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From Aspiration to Attainment: Practices that Support Educational Success

Los Angeles Universal Preschool's Child Development Workforce Initiative

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From Aspiration to Attainment: Practices that Support Educational Success

Los Angeles Universal Preschool's Child Development Workforce Initiative

Final Report

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Executive Summary

Introduction

Los Angeles Universal Preschool (LAUP) Child Development Workforce Initiative (CDWFI) project, funded by First 5 LA, seeks to create a pipeline of degreed early childhood education (ECE) practitioners by providing services aimed at fostering academic success among child development and ECE students enrolled in associate (A.A.) degree programs.[1] Across the CDWFI projects, located in seven community colleges in Los Angeles County, support services intended to promote A.A. degree completion and/or transfer to a Bachelor's (B.A.) degree program include enhanced advisement (e.g., for developing an educational plan), academic assistance (e.g., tutoring), financial assistance (e.g., scholarships and stipends), mentoring, career counseling, and networking opportunities.

In order to direct resources toward effective services, it is important to understand which supports are most helpful to various groups of students. This study, conducted by the Center for the Study of Child Care Employment (CSCCE) at the University of California, Berkeley, seeks to understand what distinguishes students who are successful at earning degrees or transferring to four-year institutions from those who are stalled in their progress or who dis-enroll from school. The study also explores the perceived effectiveness of supports that different student groups have accessed through their CDWFI projects and community colleges.

This evaluation explores the issue of student success from two perspectives: from CDWFI staff who support students toward degree attainment and transfer-ready status, and from students themselves, representing different categories of student progress. CDWFI staff perspectives were gathered through a series of focus groups conducted in January 2013. Students from each of the seven CDWFI projects were interviewed from February through April 2013.

For the purposes of this study, successful students are defined as students who had graduated with an A.A. or associate degree transfer (A.A.T), and had transferred or attempted to transfer to a B.A. program in 2012, or students who would be attempting to transfer or graduate in 2013. Stalled students are defined as those who either repeatedly failed general education courses, took classes that diverged from their educational plan, or continued to take classes at the community college level without initiating the transfer process. Students who did not sign up for classes during the spring or fall 2013 semesters are considered dis-enrolled. For an in-depth description of the student perspectives reported below, including student comments, see the Final Report, Appendix B: CDWFI Student Perspectives on Their Educational Success.

Findings

CDWFI Services

Each CDWFI is required to provide core services, including dedicated counseling and advising, mentoring, financial aid, facilitated peer support, and academic tutoring and workshops to help students succeed in attaining degrees. Individual CDWFI projects varied in when and how often these are structured for students, whether they are mandated, and how they are supplemented with other support. There was agreement among CDWFI projects, however, that these core services were all necessary for meeting the varied and complex needs of the student population. Further, there was general agreement that students use certain services, such as counseling, more often at the beginning or end of their academic careers, while others are used throughout, and that all CDWFI projects could use additional resources to expand or

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[1] CDWFI projects also provide support to high school students who are interested in studying child development, and to students moving from an A.A. to a bachelor's degree. In some cases, CDWFI projects also provide support to students for graduate education in ECE or child development. This study, however, focuses exclusively on students in community colleges and the support services they receive from their CDWFI projects. The CDWFI project is one of the many partners of the Los Angeles County Early Care and Education Workforce Consortium, managed by LAUP and funded by First 5 LA. For more information, see: http://laup.net/workforce-professional-development.aspx

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deepen some aspect of their programs (Section 1 Final Report, Focus Group Finding 2).

Student perceptions of CDWFI services mirrored those of CDWFI staff. All student groups identified academic support, particularly educational counseling, as their main reason for joining the CDWFI, and considered it invaluable to have access to someone knowledgeable about the courses they needed for transfer or graduation. Many students also mentioned CDWFI financial support as a reason for joining the CDWFI, and viewed it as essential to their school progress. While students may not have joined the CDWFI because of other services, such as tutoring or academic or career workshops, most students credited these services with helping them improve their academic skills and learn how to navigate the college environment. Mentoring and/or peer support provided by CDWFI projects were widely used and valued. Additional services offered by some projects, particularly lending libraries and one-stop resource centers, were well used and appreciated by students. A minority of students, most frequently those considered dis-enrolled, found it difficult to access some CDWFI services, typically due to scheduling conflicts and time constraints (Section 2 Final Report, Student Interview Finding 1).

General Education Requirements

All CDWFI staff identified general education classes as gatekeepers to students' ability to remain in school, earn degrees, and/or achieve transfer status. CDWFI staff reported that successful students, as well as their stalled and dis-enrolled peers, found math requirements particularly challenging, but the former were more realistic about their limitations, took advantage of tutoring services, and allocated the necessary study time to pass general education classes. Stalled and dis-enrolled students, by contrast, did not develop strategies for overcoming general education barriers. According to CDWFI staff, certain institutional barriers also increased many students' difficulties with general education; these included insufficient spaces in classes, incorrect advisement, and policies that prevented students from retaking failed classes at their home college (Section 1 Final Report, Focus Group Finding 3).

Paralleling the responses of the CDWFI staff, two-thirds of student groups reported that general education requirements prevented them from making steady progress toward their degrees. Students found math requirements for transfer or degree attainment most daunting, and successful students cited tutoring services, study groups, seeking out well-regarded professors, and their own perseverance as their primary strategies for completing required math courses. But students with inflexible work schedules, or greater financial and family responsibilities outside of school—most often, those who had dis-enrolled from college—found it difficult to take advantage of the same services and strategies. Additionally, all students cited inability to access general education classes, as well as misguided counseling, as institutional obstacles affecting their ability to fulfill general education requirements (Section 2 Final Report, Student Interview Finding 2).

Employment and School Success

All CDWFI staff agreed that low-paying jobs with inflexible schedules created additional stress for many students, and that successful students tended to work in more supportive environments that allowed them to take classes, attend CDWFI-sponsored events, and even, in some ECE settings, receive help with school assignments. For many less successful students, frustration with ECE jobs, and especially with pay, served as a disincentive to pursue their educational goals or to stay in the ECE field. All CDWFI projects offered a variety of services to help students obtain jobs when they graduated, or find more supportive working environments while enrolled in school (Section 1 Final Report, Focus Group Finding 4).

Students concurred with the CDWFI staff on these work-related issues. Three-quarters of interviewed students were employed, most of them in early childhood settings. While most students identified encouragement and support from colleagues as contributing to their school success, nearly one-half of employed students identified work as an obstacle to their progress, with dis-enrolled students twice as likely as successful students to report work-related obstacles. Lack of support, inflexible schedules, and job demands often led these students to suspend their studies (Section 2 Final Report, Student Interview Finding 3).

Family Circumstances

All CDWFI staff identified students' relationships with their families as playing a major role in how they navigated their educational careers. CDWFI staff reported that successful students typically received emotional and daily living support from family members, which contributed to their school success. Some family members of less successful students were equivocal about the value of education and its impact on the family, and consequently offered less support. The majority of CDWFI projects emphasized the importance of providing services to help garner family support for students, such as family resource rooms and family social events. CDWFI staff recognized that multiple and sometime unpredictable factors, such as illness or job loss, played a powerful role in students' lives that shaped their academic journeys (Section 1 Final Report, Focus Group Finding 5).

Students' perceptions of the importance of family reflected those of CDWFI staff. Nearly three-quarters of the students identified encouragement and practical support from family members as contributing to their progress in school. Nearly one-half of students, however, also identified family responsibilities, such as child care, household chores, and financial pressures as challenges to school success. Successful students were as likely as stalled and dis-enrolled students to mention such family challenges, but dis-enrolled students often mentioned a family crisis, such as illness, death, divorce, or job loss, as having led to the decision to suspend their studies (Section 2 Final Report, Student Interview Finding 4).

