach provided a unique perspective and information that they could not get from other resources**. One student (Y2), for example, said that their coach provided unique information not available from other on-campus resources: "I think the new things that I've learned from [the coach] are just different resources on campus because I know very limited from, like, the websites. And the websites are always very confusing to navigate. So yeah, [the coach is] always there just, like, if I have a question [the coach is] just, like, 'Okay, do you know about this one? Or if you want to get this help, you go to this place.' Yeah, I think it was really helpful to have [the coach] know what's going on in campus."

> Student (Y2): *"I feel like [the coach] not only answers your question, but then [the coach] gives you other resources along with that. So like, 'Go find out more for yourself.' So there's some times [the coach will] add a link or stuff like that and you can click on the link, it'll bring you to other things. So it's not only is [the coach] just giving you the answer, but then [the coach] also is showing where you can find the answer in the future. So it's both, like, it's kind of that quote, if you give a man a fish versus teach a man how to fish."*
>
> Student (Y2): *" One time I asked for help on an essay for a scholarship and also budgeting because I'm really bad at budgeting my money. So I asked [the coach] for a template or something to help me with, and then [the coach] sent it to me right away, a couple minutes after our meeting."*
>
> Student (Y1): *"I feel like a coach is training you to do something successfully on your own, like self-discipline in a way? So you can do it without having a doubt and being confident and secure that you know what you're doing."*

**Coaches also not only provided students information, they taught them how to find the information for themselves in the future**. In cases when coaches did not have answers to students' questions, they provided resources or links so students could find the information themselves. Students appreciated that coaches taught them how to access the information themselves because they could be self-sufficient later on.

> Student (Y3): *" I think what really helped me is they were able to share their screen because we met on Zoom and then I went through my schedule with them, we created a planner for myself and then [the coach] helped me purchased my first planner and then I was just writing down assignments and due dates, club meetings, shifts and things like that."*

Coaches used other strategies to build students' skills and knowledge, but these were less commonly reported by students (30% or fewer students reported a coach using these strategies, *N* =130, Y3 survey). Other less common ways students noted coaches built their skills are as follows:

- **Walk students through a strategy, task, or tool.** Coaches supported students with using tools or strategies by walking them through how to complete a task, so students developed the skills to engage these tools or tasks on their own. This was a common teaching strategy called guided instruction in which a teacher completes a task with students, eventually building students' confidence so they can complete the task by themselves (Fisher & Frey, 2008). As coaches walked through tasks with students, they also used metacognitive strategies, explaining their thinking, an integral part of guided instruction. Some helpful strategies students reported that coaches used in meetings are as follows:
  - Coaches walked through a website, resource, or tool with students and talked about what they were seeing or doing and how to use or apply the tool or resource in students' lives. For example, one student reported that a coach helped create an independence appeal for the FAFSA. Another student said that the coach shared a practice for setting goals and had the student practice creating the goals.
  - Coaches helped students complete a task or talked through a scenario. Coaches guided and talked students through situations. Students found this helpful because it allowed them to better understand what they were experiencing and/or thinking. For example, one student reported having a mock conversation with the coach to prepare for a conversation with a faculty member. The coach helped the student with sentence starters and responded with various scenarios, so the student felt prepared. This student (Y3) said: "That's helped in future conversations just for me to be able to approach things that might be, like, I don't know what's going to happen, but we'll see what happens and just do it in a more professional way."

> Student (Y3): *"So in the beginning I was thinking of maybe business, or biology, or public health as a potential major… We deduced it to public health. And then … [the coach] actually reached out to another CSF student who's a senior majoring in public health. And then from there I was able to connect with that student and get a better grasp on what I need to do for public health. "s, shifts and things like that."*

- **Connect students with other people.** Coaches grew students' awareness and knowledge by connecting them to people on and off campus. This made students aware of job or internship opportunities or academic majors or career pathways. These connections to people who could help gave students the capacity to manage issues in the future.
- **Coplan steps and problem solve**. Coaches partnered with students to figure out what they wanted to accomplish and how to do it. Eighty percent (*N* = 125) of students said that their coach partnered with them to troubleshoot issues and 72% (*N* = 125) said that coaches partnered with them to set goals (Y2 survey).

