

SUPPORTING RESILIENCE: Building Resilient Communities through Enhanced Student Supports

By Leah Childress and Derek Price, DVP-PRAXIS LTD
and Robert Roach and Wendy Sedlak, Equal Measure

The Northeast Resiliency Consortium

In 2012, seven community colleges in the Northeast region of the United States¹ came together to discuss the acute need for resilience in their communities in the wake of several natural and man-made disasters, including the shooting at Sandy Hook Elementary School and two hurricanes. These seven colleges formed the Northeast Resiliency Consortium (NRC), led by Passaic County Community College, to develop and implement programming and services that would help build resilience in students and communities, and generate a highly skilled workforce.²

As a recipient of a Round Three U.S. Department of Labor Trade Adjustment Assistance Community College and Career Training (TAACCCT) grant, the NRC prioritized efforts around credential completion and employment, and focused on building a resilient workforce in sectors that are critical to the healthy functioning of communities: healthcare, information technology, and environmental/utility.³

In order to develop programming and services that could help its communities—and communities around the nation—build resilience, the NRC began its efforts by defining resiliency and five corresponding competencies, which form the Resiliency Competency Model. The NRC defines resiliency as “an individual’s persistent development and application of knowledge, skills, and resources that effectively help one adapt to change and overcome adversity.”⁴ Building from this definition, NRC leadership and college staff worked with Achieving the Dream to develop five key resiliency competencies: critical thinking, reflective learning, collaboration, adaptability, and self-awareness. These resiliency competencies are presented in Table 1.

Table 1.

NRC Resiliency Competencies

CRITICAL THINKING	REFLECTIVE LEARNING	COLLABORATION	ADAPTABILITY	SELF-AWARENESS
Purposeful use of reasoning to identify strengths and weaknesses of alternative approaches in diverse situations	Integration and application of prior and current learning to new situations	Works with others to achieve a goal	Successful adjustment to a variety of positive and negative conditions and circumstances	Clear understanding of one’s qualities, characteristics, strengths, and weaknesses; and how they impact one’s self and others

The NRC dedicated significant time and effort to developing resources that help faculty and staff integrate these competencies into NRC program curricula. All seven colleges have mapped the resiliency competencies to curriculum in at least one program, and, across the consortium, colleges have integrated the resiliency competencies into 24 courses. More information about the NRC Resiliency Competency Model and the corresponding resources and assessment tools can be found on SkillsCommons,⁵ the TAACCCT free online library.

In addition to incorporating the five resiliency competencies into the curricula, NRC colleges are helping students develop resilient attitudes and behaviors by providing “resiliency support services.” Integrating the concept of resilience into the area of support services is a natural fit for colleges, as the goal of many student support services is to promote student success and develop the resilient beliefs and behaviors presented in Table 1. Resiliency support services are available at all seven consortium colleges and are the focus of this Issue Brief.

As part of our third-party evaluation, we conducted in-person interviews with NRC project leaders, staff, and faculty at three NRC colleges and held telephone interviews with project leaders and staff at the remaining four colleges. These interviews focused on the resiliency support services colleges are providing as part of their work with the NRC, and this Issue Brief reflects our analysis of the interview data.

The Brief is structured as follows:

- **Section I** provides a summary of recent research in the area of support services and student success in community colleges.
- **Section II** provides a description of the ways in which NRC colleges deliver resiliency support services to participants.
- **Section III** identifies best practices in NRC colleges’ approaches to resiliency support services.

SECTION I

RESILIENCY SUPPORT SERVICES AND STUDENT SUCCESS

Recent research on support services at community colleges suggests that the frequency and intensity of student support services play an important role in the ultimate impact on student outcomes.