Managing the Financial Aspects of Going to School

All CDWFI staff identified finances as critical to student success. CDWFI staff reported that some successful students benefited from family financial support that enabled them to persist in their studies, while others were particularly savvy about leveraging scholarships and financial aid resources to augment their low incomes and remain in school. Most viewed the lack of organization and follow-through as a reason why less successful students failed to access certain sources of financial support offered by the college or government. However, some noted that financial aid course load requirements limited students' ability to take fewer classes as a strategy to balance the demands of work, school, and family. (Section 1 Final Report, Focus Group Finding 6).

Students similarly emphasized the importance of financial assistance to their success. Most students reported that they were eligible for financial assistance for school costs from the government, their college, and/or the CDWFI project and some received help with living or school expenses from their families. When financial assistance was insufficient or they were ineligible, students pursued other strategies, often reluctantly, such as increasing their work hours, limiting the number of courses they took, or suspending their schooling until they had amassed sufficient funds. Three-fifths of dis-enrolled students reported that finances had played a role in their decision to leave school, and many stalled students identified financial issues as slowing their academic progress (Section 2 Final Report, Student Interview Finding 5).

Balancing Work, Family, and School

Students across all groups reported being overwhelmed by the competing demands of college, work, and family responsibilities. Support from family members, friends, colleagues, and CDWFI projects played a critical role in helping students manage these multiple claims on their time and energy. Students also spoke of learning coping strategies, and/or help from CDWFI personnel and services, that enabled them to make steady progress toward their educational goals. A sizeable proportion of students considered to have stalled or dis-enrolled had done so intentionally in order to preserve their well-being, resolve untenable conflicts, or fulfill work or family obligations (Section 2 Final Report, Student Interview Finding 7).

Student Attitudes and Attributes

Most CDWFI project staff agreed that almost all students, whether successful, stalled, or dis-enrolled, came to their A.A. degree programs academically under-prepared. All CDWFI staff, however, noted that successful students exhibited better school success skills, such as managing time efficiently and setting priorities, from the onset of college attendance; had a clearer sense of their academic and career goals; and participated more actively and consistently in CDWFI support structures and services. All CDWFI staff also identified individual student attributes that they felt contributed to or hampered students' ability

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to accomplish their educational goals. CDWFI staff viewed successful students as dedicated, resourceful, and optimistic about themselves. In contrast, they felt that less successful students tended to lack motivation, procrastinated, avoided seeking or accepting help, and suffered from low self-esteem. While CDWFI staff perceived differences in attitudes and attributes among successful, stalled and dis-enrolled students that influenced their success in school, both stalled and successful students identified persistence and motivation as contributing to their success (Section 1 Final Report, Focus Group Finding 1 and 7).

By contrast, the vast majority of students identified personal attributes and skills that they believed helped them to progress in school. Contrary to CDWFI staff perceptions, students who were categorized as successful or stalled both identified persistence and motivation, good study skills, and commitment to the child development profession as contributors to their school success, more frequently than did dis-enrolled students. Slightly more than one-half of interviewed students, across all student groups, also mentioned personal attributes and behaviors that they believed inhibited their progress, such as procrastination, an inability to prioritize, a lack of study skills, and low self-confidence. Students across all student groups identified strategies to overcome these unhelpful behaviors, such as using a planner, participating in CDWFI study skills classes, and seeking encouragement and guidance from others (Section 2 Final Report, Student Interview Finding 6).

The Impact of CDWFI Projects, and Students' Future Plans

Many students, across all student groups, described participating in the CDWFI as a transformative personal and professional experience, leading them to view themselves and their futures more positively. In addition to helping them make progress toward their educational goals, students described personal changes stemming from participating in the CDWFI, such as increased feelings of self-confidence and responsibility, improved communication and organizational skills, and a new sense of professional pride and ability. Most students expressed the intention to continue their education beyond the community college—in the overwhelming majority of cases, in early childhood studies. Notably, four-fifths of students designated as stalled were satisfied with the progress they were making toward their degrees, and nearly 90 percent of dis-enrolled students reported intending to return to their studies (Section 2 Final Report, Student Interview Finding 8).

Discussion

Currently operating at seven community colleges in Los Angeles County, the CDWFI will expand to three new colleges[2] in 2013-14. To determine how best to direct resources to established and new CDWFI projects, this evaluation sought to identify which supports were most helpful to different groups of students. Specifically, the evaluation was designed to identify how students who appeared to be struggling to meet their educational goals might be better served.

To explore these issues, the perspectives of both CDWFI staff and students were examined. A striking finding that emerged from this investigation is the parallel perspectives of CDWFI staff and students with respect to the challenges students face in achieving their educational goals, and the success of the CDWFI core services in helping students overcome these challenges. Another finding, however, points to the divergence of staff and student perspectives with respect to why students did not participate in all available services, and how they assess student progress. Both the alignment and divergence of CDWFI staff and student perspectives are discussed below, as well as their implications for program design.

CDWFI project designs reflect the extant evidence and professional wisdom regarding services that promote educational success among community college students, particularly those considered nontraditional. They reflect a deep understanding of the academic, personal, financial and workplace challenges that students face, including a recognition that multiple and often unpredictable factors, such as illness or job loss, play a powerful role in shaping students' academic journeys. The core services offered by the CDWFIs (dedicated counseling and advising, financial aid, mentoring and facilitated peer support, and academic tutoring and workshops) have been identified in the research literature as contributing to student retention, progress, and in some cases, degree completion and transfer (Dukakis, Bellm, Seer, & Lee, 2007). For example, sufficient financial assistance is among the strongest factors likely to increase ECE student retention (Dukakis et al., 2007; Whitebook et al., 2008; Whitebook, Sakai, Kipnis, Bellm, & Almaraz, 2010) and working adult student success (McClenney,

Marti, Nathan, & Adkins, 2007). Similarly, research examining the role of dedicated counselors or advisors for community college students indicates that students receiving enhanced advisement are more likely to return to school for the next two semesters, and to earn more credits, than their counterparts who had access only to traditional advisement (Scrivener & Coghlan, 2011).

From the perspective of the interviewed students, whether considered successful, stalled or dis-enrolled, the CDWFI projects were a success. This was particularly true for those who had begun college before CDWFI was established, and who struggled with taking the courses needed for graduation and financing their education. Overall, most students considered the menu of supports and services provided by the CDWFI projects to be well aligned with their needs and interests, and judged them to be of high quality and extremely helpful to their college careers. In addition, almost all students considered their CDWFI experience personally and professionally transformative. They noted that their self-confidence and communication skills had improved, and that they had obtained a greater sense of efficacy and commitment in their work with children. Despite the long and often arduous road that most interviewed students had traveled, they remained committed to their educational journeys, and enthusiastic about the field of early childhood education.

Both CDWFI staff and students, when asked what additional supports would be helpful, talked about expanding existing support, such as extending available hours and locations, rather than proposing new services or supports. The one exception was child care assistance which several students felt would help them with studying and attending more CDWFI events.

CDWFI staff and student perceptions diverged when they were asked about the actual use of services. CDWFI staff shared concerns about stalled and dis-enrolled students who used certain services rarely or not at all. Staff members tended to attribute this lack of participation to student characteristics, such as a lack of direction or poor organizational and time management skills.[3] In a small minority of cases, lack of participation stemmed from students not knowing

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[2] The new CDWDFI projects will operate at Antelope Valley College, Southwest College and Pasadena City College.

[3] It is possible that classifying students into three groups, and subsequently asking questions about the students who comprise those groups, biased staff responses to questions about the characteristics of students in those groups.

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the full range of services available to them, but most students reported that they often did not use particular services due to competing demands on their time and energy. This was particularly true for those considered dis-enrolled. Some students worked off-campus in jobs with inflexible hours, for example, and could not rearrange their schedules to attend CDWFI events or return to campus to access tutoring during the hours it was offered.

These different understandings of why some students did not access services reflect a greater gap between how students and staff define school success. Implicit in the CDWFI staff perspective are expectations about the pace at which students should follow their educational plans. CDWFI personnel and others in the colleges may view "stalled" students as moving too slowly toward their stated goals, but many of these students, instead, assessed their progress as realistic and appropriate to their life situations. Similarly, dis-enrolled students often viewed the decision to leave school as a temporary and rational response to their financial and/or family situations.