> Student (Y3): *): "I feel like I always come out of the meetings feeling a little bit more grounded. It's not that I'm unaware of all the things that I'm having to do, but it kind of, just feels like everything's up in the air, and I'm not really sure what to tackle first or how I figure out how to tackle each thing. So [the coach] kind of lays it out in a way that it feels more manageable to me, so I feel more competent in going about it instead of kind of procrastinating because I'm scared of doing it all."*

Coaches asked students how they would manage an issue, repeated back to students what they heard, and then helped students put together a plan or next steps. They did this for personal or academic goals or managing a specific concern or issue. A coach explained this strategy of coplanning: "I ask them like in a best-case scenario, what would they like to see as the outcome so that I can know what their expectations are. And then we kind of work backwards from that as far as, 'What are some next steps that could get you closer to that outcome?'" A student explained how a coach helped come up with next steps: "[The coach] usually asks me what's been going on and I tell her, and then [she] says, 'Okay, well it sounds like this is what you have to do. Right?' So I kind of put it all out there and it's a mess because I don't know how to tackle everything. And then [she is] like, 'Okay, well looks like you should reach out to this person if you're looking for an internship, or to check out things with your advisor' and stuff like that. So, it's like I put it out there and she helps me narrow it down."

Coaches helped students prioritize actions within their plan. Students reported appreciating the time coaches took with this strategy because sometimes students were overwhelmed and did not know where to start. This also helped build students' confidence mindset to tackle issues in the future.

- **Follow up and engage students with self-reflection about their development.** Coaches kept track of conversations with students to follow up on progress through different skills or tasks. Even if students did not schedule a meeting to follow up on a topic, some coaches asked them how they were faring with or how they improved on a skill or strategy from a previous meeting. Self-reflection is a key teaching strategy in adult learning because it allows learners to make sense of their experience implementing a new skill and think about how they might want to adjust in the future (Osterman, 1990).

Coaches checked in with students during meetings as well as through texts between meetings. This occurred mainly with students who had interacted with their coach multiple times a year. Students appreciated that their coach checked in on them because this held them accountable to following through on next steps. One student (Y3) said, "I usually get a follow-up text or email a week or 2 weeks later just, like, 'Hey, doing a quick little check-in on you. How are the stuff we talked about last meeting? How you doing? Has anything changed and would you like to meet again or are you doing okay?' . . . In a way, it almost holds me accountable."

# Section 4: Infrastructure to Support Coaching Services

This section explores three sets of infrastructure needed as a foundation for a successful third-party coaching service: training and development for coaches to ensure high-quality coaching, a data system to evaluate and monitor coaching interactions, and partnerships with higher education institutions to understand and connect with campus resources.

## Coach Training and Development

Ongoing coach training and support ensures that coaches continually develop their practice and hone strategies to meet the evolving needs of students in their particular college context. CSF coaches are provided with various training and development activities throughout the academic year and their time in coaching.

- **Formal training.** Coaches participated in formal training experiences to develop their coaching practice. Coaches completed their Level I (24 hours) and Level II (36 hours) FSM certification within their 1st year of service. The goas of this training, offered through the Fostering Success Coaching Institute, was for coaches to understand the Fostering Success Coaching Model and learn coaching skills to support partnerships with students.

  Coaches also participated in training to support the use of an equity approach in coaching meetings. This training was provided through a nonprofit coaching and consulting organization that provides coaching for equity training. The equity trainings helped coaches increase their awareness of creating an inclusive and welcoming space for students. For example, coaches mentioned how they were more cognizant of their identity, how they enter the coaching space, and how they design their coaching meetings. The tools helped them think about students' perspectives and experiences—where students were coming from. One coach (Y2) described becoming comfortable asking questions about students' cultural

identity or background: "I think [the training] made me more comfortable talking about those topics. And it just gave me awareness how uncomfortable, maybe, I was, or unprepared, or didn't ever feel it was my place to have those conversations with students. So, I felt more comfortable just asking questions, especially if it's a student from a different culture. I'll kind of dig in and start asking questions, and being authentically curious, and just learning about students from their cultural perspective, a little more than maybe I would have before."

- **One-on-one coaching**. All new CSF coaches were afforded the opportunity to meet with a certified coach from the Fostering Success Coaching Institute for 4 hours in one-on-one sessions to be trained on coaching quality, strategy and motivation, and/or morale. One coach found this helpful to tailoring an outreach approach. For example, a certified coach suggested ways to craft messages that would resonate with CSF students, instead of the generic "I'm here for you" email or text.
- **Peer learning community**. Coaches created a learning community with other CSF coaches in which they met once per month and took turns facilitating coach practice sessions. Coaches discussed a scenario they were facing, presented it to the team, and received feedback and advice. This provided an opportunity for continuous improvement.

## Data System to Monitor and Evaluate Coaching

CSF College Services uses a virtual platform in which all coaches can access and log information on their students and coaching interactions. Through the platform, coaches may view information collected by CSF on each student, see updated information on who is in their coaching load, and record information on each interaction they have with students. This type of data system is useful for two main reasons:

➔ Data on interactions is key for coaches to track student progress and understand real-time trends in coaching interactions. This tracking method is also helpful when students shift to working with new coaches so that their interaction history is recorded. CSF coaches log information such as the type of interaction (e.g., one-on-one meeting or text), the content of the interaction (e.g., financial aid or employment opportunities), and when the interaction occurred.