For example, there is evidence that more intensive, long-term supports have greater impact than one-time, low-intensity services,⁶ and repeated one-on-one coaching support has been linked to higher rates of student persistence and college completion.⁷ An experimental study conducted by MDRC as part of its Opening Doors demonstration documented that providing support services increases student retention.⁸

Additionally, the research literature suggests that making support services a required part of the community college experience can lead to more positive outcomes for students. Expecting students to identify, and independently engage with, support services can become a barrier to student success, because not all students are equipped with the social capital necessary to seek out the supports they need.⁹ Removing that responsibility from students by making support services mandatory promotes equal access, and gives all students the opportunity to benefit from the supports colleges provide. For example, an experimental study at a California community college found that providing voluntary support services did not have an effect on students'

academic outcomes; however, after the college made the services mandatory, these supports yielded significant increases in cumulative grade point averages and doubled the proportion of students that moved off academic probation.¹⁰

The idea of making support services mandatory is particularly salient in the context of resiliency support services, as these supports are intended to help students build the resilient beliefs and behaviors necessary to seek out help independently in the future.

"...making support services mandatory promotes equal access, and gives all students the opportunity to benefit from the supports colleges provide."

—NRC staff

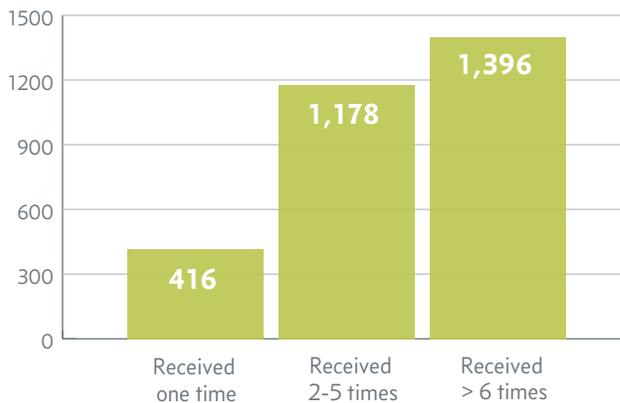
SECTION II

RESILIENCY SUPPORT SERVICES AT NRC COLLEGES

NRC colleges prioritized the design and delivery of resiliency support services as part of their TAACCCT grant, and, as of summer 2016, **2,990 NRC participants had received at least one resiliency support service.**

Of these 2,990 students, 86% received a support service at least twice, and almost 50% received resiliency supports at least six times (Figure 1). This high level of support service access is promising, and future evaluation work will examine the relationship between student engagement with resiliency support services, student persistence, and credential completion.

Figure 1.
Resiliency Support Service Participation¹¹



Resiliency support services in the NRC vary in a number of ways, both across and within institutions. In general, resiliency support services cover one (or more) of the following three content areas: academic success; career preparation; and personal, or wrap-around, support. Table 2 provides examples of NRC resiliency support services in each of these content areas.

Table 2.

Examples of NRC Resiliency Support Service Content Areas

ACADEMIC

- Enhanced tutoring and/or study hall
- Study skills workshops
- Enhanced intake support and/or assistance with program enrollment

CAREER

- Resume development, interview skills, and/or LinkedIn workshops
- Mock interviews
- Counseling/advising sessions with employment specialists or job developers

PERSONAL

- Sessions with case managers, counselors, and/or advisors
- Referrals to other resources or supports
- Workshops on topics such as communication, time management, stress management, and/or goal setting

In order to document and organize approaches to resiliency support services across the consortium, we developed an overarching typology that reflects both the service location and the delivery modality. In this section, we use the typology to provide a detailed description of approaches to resiliency support services at NRC institutions, and explore the variation that exists within each approach. We also discuss potential benefits and limitations of each approach.

Although resiliency supports could be provided in a number of locations and in a variety of ways, the approaches to NRC support service delivery can be categorized along two dimensions: location (in-class vs. out-of-class) and modality (group setting vs. one-on-one). The combination of these two dimensions results in three location/modality service types: in-class/group (ICG), out-of-class/group (OCG), and out-of-class/one-on-one (1:1). In general, services provided in a classroom setting do not meet the threshold of personalized and individualized attention necessary to be considered a one-on-one support, hence the absence of an in-class/one-on-one category. Table 3 provides a description and examples of each service type.

Table 3.

NRC Resiliency Support Service Typology



IN-CLASS/GROUP (ICG)

ICG resiliency supports are provided during class sessions, either by the instructor or an NRC support service staff member (e.g., case manager or employment specialist). In-class services are always delivered in a group session, and are typically provided in a workshop format. ICG supports are mandatory.