Notably, students, perhaps more so than CDWFI staff, also recognized that some situations they faced were beyond the reach of CDWFI services and support. Both stalled and dis-enrolled students reported that they had participated in CDWFI support services whenever possible, but that events beyond their control, rather than a lack of services or direction, were the major factor in determining the pace of their academic journeys. Despite the support and services provided by CDWFI and by family and friends, prioritizing work or family was, for some, their best option for balancing multiple responsibilities, even when it meant reducing one's school load or putting studies on hold. Based on the student interviews, the presence or absence of familial, financial or health crises, rather than demographic characteristics, personal motivation or school skills, emerged as the most telling differences among those categorized as successful, stalled or dis-enrolled.[4]

Thus, in seeking to enhance student support, the issue facing CDWFI projects is less one of revamping what they currently provide by redesigning or adding services, than one of making decisions about membership and who has access to the full complement of services offered. Should the CDWFI programs restrict membership to students who show greater likelihood of progressing at a steady pace? Should the CDWFI establish two membership levels, with different expectations and supports, based on a more realistic assessment of what different students can confidently accomplish? Certain adjustments to CDWFI services and to home institutions' policies may boost students' utilization of services and their likelihood of success (see recommendations below). But fundamentally, the CDWFI projects can only be reasonably expected to help with some of the multiple challenges facing students who enter college academically under-prepared, must work to support themselves and/or a family, and typically earn very low incomes. In particular, in the absence of better academic preparation in high school, students attending community colleges will continue to face difficulties in completing degrees or transferring in a timely fashion.

Still, CDWFI projects can hone their already impressive track record in helping ECE students advance their education by working closely with other stakeholders seeking to improve high school education, improve ECE and other low wage jobs, and expand services that support families and children. The CDWFI projects themselves and their home institutions might consider the following recommendations.

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[4] In general, we found no indication of differences between interviewed students and all core CDWFI members along the following key characteristics: gender, age, English fluency, and personal income. Students sampled for the interview (49 percent) were somewhat less likely to be Latino/Hispanic than the total CDWFI population (62 percent). Two-thirds of students interviewed for this study (67 percent) reported that they were employed in early care and education, compared to 37 percent in the total CDWFI population. This difference reflects an intentional sample recruitment strategy, as the study was designed to include at least one student working in early care and education in all student groups (successful, stalled, and dis-enrolled) for each of the seven CDWFI projects. Additionally, differences in work-related variables between the two groups should be interpreted with caution, as student employment status appears to be unstable. When CSCCE made recruitment calls, a number of students reported that they were working, although their student application data suggested that they were not.

Recommendations

1. *Services:*

   Core CDWFI services—dedicated counseling and advising, financial aid, mentoring and facilitated peer support, and academic tutoring and workshops—are well-utilized and highly valued by students, and these should be continued in order to help students meet their educational goals. To the extent possible, all core and supplemental services should be offered at multiple times for students in easily accessed locations. Services available only during the day, such as college tours and job fairs, may need some re-design to accommodate the varied work and school lives of CDWFI students. To ensure better participation in services, all new and returning members should be required to attend a CDWFI orientation to become familiar with the full array of available support. Resources permitting, assistance with students' child care costs should be considered.

2. *Expectations for membership:*

   The CDWFI project should revisit the definition of successful student progress, and develop a process for CDWFI staff and student applicants to jointly assess whether students' financial, employment and familial situations will allow them to meet project expectations during a given semester. Criteria for ongoing membership should include a session with a CDWFI staff member (counselor, advisor or mentor) to re-assess the student's capacity to continue to meet program expectations, and to identify available services that may enhance success.

3. *Relationship with the ECE community:*

   CDWFI projects could assist students who work in ECE settings by providing information to current and potential employers that familiarizes them with the CDWFI project and the potential benefits to their workplace as staff gain additional education. CDWFI projects should forge intentional partnerships with ECE employers who already understand the importance of education and are willing to accommodate students' schedules, offer encouragement and assistance with their studies, and create a supportive adult learning environment where students can apply what they are learning.

4. *Publicizing CDWFI and joining with other stake-holders:*

   CDWFI programs are an important model for colleges, serving both ECE and other nontraditional students, and efforts should be made to share information about promising practices and lessons learned and to engage with others to ensure that higher education institutions implement policies that help, rather than under-mandating placement assessment for all students, regardless of course load, to guide them to classes appropriate for their skill level; reviewing criteria for priority status for general education courses; promoting financial aid options, such as AB540, that can assist students regardless of immigration status; and developing financial aid options for students who attend less than part-time.

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Introduction

L os Angeles Universal Preschool's (LAUP) Child Development Workforce Initiative Project (CDWFI), funded by First 5 LA, seeks to create a pipeline of degreed early childhood education (ECE) practitioners by providing services aimed at fostering academic success among child development and ECE students enrolled in associate (A.A.) degree programs.[5] Across the CDWFI projects, located in seven community colleges in Los Angeles County, support services intended to promote A.A. degree completion and/ or transfer to a four-year degree program include enhanced advisement (e.g., for developing an educational plan), academic assistance (e.g., tutoring), financial assistance (e.g., scholarships and stipends), mentoring, career counseling, and networking opportunities.

In order to direct resources toward effective services, it is important to understand which support services are most helpful to various groups of students. This study, conducted by the Center for the Study of Child Care Employment (CSCCE) at the University of California, Berkeley, seeks to understand what distinguishes students who are successful at earning degrees or transferring to four-year institutions from those who are stalled in their progress or who dis-enroll from school. The study also explores the perceived effectiveness of support services that different student groups have accessed through their CDWFI projects and community colleges.

Study Rationale

In response to research findings on the links between children's school readiness, teaching quality, and teacher preparation (Whitebook, 2003), many early childhood programs now require teachers to hold higher education degrees. The Head Start program's 2007 reauthorization, for example, required that at least 50 percent of teachers, and all education coordinators, hold a bachelor's degree (B.A.) by 2013. Similarly, 43 states require public pre-kindergarten teachers to hold at least an associate degree (A.A.), with most states requiring a B.A. (Barnett, Carolan, Fitzgerald, & Squires, 2011). Although there is no degree requirement for teachers in California's State Preschool program, several communities have nonetheless adopted a B.A. requirement for their programs. In addition, teachers in California's newly established Transitional Kindergartens are required to hold a bachelor's degree and a multiple subjects teaching credential, which typically requires an additional year of schooling past the B.A. Most recently, President Obama has proposed an expansion of publicly-funded pre-kindergarten programs, staffed by degreed teachers to be paid comparably to educators in grades K-12.

The demand for degreed early childhood teachers reflects a national trend in rising educational expectations for working adults. The Bureau of Labor Statistics (2010) currently estimates that at least 70 percent of the fastest-growing jobs now require post-high school education. Indeed, post-secondary education has long been considered an important pathway to increased competency in one's job, higher wages, greater job mobility, a better quality of life, and overcoming social inequities. In today's post-industrial economy, ensuring a degreed workforce is also considered imperative for remaining competitive as a nation.

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[5] CDWFI projects also provide support to high school students who are interested in studying child development, and to students moving from an A.A. to a bachelor's degree. In some cases, CDWFI projects also provide support to students for graduate education in ECE or child development. This study, however, focuses exclusively on students in community colleges and the support services they receive from their CDWFI projects. For more information, see: http://laup.net/early-care-education-workforce

The CDWFI project is one of the many partners of the Los Angeles County Early Care and Education Workforce Consortium, managed by LAUP and funded by First 5 LA. http://laup.net/early-care-education-workforce.aspx

While college students, historically, have largely been recent high school graduates between the ages of 18 and 24, enrolled full-time and financially dependent on their parents, this group of so-called "traditional" students is now a minority of the college population (Dukakis, Bellm, Seer, & Lee, 2007). By contrast, the new majority of "nontraditional" students are considered to have at least one of the following characteristics: delayed college entry, part-time college enrollment, part- or full-time employment, financial independence, parental responsibility, single parenthood, and/or lack of a high school degree. Students pursuing higher education with several of these characteristics are frequently described as "highly nontraditional" (Brock, 2010). In addition, many nontraditional students are people of color, from low-income backgrounds, and/or first-generation college students (Wei & Horn, 2002).