➔ Accessible, reliable data are vital to conduct internal and external evaluations on program impact. For example, we connected National Clearinghouse Data on student persistence and CSF's database to explore the association between participation in coaching and student persistence.

To support functionality for coaches and evaluation purposes, practices related to the data system should be modified over time to adapt to the coaching model as it evolves. Following are lessons learned to ensure reliable data are available for both monitoring and evaluating coaching:

- **Ensure uniformity in how coaches' log interactions with students.** Standard understanding and practices on which activities to catalogue, and how to do so, could increase consistency in data across the cadre of coaches. This documentation could also support transitions for students between coach assignments as CSF develops coach caseloads and assignments, because a recorded history of coach interactions and progress will follow the student. Practices that strengthen uniformity include the following:
  - **Develop written guidelines on what constitutes a coaching session for documentation purposes**. For example, CSF coaches interact with students all the time through various modalities, but not all interactions are "coaching" interactions. Coaches might check in with students and find out how they are doing but may not go through the assess, prioritize, and teach coaching process. They must know when and how to document each interaction.
  - **Standardize the types of details being recorded for each coaching session**. Shared norms around what aspects of coaching sessions to document may help coaches track their own progress and offer opportunities for peer learning among coaches. For example, coaches could document aspects such as goal-setting activities, ways they are empowering students, or examples of support provided to students. They could also jointly identify one or two quality measures to track over time and include a self-assessment on progress in those measures in their notes.
  - **Ensure students can self-identify demographic characteristics**. Database entries should reflect students' preferences for race and ethnicity identification and gender identity. If the database is prepopulated using administrative data, schedule annual updates to reflect students' preferences for identification in cases where they differ from the administrative record. For example, CSF uses administrative data and self-reporting from students to populate the race and ethnicity and gender identity fields in the database. However, findings still indicated a discrepancy between how students' identify themselves and the administrative records, particularly in cases where the database did not contain space for documenting intersectional or additional identities not in the system. For example, most students who were identified as two or more races in the database later identified as Hispanic or Latino in the survey. One student also responded positively to nonbinary gender options on the survey.

## Establishing Partnerships With Higher Education Institutions

A key enabling condition to a successful coaching model is establishing partnerships with higher education institutions. Students find coaches valuable because they provide useful and relevant support and information, specifically within students' college context. Coaches connect students to other service providers or resources at the campus. This can only happen if coaches are aware of the services at the campuses and if they have personal connections with campus resources. Below, we share how coaches develop connections, learn about campus supports, and leverage campus supports to benefit students.

### Develop Personal Connections

Developing personal connections with student service providers and campus resources might be challenging when coaches are not physically located at the campus. CSF coaches identified two strategies as effective for connecting with campus staff:

- **Continue to reach out until the relationship is established.** For example, one coach providing remote coaching was unable to schedule a conversation with the head of advising staff until spring of the 2nd year that coaching was offered. However, once the connection was established, this coach developed a relationship with an advisor at the student outreach office and established ways to collaborate.
- **Establish connections at campuses through regional associations or board**s. For example, CSF directors established relationships with various campuses, including college presidents or others in positions of leadership, through CSF's advisory boards. Directors used these connections to foster relationships between college coaches and the campuses. One director held a partner meeting with two campuses that enabled a coach to make connections. The coach received emails about campus resources, which allowed the coach to better serve students. Another coach established a campus contact because the director brokered connections. One director also mentioned that leadership connections could help start the process for or finalize memoranda of understanding or data sharing agreements (see below for more information about the benefits of data sharing agreements). This director mentioned that "having the right advocate on campus with positional power" could help establish these agreements.

### Learning About Campus Supports and Relevant Policies

Coaches use a variety of strategies to learn about services and resources available to students on college campuses as well as policies that impact students' journey:

- One way that CSF coaches learned about resources at their college campuses was to **develop an "eco-map" to improve their understanding of student service providers** at each campus. Specifically, this map was intended to identify campus and community contacts for all seven FSM life domains to ensure a warm handoff to relevant support services, based on student needs and priorities. Two coaches created eco-maps, and they found the process of creating these maps helpful because they identified new resources, specifically aligned to the seven life domains. One coach also mentioned, by trying to identify resources, being able to see barriers that students may have when accessing these resources, which better positioned them to anticipate students' challenges.
- CSF coaches who were situated at a college campus learned about campus policies and supports through interactions with college staff. These coaches also received information about college policy changes or events through ongoing meetings with staff. One coach on a college campus explained, "I also get lots of updates on what's happening on the campus because I'm a part of the academic advising team.

For example, [I'm notified] when there are changes to minimum GPA [grade point average] needed before being dropped. Also, there are events on campus that the team is notified about."