OUT-OF-CLASS/GROUP (OCG)

OCG resiliency supports are provided through workshops, skills practice labs, and job fairs. These out-of-class supports may be delivered by college student services staff, NRC support service staff, instructors, or external partners. OCG supports are generally voluntary, and many of these supports are available to the entire campus (not just NRC participants).



OUT-OF-CLASS/ONE-ON-ONE (1:1)

1:1 resiliency supports are provided out of class. These services generally consist of advising or counseling sessions with NRC support service staff. Some colleges require students to participate in one-on-one counseling or advising sessions, but this type of support is generally voluntary.

EXAMPLES

- Resume development and interview preparation workshops
- Study skills workshops
- Cultural competency workshops
- “Healthcare 101” workshops
- Time management and study skills workshops
- Tutoring sessions and study halls
- Skill practice labs
- Resume writing and job skills workshops
- Counseling or advising sessions
- Tutoring
- Resume review with job developers
- Enrollment assistance

In-class/Group Resiliency Support Services

NRC ICG resiliency services may cover academic, career, and/or personal content and these supports are provided at different frequencies—some ICG resiliency supports are provided on a weekly basis, while others are offered only once.

Examples of ICG supports include: resume development, interview preparation sessions, mock interviews, study skills, time management, and communication skills sessions. Colleges have also offered “NRC orientation” sessions, in which key NRC support service staff introduce themselves, present information about the grant program, and provide information about other supports on campus. “NRC orientation” sessions take place only once, during one of the first class sessions. Similarly, mock interviews take place only once. The other in-class workshops may be offered only once or twice, or they may be integrated into course sessions on a weekly basis.

A handful of colleges deliver these in-class workshops over the course of two or three class sessions, for a total of three to nine hours of workshop time. ***For example, Capital Community College provides three in-class sessions, each of which is three hours long, to students in its non-credit NRC programs. These sessions provide guidance and support with resume development, interview skills, and the job search process.***

A key difference in approaches to resiliency support service delivery—both across the consortium and within institutions—is the mandatory or voluntary nature of the service. In-class supports are inherently mandatory, given the fact that—pending absences—all students in the class will receive the support. Thus, integrating resiliency support services into class sessions—similar to the NRC’s approach to integrating resiliency competencies into course curriculum—could help reduce barriers to access and reach a larger number of students. At the same time, the need to focus on course content during class sessions can create challenges to providing resiliency supports at a high enough frequency to positively affect student outcomes. In Section III, we highlight several in-class resiliency support services as best practices among the NRC colleges.



Out-of-class/Group Resiliency Support Services

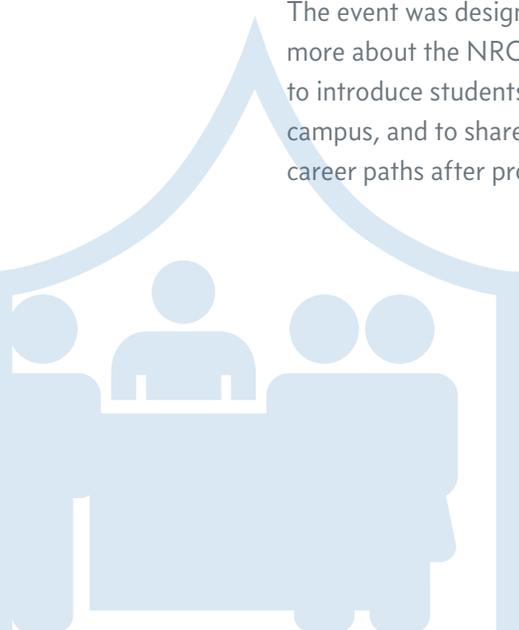
Of the three approaches to delivering resiliency support services, OCG supports are the most diverse among the NRC colleges.

The OCG supports may take the form of workshops, college orientation sessions, study halls, skills practice labs, career fairs, or pre-enrollment decision-making events. The OCG supports may be required for NRC participants or voluntary and available to all students on campus, and they may happen several times during a term, one time, or not at all (some services are available some terms and not others). The OCG resiliency services cover academic, career, and/or personal content.