According to Whitebook, Bellm, Lee, and Sakai (2005), most students majoring in early childhood and attending California's colleges and universities share many of the attributes described above. Most are working full-time, typically in low-wage child care positions, and are simultaneously juggling the demands of a family. Many are women of color and speak a language other than English, and significant numbers, whether they are second language learners or not, face substantial challenges in pursuing college-level work in English and math. Many ECE students are also among the first generation in their families to go to college, and often have a limited understanding of application and financial aid processes, how to enroll in courses and navigate the college system, and/or how to establish realistic education goals, as family members are less able to offer information, role modeling, and support (Tym, McMillon, Baron, & Webster, 2004). Although figures specific to the ECE student population are unavailable, degree completion for the overall community college student population has been estimated at 32 percent (Doyle, 2011; Horn, 2009). For those who do complete associate degrees and transfer to four-year institutions, B.A. degree completion rates are extremely low. A recent report commissioned by the United States Department of Education found that only 12 percent of community college transfer students persisted in completing a four-year degree (National Center for Public Policy and Education, 2011).

In response to this conflict between rising demands for an educated workforce and a student population for which degree attainment is particularly challenging, there is growing policy attention on access to, and success in, higher education as a means of ensuring an available and competent workforce across industries, particularly in early childhood education. In 2012, the Obama administration announced a $500 million appropriation to improve community colleges and to expand job training through local employer partnerships.

To meet the demand for degreed ECE teachers, many communities have developed initiatives in conjunction with community and four-year institutions to support degree attainment (Whitebook, Kipnis, Sakai, & Almaraz, 2008) through a menu of services that include financial assistance, advising and counseling, access-based support (such as evening and off-campus classes), skill-based support (such as academic tutoring and assistance with technology), learning communities, and relationship-based support (such as mentoring).

This report focuses on an evaluation of one such initiative funded by First 5 LA and operated by LAUP, the Child Development Workforce Initiative Project. Specifically, the report seeks to further an understanding of the factors that undermine or bolster student success in community colleges. It is intended to inform policies and programs that support achievement among the growing population of nontraditional students, in ECE and other fields, in meeting their educational goals in community college programs and as they pursue B.A. degrees.

Organization of the Report

The CDWFI classifies students as either "core members" or "participants." Core members, also referred to in this report as members, are defined as students who are working toward a degree and have already taken several child development classes. Participants differ from core members in that they may not be attending community college with the intent of attaining a degree or becoming transfer-ready. In contrast to core members, participants do not have access to the full array of WFI services.

The evaluation examines what distinguishes different groups of core members in meeting their

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educational goals. Based on 2012 CDWFI member application data, most are nontraditional students. Two-thirds of core members were 25 years of age or older (CSCCE, 2013), and more than one-half reported living in households with incomes of $20,000 a year or less. Many are also working full-time (Love & Valdes, 2012).

For the purposes of this study, successful students[6] are defined as students who had graduated with an A.A. or associate degree transfer (A.A.T), and had transferred or attempted to transfer to a B.A. program in 2012, or students who would be attempting to transfer or graduate in 2013. Stalled students are defined as those who either repeatedly failed general education courses, took classes that diverged from their educational plan, or continued to take classes at the community college level without initiating the transfer process. Students who did not sign up for classes during the spring or fall 2013 semesters are considered dis-enrolled.

This evaluation explores the issue of student success from two perspectives: from CDWFI staff who support students toward degree attainment and transfer-ready status, and from students themselves, representing different categories of student progress. Section One reports findings from focus groups with CDWFI staff, and Section Two reports findings from phone interviews with a sample of CDWFI students. Each section begins with a brief description of the study design, followed by findings. The discussion and recommendations consider the implications of both staff and student perspectives. Appendices A (CDWFI staff) and B (CDWFI students) provide more detailed descriptions of the findings, including student comments. Appendix C provides an expanded description of the study protocol, including demographic and employment information about CDWFI students who participated in this study and a comparison of interviewed students to the larger WFI population.

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[6] Throughout this report, the term student refers to CDWFI core members.

Section One: CDWFI Staff Perspectives

Study Design

In January 2013, researchers from CSCCE conducted a focus group with staff from each of the seven CDWFI projects, each lasting approximately two hours. Three to seven staff members participated in each focus group, for a total of 27 staff participants. (See Appendix C for characteristics of these focus group participants.)

The focus group protocol included a series of open-ended questions that began by asking CDWFI staff about the characteristics of students in each of the three student groups. CDWFI staff were asked about the prior academic preparation of different student groups; what factors contributed to their success or lack thereof (e.g., family support, work support, personal characteristics); the major obstacles that different student groups encountered while working toward degrees; the role of the CDWFI in student success; and how different student groups did or did not access CDWFI and community college support services. Focus group participants were also asked about whether and how the CDWFI's home institution and partner four-year universities supported or hampered their success. (See Appendix C for the focus group protocol.)

Findings

FINDING ONE:

Preparation for College, Academic Performance, and School Success Skills

Most CDWFI project staff agreed that almost all students, whether successful, stalled, or dis-enrolled, came to their A.A. degree programs academically under-prepared. All CDWFI staff, however, noted that successful students exhibited better school success skills, such as managing time efficiently and setting priorities, from the onset of college attendance; had a clearer sense of their academic and career goals; and participated more actively and consistently in CDWFI support structures and services.

Prior Academic Performance and Preparation

Prior performance in high school, as indicated by grade point averages (GPAs), was not considered by most focus group participants as an accurate predictor of how well a student would perform in an A.A. program. CDWFI staff, however, perceived successful students as having better time management, priority management, and organizational skills. Several staff members also thought that successful students, unlike their stalled or dis-enrolled counterparts, began their A.A. programs with a clearer sense of purpose.

Use of Academic and Other CDWFI Support

CDWFI staff also noted differences between more and less successful students in their approach to accessing and using services, with successful students being more willing to pursue services, such as student success courses or personal development courses. Most focus groups noted that successful students tended to take advantage of the full array of services

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offered, and in particular, attended events that had been specifically designed to build academic skills, child development knowledge, and a deeper understanding of career pathways. These included such services as content workshops (e.g., math), permit clinics, and tutoring. Successful students tended to use these support structures consistently throughout their academic career at the colleges. By contrast, most focus groups indicated that stalled and dis-enrolled students tended to use services initially, but that their attendance at events was sporadic and often tapered off.

Most focus groups also noted that successful students, both at the beginning of their course of study and consistently each semester, made use of advisors or counselors in order to develop or revise their educational plans for transferring to a four-year degree program or pursuing a chosen career track. Alternatively, some stalled and dis-enrolled students met only sporadically with advisors, and dis-enrolled students frequently missed advisement appointments, leaving themselves without an educational plan and/or reliant on academic guidance from peers that was not always correct.

FINDING TWO: CDWFI Services

Each CDWFI is required to provide core services, such as dedicated counseling and financial support, but individual CDWFI projects vary in when and how often these are structured for students, whether they are mandated, and how they are supplemented with other supports. Across CDWFIs, there was agreement that a constellation of services, including dedicated counseling and advising, mentoring, financial aid, facilitated peer support, and academic tutoring and workshops, were all necessary in order to meet the varied and complex needs of the CDWFI student population. Further, there was general agreement that students use certain services more often at the beginning or end of their academic careers, while others are used throughout, and that all CDWFI projects could use additional resources to expand or deepen some aspect of their programs.

Essential Services

Focus groups agreed on a certain constellation of services, including dedicated counseling and advising, mentoring, financial and facilitated peer support, and academic tutoring and workshops, that were necessary for meeting the varied and complex needs of the CDWFI student population.