- One coach joined online **social media groups** for college staff to stay abreast of updates and events, especially as policies changed day to day during the COVID-19 pandemic.

### Collaborate to Better Support Students

Having a clear champion or personal connection on campus allows collaboration between coaches and campus-specific support providers to help students. One way they collaborate is sharing information about students' needs or circumstances to better serve those students. For example, CSF coaches situated on a campus were notified when an academic alert was placed on students. When this happened, one coach used this alert as an opportunity to work with an academic advisor to "tag team with a plan and contact the student together." Another coach collaborated with campus staff to organize a scholarship and financial aid workshop for students that included presentations from campus staff.

**Have ongoing meetings with staff to help collaboration.** For example, one coach was part of a college's recruitment and outreach team and met weekly with the staff; at another campus, this coach was working with a TRIO team and making connections with other campus services.

### Access to Student Data

Creating a data sharing agreement with a college or university allows coaches to access information about students' academic standing that could help tailor their coaching approach for each student. **Coaches who had access to data found it extremely helpful, especially when they could access the information themselves without needing college staff to retrieve reports**.

- First, knowledge about students' enrollment status allowed coaches to personalize outreach to students. For example, a coach prioritized outreach to students who were not registered for classes.
- Second, access to information helped coaches "get to the point faster and be ready to address it" in a coaching meeting instead of spending time in the beginning of the meeting drawing out students' problems. As a result, coaches could address student issues that posed a barrier to college completion.

The types of data shared with coaches differed across campuses. For example, one coach was granted access to a system to view students' academic standing, grades, and probation but was unable to access financial aid information. Another coach received ongoing data reports from helpful college staff each quarter but was unable to run reports herself. Those data reports included student GPA, credits, classes, and contact information. Coaches were also notified about academic alerts placed on students.

Data sharing agreements are not always necessary, as one coach was able to come to an informal agreement with a college advisor to share information. However, formal agreements can facilitate quicker access to information and establish sustainable data sharing practices over time as the staff rotates.

# Conclusion

This report synthesizes practices and strategies mentioned by CSF coaches and students throughout our 3-year evaluation to inform the field on how a third-party college coaching service can effectively support college students in a remote environment. The data were mainly collected from students attending 4-year colleges, and therefore these practices may mainly apply to coaches working with 4-year college students. We outlined several practices noted by CSF coaches and students that were effective in establishing initial connections, building a caring and trusting environment, and developing students' knowledge and skills to navigate their campus and succeed in college. Although some practices were specific to the FSM framework, such as the assess, prioritize, and teach strategy, or FSM's focus on a variety of life domains, the practices themselves are agnostic (e.g., demonstrate coaching instead of teaching about a model or using effective adult learning practices when teaching skills to students). Practitioners in the field can use these strategies and tailor them to their campus context and student population to best serve their students. The infrastructure outlined to support coaching services can also be applicable to other coaching models as they begin to establish their programs at different campuses.

Many strategies mentioned in this report also support multiple aspects of establishing a successful coaching relationship that builds students' knowledge and skills. Coaching programs, especially those in their infancy, may want to focus on implementing a few strategies because of the impact on multiple areas. These cross-cutting strategies are as follows:

- **Continue to reach out and create a system to prioritize outreach**. Continue to reach out to students via email, phone, or text to get them in the door for the first meeting, and support their continued engagement afterward.
- **Be responsive and reliable**. When coaches were responsive to students and provided them with timely and useful information, students reported being more inclined to continue to reach out for support, especially when other college support staff did not provide timely responses. This is also the first step in establishing trust with students. When their coach responded quickly, students knew the coach cared for them and were more willing to open up.
- **Interact without judgment and express care, encouragement, and enthusiasm**. When students believed their coach understood where they were coming from and/or cared about them, they reported being more inclined to reach out to their coach than other staff, friends, or family, especially when they did not get the same level of support from other people. This also establishes a trusting

environment where students feel comfortable opening up about personal or challenging issues because they see that coaches can relate. When coaches shared their experiences which were similar to the students' own, students recognized that they were not alone and felt comfortable sharing. Coaches' caring, nonjudgmental nature signaled to students that they could open up, which led to students scheduling additional meetings.

- **Follow up on student concerns and engage students in self-reflection about their development**. When coaches followed up with students about their situations or concerns in subsequent meetings or communication, and remembered aspects of past conversations, this demonstrated to students that coaches cared about their personal well-being. Students reported that their trust in their coach increased. Coaches also furthered students' skill or knowledge development by asking probing or reflective questions about progress on skill or knowledge attainment so that students could assess their personal development.

As CSF College Services continues to expand, the promising practices listed here will evolve, especially as CSF serves more students at 2-year institutions and adapts to the policy and community contexts in Washington State.

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