For example, Atlantic Cape Community College’s pre-enrollment “Decision Making Day” touches on all three content areas: academic, career, and personal. During this “Decision Making Day,” potential students cycle through three or four short class sessions (led by program instructors), participate in a panel discussion with employers, and receive information about financial assistance.

The event was designed to help students learn more about the NRC programs before enrolling, to introduce students to wrap-around supports on campus, and to share information about potential career paths after program completion.

Most OCG resiliency supports are not mandatory, and, as such, it is harder for colleges to ensure that students actually receive these resiliency-building support services. The designation of an out-of-class support service as voluntary or mandatory may affect the number of students who receive these supports. If a support service is voluntary, and if students are not sufficiently convinced of the benefit of receiving the service, the support service may be underutilized and thus be less likely to yield improvements in overall student outcomes. Therefore, colleges may see more significant impact of OCG resiliency support services on student outcomes if these services are mandatory. However, even if out-of-class supports are required, students’ schedules and other life responsibilities may affect their ability to access or participate in the services.



Out-of-class/ One-on-one Resiliency Support Services

A number of NRC colleges hired case managers, job developers, or program counselors to provide enhanced 1:1 resiliency supports to NRC students, either proactively or in response to student requests.

These 1:1 supports typically take the form of advising or counseling sessions, and the key difference in 1:1 support services across the consortium is the level of interaction students have with the support service staff. Some 1:1 supports are mandatory, while others are voluntary; and, the support service frequency also varies across—and within—institutions.

The majority of the NRC's 1:1 resiliency support services are voluntary, which means students may or may not receive these supports. ***An exception to this trend is the significant 1:1 outreach and required weekly contact that takes place in the Community Health Worker, Culinary, and Energy Industry Fundamentals programs at Passaic County Community College. In these programs, students receive regular, proactive outreach from NRC support service staff and have weekly 1:1 sessions with the program counselor.*** According to NRC support staff at the college, “student engagement is key to what we’re doing” and “meeting every single week is helpful.”

Other examples of mandatory 1:1 resiliency supports among NRC colleges are: quarterly check-ins with a case manager, a mid-program advising session to discuss academic progress and career goals, and a one-time pre-program advising session. As this list of examples indicates, there is variation in the frequency with which mandatory 1:1 resiliency support services are provided. Conversely, voluntary 1:1 services may happen only once or on an ad-hoc basis. Examples of voluntary 1:1 services include mock interviews, enhanced tutoring support, resume review, and student-initiated counseling or advising sessions. Although a number of 1:1 resiliency supports are voluntary, NRC support service staff from several colleges emphasized the importance of these services, stating that “the one-on-one contact is so important; students know we are looking out for them, and the personal connection is key.”

As mentioned earlier, research literature has shown that intensive 1:1 supports are particularly beneficial for students, and that more intensive services are related to longer-term impact. Although some schools engage in proactive outreach and require students to participate in regular 1:1 counseling or advising sessions, the majority of 1:1 services are not mandatory and, thus, may be utilized less regularly. Students who receive 1:1 support services, even irregularly, can derive short-term benefits; however, institution-wide improvements in student persistence and completion are more likely if 1:1 supports are required and offered on an ongoing basis.

SECTION III

PROMISING PRACTICES TO EMPOWER STUDENT RESILIENCY AT NRC COLLEGES

While the NRC as a whole has implemented a range of support services that empower students to adopt resilient beliefs and behaviors, several colleges began this work earlier than others and have reached a more advanced implementation stage. The resiliency support services at these colleges serve as examples of promising practices in the field of student supports, and we profile these services here.

Integrated Academic, Career, and Personal Resiliency Supports

LaGuardia Community College developed and implemented the Supporting Adults through Vocational EMT Training program (SAVE EMT), in which students receive integrated basic skills instruction as well as career preparation and personal resiliency supports.

The program is based on Washington State’s I-BEST model,¹² and all enhanced supports are fully embedded in the program. Additionally, students in this program participate in a three-week pre-program “vestibule.” The vestibule serves as an extended orientation and provides students with the opportunity to try out the program and determine whether it is a good fit with their interests and academic and career goals. Program instructors, the basic skills instructor, and NRC case managers co-lead the vestibule and, according to college stakeholders, “help make the technical material more accessible to students who have not always done well in a traditional academic setting.” Program leaders make the EMT content more accessible to students through a combination of providing basic skills instruction; requiring one-on-one meetings with the basic skills instructor; offering group sessions on study skills, time management, and goal setting; and implementing nightly homework in conjunction with a homework tracker tool.