Support services that facilitated student relationships with each other and with CDWFI and college staff were also seen as vital to helping students succeed. Most focus groups, for example, noted that student clubs and support networks gave students an opportunity to learn new teaching techniques, form study groups, and share ideas about balancing family and school life (e.g., sharing child care). Most focus groups also noted the importance of dedicated academic advisors to students, and to a slightly lesser extent, the importance of mentors. Because dedicated advisors and mentors have direct knowledge of early childhood career opportunities and career ladders, they were able to help students choose appropriate classes for meeting their career and educational goals. They also offered such tools as planning calendars and time management strategies.

Most focus groups recognized financial support as critical to student success. In some cases, the CDWFI project provided the majority of financial support; in others, the community college helped students to access other sources, such as government support. Several focus groups noted the importance of stipends and tuition waivers provided by CDWFI projects, as well as Board of Governors and Equal Opportunity Program grants offered through the community college. Several focus groups noted that book lending libraries helped students save on textbook expenses. One group noted the importance of financial aid workshops that helped students understand the full array of support available to them, and assisted them in filling out the necessary paperwork. Educational support offered through the CDWFI project and community colleges were also frequently mentioned as necessary for student success. For most focus groups, this included disability services, writing and language labs, student success classes, and technology labs.

Although they did so in different ways, all CDWFI projects worked with their institutions to provide access-based support for members that they agreed were important to student success. Such support

included priority class enrollment in Child Development and general education classes for CDWFI members; a CDWFI lead who could negotiate adding a class that was needed for transfer, if it had been cut; and flexible options including daytime, evening, weekend and online classes. Finally, two focus groups noted that program designs that linked community colleges with B.A. programs were critical to student success and willingness to transfer. These included holding B.A. classes on community college campuses, and negotiating priority enrollment for CDWFI students into impacted child development departments and classes.

Use of Services Over Time

Several focus groups agreed that students tended to use the following services at the beginning of the CDWFI project: counseling/advisement to develop educational plans, informational meetings to learn about CDWFI and community college services, and center tours that they felt helped students to develop a clearer vision of being a teacher.

Other services, according to focus group participants, tended to be used throughout a student's academic career, such as advisement to keep on track with one's educational plan, student clubs, the teacher/family resource room, support groups, book lending libraries, and an array of workshops. Most focus groups also indicated that students used mentoring consistently; other services tended to be accessed only when specifically needed, including tutoring (used later in a semester or near final exams), disability services, and writing classes.

As might be expected, services geared toward finding jobs or transferring, such as transfer workshops, permit clinics, and college tours, were more likely to be accessed toward the end of a student's matriculation through an associate degree program.

Priorities for Expansion

While nearly one-half of the focus groups wanted to see an expansion of educational services, such as dedicated tutoring, content workshops, and ways to identify students with learning disabilities more quickly, no consensus was reached on priorities. While no consensus was reached on which structural or programmatic design features were most important, recommendations included more cohort models,

smaller class sizes, technology labs open during non-traditional hours to support working students, and work coaches that could help students apply in their classrooms what they were learning in school.

FINDING THREE:
Navigating General Education Requirements

All CDWFI staff identified general education classes as gatekeepers to students' ability to remain in school, earn degrees, and/or achieve transfer status. Successful students, as well as their stalled and dis-enrolled peers, found math requirements particularly challenging, but the former were more realistic about their limitations, took advantage of tutoring services, and allocated the necessary study time to pass general education classes. Stalled and dis-enrolled students, by contrast, did not develop strategies for overcoming math and writing barriers. Certain institutional barriers also increased many students' difficulties with general education; these included insufficient spaces in classes, incorrect advisement, and policies that prevented students from retaking failed classes at their home college.

CDWFI staff unanimously identified general education classes, particularly math courses, as presenting challenges to all students, even those whom they considered successful. All CDWFI staff believed that difficulty with math resulted from insufficient preparation in high school, which in turn fueled a fear of being unable to meet college-level math requirements.

Developing and Pursuing a Strategy

Most CDWFI staff noted that successful students were more likely to meet with counselors and advisors regarding their general education classes, enlist support from tutors, take placement tests, allocate the necessary study time to pass classes, and tackle general education classes early on in their college careers, interspersing challenging classes such as math with less demanding ones.

CDWFI staff agreed that stalled and dis-enrolled students tended to lack an organized strategy for overcoming these barriers, and did not take advantage of advising services, leading them to wait too long to tackle the general education requirements for earning a degree or transfer. Less successful students also resisted placement tests to accurately assess their

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abilities, unless they were required to take them. As a result, many less successful students failed classes that were too advanced for them, and such frustration led some stalled students to dis-enroll.

Institutional Challenges

Institutional challenges related to general education classes, such as long waiting lists for classes and new mandates limiting the number of times a class could be repeated at a particular college, were noted by most focus groups as hampering students from making progress and transferring. In particular, most focus groups noted that poor advice from some counselors serving the whole college population (i.e., not those specifically designated and trained to work with CDWFI students) resulted in students taking either more courses than needed, or the wrong courses, to achieve their academic goals. As a result of such advisement, focus group participants reported that some students thought that they were ready to transfer, only to find out that needed to take additional general education classes they had not known about.

> FINDING FOUR:
>
> Navigating Work and School

All CDWFI staff agreed that low-paying jobs with inflexible schedules created additional stress for many students, and that successful students tended to work in more supportive environments that allowed them to take classes when needed, attend CDWFI-sponsored events, and even, in some ECE settings, receive help with school assignments. For many less successful students, in contrast, frustration with ECE jobs, and especially with pay, served as a disincentive to pursue their educational goals or to stay in the field. All CDWFI projects offered a variety of services to help students obtain jobs when they graduated, or find more supportive working environments while enrolled in school.

All CDWFI staff agreed that employment was an added stress for students, particularly if they were employed in unsupportive settings, defined as those that paid low wages, required inflexible work schedules, and did not encourage students to apply what they were learning in their classes. CDWFI staff noted that successful students tended to work in more supportive environments that allowed them to take classes

when needed and to attend CDWFI-sponsored events. Several focus groups noted that most students, even successful ones, earned inadequate compensation.

Most focus groups noted that less successful students working in ECE or other environments often had supervisors who did not place value on their educational pursuits. Thus, students were often required to work more hours in order to keep their jobs, and could not arrange work schedules to accommodate attending classes. Such inflexible schedules also limited the classes that students were able to take, and their ability to engage in CDWFI services, such as tutoring.

For less successful students, according to several CDWFI focus groups, low-paying and poor-quality ECE work settings served as a disincentive to education. They saw no economic reward in pursuing a four-year, or in some cases even a two-year, degree. Several CDWFI focus group staff noted poor compensation as helping motivate some dis-enrolled students to change fields in hopes of making a better wage.

All CDWFI projects offered a variety of services to help students obtain jobs when they graduated, or find more supportive working environments while enrolled in school. These services included center tours, job fairs, and portfolio and resume writing workshops. Most CDWFI focus groups noted that successful students were more likely to take advantage of these services.

In addition, two CDWFI focus groups noted the value of providing students with paid on-campus jobs in a child development center which allowed them to attend classes and CDWFI-sponsored events when needed, and to receive assistance with homework assignments from supervisors and seasoned teaching staff.

CDWFI staff also explored whether and how working in the ECE field contributed to student success or lack thereof. About one-half of the focus groups noted that those working in the ECE field had a head start on those not currently doing so, because they grasped what teaching in ECE entailed, were able to make connections between coursework and their work experiences, and understood how education could help them progress up the career ladder. Alternatively, those not working in the field were not always able to understand the value of course content,

and often lacked clarity about career pathways. Several focus groups noted that working in ECE did not guarantee a passion for the work or for more education. Those who were required to obtain a degree as a condition of their employment differed from those who pursued degrees of their own volition.

All CDWFI staff identified students' relationships with their families as playing a major role in how they navigated their educational careers. Successful students typically received emotional and daily living support from family members, which contributed to their school success. Some family members of less successful students were equivocal about the value of education and its impact on the family, and consequently offered less support. Most CDWFI projects emphasized the importance of providing services to help garner family support for students, such as family resource rooms and family social events. CDWFI staff recognized that multiple and sometime unpredictable factors, such as illness or job loss, played a powerful role in students' lives and shaped their academic journeys.

Family Support and Values

All CDWFI staff identified family support—emotional, practical, and financial—as influential to students' academic careers. Most CDWFI staff agreed that successful students entered their associate degree programs with more family encouragement and help with household operations such as child care, house cleaning, and transportation than did less successful students. Successful students, whether among the first generation in their families to attend college or not, appeared to have families who understood the length of the journey through school, and that the student might have to sacrifice other facets of life. Non-first-generation students, according to CDWFI staff, were often expected to succeed academically and often received guidance in how to navigate the college system.

Stalled students, on the other hand, often had families who were initially unsupportive of their going to school, and received little help from family members in juggling responsibilities at home. This made it difficult for them to dedicate as much time as they needed to their education. In recognition of these issues, most CDWFI projects provided services to help garner family support for students, such as family resource rooms and family social events. These experiences were viewed as helping some their families recognize and value the importance of education and its positive impact on the family in the future.

Exceptional Family Circumstances

All CDWFI staff noted that exceptionally challenging home lives were a key reason why students dropped out, even if they had good grades. Their challenges included such issues as family and personal health, pregnancy, deportation, job loss, extreme financial instability, and homelessness. As a result, some stalled students took classes during some but not all semesters, and others demonstrated a pattern of inconsistent GPAs. All CDWFI staff agreed that less successful students tended to face much more difficult life challenges than did successful students. Several CDWFI staff noted that less successful students were less likely to seek counseling, and either dropped out of school or attended inconsistently, while more successful students tended to seek advice from CDWFI staff on strategies to handle difficult situations, especially if they were considering dropping out.

All CDWFI staff identified finances as critical to student success. Some successful students benefited from family financial support that enabled them to persist in their studies, while others were particularly savvy about leveraging scholarships and financial aid resources to augment their low incomes and remain in school. Most staff viewed the lack of organization and follow-through as a reason why less successful students failed to access certain sources of financial support offered by the college or government. Some institutional financial aid requirements also contributed to students stalling in the A.A. programs, doing poorly in school, and/or failing to transfer.

All CDWFI focus group participants agreed that the ability to secure adequate financing for school played a major role in determining student success.

Family Financial Support

Three-quarters of CDWFI members lived in low-income households, with one-half living near or below the poverty level.[7] When families with greater financial resources were able to offer financial help, students were more likely to persist in their educational journeys. Such help included having a rent-free place to live, or tuition assistance from parents or spouses.

Financial Aid and Planning

All CDWFI staff agreed that successful students with limited means often took full advantage of available financial resources—for example, by seeking multiple sources of aid. Several CDWFI staff called such students "financially savvy," able to predict the amount of money they needed and to develop a plan to secure it. Most focus groups also agreed that more successful students were likely to seek out financial aid information, attend financial aid workshops, and complete all necessary paperwork in a timely fashion, in contrast to some stalled and dis-enrolled students.

Financial Aid Requirement Barriers

Almost all CDWFI staff noted that institutional financial aid requirements also contributed to students stalling in their A.A. program, failing to transfer, or doing poorly in school. Most focus groups noted, for example, that students who needed to work to maintain family financial stability often took fewer than 12 units, making them ineligible for some types of financial assistance, and slowing their progress if taking one or two classes was all they could afford. Others noted a lack of availability of classes needed for transfer, which prompted students to stray from their educational plan in order to maintain the 12 units needed for aid. One focus group noted that for some students, taking fewer classes while enrolled in more demanding general education classes was an important strategy for academic success. Financial aid requirements, however, limited students' ability to take fewer classes as a strategy, since this could mean losing a scholarship or grant. Such students, therefore, often continued to take a full course load, become overwhelmed, and failed classes or dropped out of school.

CDWFI staff noted that transferring was often delayed or avoided because of financial issues. Some students who had completed the necessary coursework did not apply for transfer, according to many CDWFI staff, because they had already depleted all of the available financial aid. Almost all focus groups noted that recent immigrant students needed to wait until their immigration status changed in order to qualify for aid at the B.A. level, and therefore continued to take classes at the A.A. level.

FINDING SEVEN:

Student Attitudes and Attributes, and Their Perceived Links to Degree Persistence and Accessing Services

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All CDWFI staff identified individual student attributes that they felt contributed to or hampered students' ability to accomplish their educational goals. CDWFI staff viewed successful students as dedicated, resourceful, and optimistic about themselves. In contrast, they felt that less successful students tended to lack motivation, procrastinated, avoided seeking or accepting help, and suffered from low self-esteem. CDWFI staff held differing opinions about how age influenced student success.

CDWFI staff tended to agree about the constellation of personal attributes that were typical of both successful and less successful students.

Student Attributes and Attitudes

CDWFI staff viewed successful students as dedicated and committed to their educational goals, and more resourceful, self-reflective, and open to accessing and participating in the CDWFI services. Successful students, in the opinion of CDWFI staff, also displayed optimism and confidence about dealing with setbacks or moving to the next stage of their education. In contrast, CDWFI staff described stalled or dis-enrolled students as wary of seeking help or utilizing services, and equivocal about their educational goals. They also described less successful students as having low self-esteem and lacking resilience. Focus groups were almost evenly split about whether or not younger students (25 years or younger) were more likely to achieve educational success.

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[7] From Los Angeles Universal Preschool Workforce Initiative: A Description of Community College Core Members, A Memo Based on WFI Student Application Data Prepared for First 5 LA by the Center for the Study of Child Care Employment, University of California, Berkeley.

CDWFI projects' relationships with their home institutions and four-year colleges and universities play an important role in their efforts to support student success. Strong collaborations among CDWFI projects and four-year institutions also helped to promote policies and services that aided students' transfer and integration into B.A. programs.

Supportive relationships with campus leaders and faculty helped many CDWFI projects to understand institutional structures, negotiate policies, manage grants, and find space, all of which contributed to their capacity to serve students effectively. Most CDWFI focus group participants spoke about the importance of buy-in from campus leadership and faculty to their program's success. College presidents and deans appreciated the funds associated with the program, and the strong gradu-ation rates among CDWFI students. Conversely, some CDWFI projects experienced an absence of such support, posing difficulties with processing grants, securing space, and addressing human resource issues when CDWFI staff were not regular college employees.

Positive relationships among CDWFI project staff and those at B.A.-granting institutions led to collaborations that aided the transfer process for CDWFI students. These included such practices and policies as four-year colleges' willingness to hold B.A. classes on community college campuses, in order to reduce student stress and transportation needs; honoring articulation agreements that helped students achieve B.A. degrees in a clearer, more efficient way; and ensuring that CDWFI members also received special status in being accepted into departments that were either not accepting new students, or placing grade restrictions on new students due to budget cuts. Most focus groups, in particular, reported having built strong relationships with key faculty at the California State Universities (CSUs), helping to ease students' transition from A.A. to B.A. programs.

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Section Two:
Student Perspectives

Study Design

From February through April 2013, researchers from CSCCE conducted individual interviews with students from each of the seven CDWFI projects who were considered successful, stalled and/or dis-enrolled. Six to twelve students from each CDWFI project participated in a phone interview lasting 45 to 60 minutes. Interviews were conducted with 61 students from the three student groups: 23 successful, 20 stalled, and 18 dis-enrolled. A detailed description of the recruitment and sampling procedure, and sample characteristics, is included in Appendix C.

Interview questions asked students about why they joined the CDWFI; what factors contributed to their success (e.g., family support, workplace support, or personal characteristics); the major obstacles encountered while working toward a degree; whether and how they had overcome obstacles; and which CDWFI and community college services they had accessed and found useful. Students were also queried about how they attempted to balance work, family and school life, how they managed the financial aspects of attending school; and the ways in which they thought they had grown personally or professionally as a result of their participation in the CDWFI. Successful and stalled students were also asked to reflect on what additional skills or resources they needed, or wished the CDWFI projects offered, that would assist them in their B.A. or A.A. degree program; dis-enrolled students were asked about what resources or support they would need in order to re-enroll in school. The interview concluded with questions about students' employment status and type of work, their tenure in the early childhood field, their own annual income, their age, their ethnic and linguistic backgrounds, and their family constellation. For a list of specific questions posed to students, see Appendix C.