Students are required to set short-term and long-term goals in the first few days of the vestibule, which they then review at the end of the vestibule and at the end of the program.

Once the SAVE EMT program begins, the basic skills instructor leads class one day each week and, in addition to providing enhanced academic support and addressing college success strategies, helps students build resiliency through mandatory weekly one-on-one advising sessions. This enhanced support was recognized by students as “critical” to success in the program. Additionally, NRC case managers lead two-hour career development workshops most weeks, meet with students individually at least once early in the program, and occasionally lead sessions on other topics (e.g., study skills).

“[The basic skills instructor]...made sure I was where I needed to be...without making me feel exposed or less than what I’m worth, and people came around me to help support me.”

—NRC participant

Program Orientation and Weekly Workshops

Kingsborough Community College (KBCC) instituted a mandatory three- to five-day pre-program bridge and series of weekly workshops for a subset of its NRC programs of study.

The pre-program bridge introduces students to the supports available on campus, provides training on academic management software (Blackboard), encourages students to build academic and career goals, and covers personal resiliency topics and college-success skills. Students also complete an individual service plan, in which they identify services they may need, and the NRC coordinator conducts one-on-one follow-up with students after the bridge to connect students with the services they identified.

Once the program begins, program counselors lead weekly one-hour professional development sessions that cover employment, college success, time management, stress management, and other resiliency-building topics. These sessions take place immediately before class one day each week. Students also receive one hour of math/writing support each week in a similar format.

“Lots of success stories over the past few years have shown us that this is something we need to sustain in grant-funded programs and replicate in degree programs. It’s necessary, and our students tell us that all the time.”

—NRC staff

Additionally, students have access to job developers who help students revise resumes and apply for internships. Project staff report that students have gone “even farther than we, or they, expected,” and pointed to the enhanced supports as a key factor in students’ success. And, NRC program instructors recognize that “the support systems that exist in the program each work separately and together to help students in a different way...the supports that they get really help them hone in on their weaknesses and build their strengths...strength building is a huge component of this.”

“The Bridge was very informative and [NRC staff] did a great job.”

—NRC participant

Housatonic Community College (HCC) incorporated a session on resiliency and college success strategies into its required two-day orientation for all college students.

The resiliency orientation session is led by NRC support service staff and includes discussion of time management, study skills, communication with instructors, healthy eating, and self-care. Since the NRC began, HCC has modified the session format based on student feedback; it was first offered as a large-group two-hour session, and is now delivered in small-group 30-minute sessions. The college's internal evaluation of orientation indicates that students appreciate the time management tools and tips for college success—two key areas covered during the resiliency session. During focus groups, students expressed appreciation of the resiliency session content, calling the session leaders “awesome,” and saying specific tips and strategies learned during that session continue to be useful in their day-to-day experience on campus. The orientation is available only to college (credit) students at HCC, and at this point there is no equivalent support available to continuing education students.

“[The supports in the Community Health Worker program] makes the class as a whole stand out as very different from other classes here. It is more hands-on and [the instructor] goes out of her way to explain everything — anytime we're lost, [the instructor] answered our questions and provided resources.”

—NRC participant

HCC also integrated a number of resiliency supports into its Community Health Worker program curriculum. Time management, self-care and stress management, conflict resolution, and cultural sensitivity are embedded in the program curriculum, and students also receive in-class resume development and cover-letter preparation support. Students call the additional resiliency content and support services “very helpful,” and say the class “stands out” because of these extra supports.

CONCLUSION

NRC institutions have dedicated significant effort to developing programming and services that support resilience among their students and in their communities, as evidenced by the wide array of resiliency support services described in this Issue Brief.

The most promising NRC resiliency support services reflect practices the research literature has identified as improving academic success and student retention, such as regular, mandatory one-on-one counseling or advising sessions; consistent proactive outreach to students; resiliency supports integrated into coursework; weekly professional development sessions; and pre-program bridges that integrate academic, professional, and personal supports.