Sample Description

CDWFI students interviewed for this study were primarily women of color between 25 and 49 years of age. As a group, they were linguistically diverse. Most students were single and lived in low-income households. Most of these students reported employment in early childhood settings, primarily center-based programs.

Table 1 provides a description of the interviewed students with respect to demographic characteristics, family constellation, employment status, and income. Among the 61 interviewed students, there were no differences in personal characteristics, employment, and income based on their student group (successful, stalled, or dis-enrolled). For more detail about the characteristics of interviewed students in each student group, and how they compare to the CDWFI member population, see Appendix C.

Table 1. Characteristics of Interviewed CDWFI Students

Characteristics	Percentage of students
Demographic characteristics (N=61)	
Gender	
Female	93.4%
Male	6.6%
Age	
Average age	35 years
20-24 years	21.3%
25-35 years	42.6%
36-49 years	21.3%
50 years or older	14.8%
Ethnicity	
Latino/Hispanic	49.2%
Caucasian	13.1%
Asian/Pacific Islander	9.8%
Black/African-American	9.8%
Other	16.4%
Declined to state	1.6%
Languages spoken fluently	
English and Spanish	49.2%
English only	26.2%
English and another language – not Spanish	*21.3%
English, Spanish and another language	*3.3%
Family characteristics (N=61)	
Marital status	
Single	55.7%
Living with spouse or domestic partner	31.1%
Divorced	11.5%
Decline to state	1.6%
At least one dependent child living at home	39.3%

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Table 1. Characteristics of Interviewed CDWFI Students (continued)

Characteristics	Percentage of students
Employment characteristics	
Employment status (N=61)	
Employed in ECE field	67.2%
Not employed	24.6%
Employed outside ECE field	6.6%
Decline to state	1.6%
ECE setting (N=41)	
Center-based	70.7%
Other ECE	17.1%
Family child care	12.2%
Center-based job role (N=29)	
Teacher or head teacher	37.9%
Teacher aide/assistant	34.5%
Other ECE job role	27.6%
Tenure for students working in center-based settings	
Mean years in ECE field (N=28)	7.3 years
Mean years with current employer (N=29)	3.7 years
Mean years in current job position (N=29)	3.4 years
Financial status	
Personal annual income (N=61)	
Less than $10,000	41.0%
$10,000 - $19,999	24.6%
$20,000 - $29,999	11.5%
$30,000 - $49,999	4.9%
$40,000 - $49,999	1.6%
Don't know/decline to state	16.4%
Center-based ECE earnings – mean hourly wages	
Other ECE job role (N=8)	$16.89 per hour
Teacher (N=10)	$13.72 per hour
Teacher aide/assistant (N=10)	$11.00 per hour

*No other individual language was identified as the primary language of more than 5% of interviewed students. Other language(s) included Armenian, Cantonese, Farsi, and Korean.

Findings

All student groups identified academic support, particularly educational counseling, as their main reason for joining the CDWFI and considered it invaluable to have access to someone knowledgeable about the courses they needed for transfer or graduation. Many students also mentioned CDWFI financial support as a reason for joining the CDWFI, and viewed it as essential to their school progress. While students may not have joined the CDWFI because of other services, such as tutoring or academic or career workshops, most students credited these services with helping them improve their academic skills and learn how to navigate the college environment. Mentoring and/ or peer support provided by CDWFI projects were widely used and valued. Additional services offered by some CDWFI projects, particularly lending libraries and one-stop resource centers, were well used and appreciated by students. A minority of students, most frequently those considered dis-enrolled, found it difficult to access some CDWFI services, typically due to scheduling conflicts and time constraints.

All CDWFI projects offer a constellation of services, including dedicated counseling/advising, mentoring, financial aid, facilitated peer support, and academic tutoring and workshops, but individual projects vary in how these services are structured. Each CDWFI project supplements these core services with others they deem helpful for meeting the varied and complex needs of their student population. In addition to asking students why they had joined the CDWFI, interviewers asked whether they had taken advantage of each of the core and specific services offered by their CDWFI project, and whether or not they had found them useful.

Academic Guidance: Counseling, Tutoring, and Educational Planning

Almost every student, regardless of status, mentioned counseling/advising and/or educational planning as particularly helpful and as the primary reason for joining the CDWFI project at their college. Although students didn't always distinguish between counseling and educational planning, they recognized the value of these services in helping them identify an educational path, learn to navigate the college systems, and find available support services and resources.

Many students attributed the success of this academic guidance to dedicated child development counselors. These sentiments stood in stark contrast to their assessment of the general counselors available to all students at the various colleges, whom many students felt had misled them about the specific courses needed for transfer or graduation. CDWFI counselors were also able to assist students with Child Development Permit applications, financial aid and other college-related forms.

Financial Assistance and Guidance

Second to counseling and educational planning, students identified financial support offered by the CDWFI as critical to their success and as a primary reason for joining the CDWFI. Students valued the specific financial support that CDWFI projects made available to them, and appreciated the flexibility in how they were able to use the resources (e.g., books, parking, tuition). Students also appreciated the information they received about other financial resources and assistance in the application process.

The minority of students who had not accessed financial support and services offered by the CDWFI typically were ineligible because of their citizenship status, or did not qualify for a specific type of financial support related to working with children. A few students mentioned not knowing about and/ or not having time to learn about what the CDWFIs offered. Most often, students who had not accessed CDWFI financial services while in school were those who had dis-enrolled.

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Mentoring and Peer Support

While they are structured in various ways, mentoring and peer support services were highly valued by the majority of students across student groups and CDWFI projects. In addition to relying on mentors and facilitated peer support groups for academic guidance, most students looked to mentors and peers for emotional support and assistance in handling the many demands in their lives. Students stressed the importance of being matched with a mentor or peers who had life situations similar to their own.

Tutoring, and Academic and Career Workshops

Students, particularly those who were considered successful or stalled, credited tutoring or academic or career workshops, with helping them improve their academic skills and learning how to navigate the college environment. They also described these services as providing tips on how to improve their work with children, and learn about opportunities in the child development field. Students appreciated various career-related workshops, including those that helped with getting Child Development Permits. Dis-enrolled students who had attended workshops found them helpful, although as a group they were less likely to have attended them, often due to scheduling conflicts.

Although students were often unsure about the role of the CDWFI in making tutoring services available (some were provided by the college itself), about one-half reported relying upon them for help with assignments for both general education and child development classes. Students generally seemed more comfortable with in-person versus online tutoring, and appreciated being able to drop in to ask questions about their homework. They particularly appreciated tutors who were familiar with child development and could help them interpret the meaning of what they were reading or being asked to learn.

CDWFI Project-Specific Services

About one-half of the interviewed students, across all groups, reported that they had attended a CDWFI orientation, which helped them become familiar with the array of core and special services and support provided by their campus CDWFI project. Among the most common services provided by CDWFI projects, in addition to the core services described above, were college tours, job fairs, permit clinics, lending libraries, and resource centers.

Students who had used CDWFI project-specific services typically found them helpful, and as with core services, issues of scheduling and general time constraints were the reasons most often cited by students who had not used them. Job fairs and college tours were particularly difficult for working students to access, since they commonly occurred during the work week. Permit clinics and first aid classes were also helpful to students. Students also appreciated that the attendant costs of the class and permits were typically covered by the CDWFI.