Other promising NRC practices include in-class resiliency support workshops delivered two or three times per program; pre-program enrollment support and/or required one-on-one advising sessions; resiliency support service sessions at mandatory college orientation; and resume assistance, mock interviews, and other mandatory career preparation supports. Our ongoing evaluation will examine the relationship between resiliency support services, student persistence, and credential completion, and we will share results in the Final Evaluation Report in September 2017.

REFERENCES

- 1 Atlantic Cape Community College (NJ); Bunker Hill Community College (MA); Capital Community College (CT); Housatonic Community College (CT); Kingsborough Community College (NY); LaGuardia Community College (NY); and Passaic County Community College (NJ).
- 2 Powell, M., Hatch, M. A., Fians, E., Shinert, A., & Richie, D. (2016). *Strategies for Transformative Change: Creating resiliency and pathways to opportunity*. Champaign, IL: Office of Community College Research and Leadership, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign.
- 3 Ibid.
- 4 Ibid.
- 5 <http://www.skillscommons.org/handle/taaccct/7453>
- 6 Karp, M.M., & West Stacey, G. (2013). *What We Know About Nonacademic Student Supports*. Community College Research Center, Teachers College, Columbia University.
- 7 Bettinger, E.P., & Baker, R. (2014). The Effects of Student Coaching: An Evaluation of a Randomized Experiment in Student Advising. *Educational Evaluation and Policy Analysis*, 36(1).
- 8 Scrivener, S., & Weiss, M. (2009). *More Guidance, Better Results? Three-Year Effects of an Enhanced Student Services Program at Two Community Colleges*. New York: MDRC.
- 9 Karp, M., O’Gara, L., & Hughes, K.L. (2008). *Do Support Services at Community Colleges Encourage Success or Reproduce Disadvantage? An Exploratory Study of Students in Two Community Colleges*. Community College Research Center Working Paper No.10. Teachers College, Columbia University.
- 10 Scrivener, S. & Coghlan, E. (2011). *Opening Doors to Student Success: A Synthesis of Findings from an Evaluation at Six Community Colleges*. New York: MDRC, Policy Brief, March.
- 11 Each college collected resiliency support service data and reported those data to Passaic County Community College. Passaic County Community College then shared the data with the evaluation team. Data collection and entry varies across institutions, so these numbers may not capture the full reach of the services provided to NRC participants.
- 12 Wachen, J., Jenkins, D., & Van Noy, M. (2011). Integrating Basic Skills and Career Technical Instruction: Findings from a Field Study of Washington State’s I-BEST Model. *Community College Review*, 39.

About Equal Measure

Headquartered in Philadelphia, PA, Equal Measure provides evaluation and philanthropic services to social sector organizations. For more than 30 years, our clients have been major private, corporate, and community foundations, government agencies, and national and regional nonprofits. We have deep experience with network collaborative initiatives that improve educational outcomes, and build career pathways, for young adults to live better economic qualities of life. To that end, we have worked on an array of major national and regional programs for organizations such as the Citi Foundation, the Aspen Forum for Community Solutions, the James Irvine Foundation, Lumina Foundation, StriveTogether, RISE for Boys and Men of Color, the W.K. Kellogg Foundation, and U.S. Department of Labor-funded grants in Wisconsin and the Northeast U.S.

For more information about Equal Measure, please contact Seth Klukoff, Senior Director of Communications, at sklukoff@EqualMeasure.org

About DVP-PRAXIS LTD

DVP-PRAXIS LTD is an action-oriented consulting firm focused on higher education and the workforce. We specialize in mixed-method formative and summative evaluation services to inform implementation and measure impact. We also provide strategic advising services for project development and implementation, and conduct research and policy analysis on critical issues facing higher education and the economy. We listen with a keen ear to client's needs, and leverage our experience and knowledge to support foundations, non-profit organizations, state agencies, and colleges and universities committed to improving postsecondary education and skills-development practices and public policies.

For more information about DVP-PRAXIS LTD, please contact Derek Price, Principal Owner, at derek@dvp-praxis.org.