Some form of lending library was made available by most CDWFI projects, and students widely used and appreciated these. Access to a librarian was viewed as a particularly helpful feature of the lending library. Students also found centralized services to be especially convenient. One CDWFI created a "one-stop" teacher resource center that housed all CDWFI services, including the computer lab, the lending library, tutoring, and materials for class projects. Numerous students mentioned relying on both the computer lab and the library for access to a well-functioning Internet connection and printer. Students also mentioned the importance of access to the child development or family resource center, where they could gain experience volunteering with children, amassing the supervised hours necessary for their permit, and also conduct child observations.[8] When asked what additional services would help them succeed in school, students essentially asked for more of the same, especially tutors; their suggestions focused primarily on services being offered more often, for extended hours, at multiple sites, and on weekends to make them more accessible. The one exception was child care, which several students felt would help them with studying and with attending more CDWFI events.

[8] Students often could not distinguish between services offered by the CDWFI project or by the college, in part because many CDWFI projects served as the gateway or connector for students to such college services as computer labs, writing centers, and tutoring centers.

Two-thirds of all student groups reported that general education requirements prevented them from making steady progress toward their degrees. Students found math requirements for transfer or degree attainment the most daunting, and cited tutoring services, study groups, seeking out well-regarded professors and their own perseverance as their primary strategies for completing required math courses. Fewer students reported challenges related to literacy and writing. Additionally, students cited an inability to access general education classes and misguided counseling as institutional obstacles affecting their ability to fulfill general education requirements.

General education classes, such as math or English, are commonly identified by college faculty and administrators as gatekeepers to students' ability to remain in school, earn degrees, and/or achieve transfer status. Depending on their level of pre-college preparation, many students face remedial coursework or multiple classes before they can enroll in the classes they need for transfer or graduation. Students often postpone enrolling in prerequisite and required classes and/or fail to pass them, in some cases repeatedly.

Two-thirds (67 percent) of all student groups reported that general education classes had prevented them from making steady progress toward their degrees. Math requirements were most frequently identified as challenging, even for the many students who had successfully transferred. Many students recognized their math-related challenges as stemming from inadequate preparation in high school.

To overcome math-related challenges, students used a variety of strategies. Successful students, in particular, accessed math tutoring services and study groups. As all students recognized that the math instructor's approach influenced their ability to complete a course, several successful students mentioned considering faculty members' reputations when selecting their classes.

Students with less flexible work schedules, most typically those who had dis-enrolled from college, found it difficult to take advantage of tutoring or study groups because of scheduling conflicts, lack of time, and/or transportation issues. Students with inflexible work schedules or greater financial and family responsibilities outside of school found it less feasible to select courses based on a teacher's reputation.

English courses also posed a challenge to many students, particularly stemming from inadequate preparation related to writing and grammar, or because they were not native English speakers. To overcome these challenges, students accessed tutoring and English as a Second Language (ESL) services offered by all of the colleges. One CDWFI project offered an English class focused on child development topics, which students identified as particularly helpful because it allowed them to practice reading and writing in the context of their chosen major.

Institutional barriers and policies also increased many students' difficulties with general education. Most notably, students mentioned incorrect advisement, prior to enrollment in the CDWFI project, as a major obstacle. Another serious challenge was over-subscription of general education classes, since these were required of all community college students seeking to transfer to a four-year institution or complete an associate degree. Students also cited articulation issues between child development programs as an obstacle to success. Finally, policies that prevented students from retaking failed classes more than three times at their home college posed difficulty for some students.

Three-quarters of interviewed students were employed, most of them in early childhood settings. While most students identified encouragement and support from colleagues as contributing to their school success, nearly one-half of employed students identified work as an obstacle to their progress. Lack of support, inflexible schedules, and job demands were cited as the leading problems. Work-related challenges led some students with financial constraints to suspend their studies.

Attending college classes while employed is a necessity for many non-traditional students, such as those participating in the CDWFI. This can pose a particular challenge for older students who have greater family and financial responsibilities than those of traditional college age. Supportive employers, however, can play a positive role in helping working students

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achieve their educational goals. About four-fifths of the working students interviewed for this study, in similar proportions across all student groups, reported that their co-workers and/or supervisors had helped them succeed in school by offering advice and encouragement, assisting with school tasks, and providing flexibility in work hours and/or some form of financial assistance.

Students who received workplace support for their studies most commonly described encouragement and advice from colleagues and supervisors about the importance of school for their immediate and future job performance. Often, it was encouragement from others at work that had launched students into their educational pursuits, with supervisors emphasizing the importance of college studies to their career goals and co-workers serving as role models and cheerleaders. Students also mentioned help from co-workers with school assignments, in both general education and child development courses.

Many students cited flexible work schedules as enabling them to pursue their studies while employed. Most commonly, students mentioned policies that allowed them to craft their work schedules around their classes, or to reduce or rearrange their work hours to arrive at class on time, complete a project, study for a test, or attend CDWFI events.

A small proportion of students received some form of financial assistance from their workplace, such as money for books, help with tuition, or paid time off to visit other sites to learn about different teaching strategies. In a few cases, students mentioned receiving a bonus or raise each time they completed a certain number of units.

Dis-enrolled students were twice as likely to report work-related obstacles than those classified as stalled or successful. Many such students identified lack of support for their studies, and rigorous demands at work, as problems. Inflexible scheduling policies were a major obstacle to working while attending school, and these often forced students who needed to work full-time to withdraw from school for a semester or longer.

Nearly three-quarters of the students identified encouragement and practical support from family members as contributing to their progress in school. Nearly one-half of students, however, also identified family responsibilities, such as child care, household chores, and financial pressures as challenges to school success. Successful students were as likely as stalled and dis-enrolled students to mention such family challenges, but dis-enrolled students often mentioned a family crisis, such as illness, death, divorce, or job loss, as having led to the decision to suspend their studies.

Almost three-quarters of interviewed students across all student groups identified multiple ways in which their families supported them while they were attending school, including assistance with such daily chores as cooking, cleaning, laundry, and coordinating family schedules. Many students also spoke about emotional support from family members, in the form of encouragement to keep going when the challenge of school seemed overwhelming.

A sizeable number of students also relied on financial support from their families to cover school-related expenses such as gas, parking, books, or tuition. Some also received help with rent and living costs, which enabled them to work fewer hours and/or pursue a heavier academic load.

Despite such acknowledgment of support from family members, however, nearly one-half of students answered affirmatively when asked whether challenges with their family situation had prevented them from making steady progress toward their degrees. For many students with children living at home, it was challenging to find child care as well as time to study amidst a household of children, particularly when children needed the student's attention for their own homework or activities. Those who overcame these challenges typically enlisted families to help with child care, took weekend classes, and utilized online services to reduce their time away from home.

Those who were not able to secure help in meeting child care responsibilities were more apt to interrupt their schooling or relegate their schoolwork to the

bottom of the family priority list. For some students, other family responsibilities posed even greater obstacles than child care, particularly those involving a crisis or major life transition, such as a parent needing care, illness, or divorce. Dis-enrolled students often identified such family crises as tipping the delicate balance against allowing them to remain in school.

FINDING FIVE:
Managing the Financial Aspects of Going to School

Many nontraditional students, such as those participating the CDWFI, struggle with covering the cost of education. Most students were eligible for financial assistance for school costs from the government, their college, and/or the CDWFI project, and some received help with living or school expenses from their families. When financial assistance was insufficient or they were ineligible, students pursued other strategies, often reluctantly, such as increasing their work hours, limiting the number of courses they took, or suspending their schooling until they had amassed sufficient funds.

College costs are daunting for all students, particularly for low-income students who have families to support, as is the case for most students participating in the CDWFI projects. Two-thirds of the students interviewed for this study reported receiving financial support from their CDWFI project, and one-half reported financial aid from other sources as well. Three-fifths of dis-enrolled students reported that finances had played a role in their decision to leave school; many stalled students identified financial issues as slowing their academic progress; and more than three-quarters of successful students expressed concern about how they would finance their B.A. degrees. Low-paying jobs in the early childhood education field also contributed to students' financial challenges.

Students described multiple strategies for managing the financial aspects of going to school, including working longer hours or second jobs, receiving financial help from family members, accessing financial aid, limiting the number of classes each semester, and strict budgeting. For those who obtained it, financial aid was critical to being able to pursue their studies, even if grants and scholarships fell short of meeting all school-related costs.

Some students, especially non-U.S. citizens, were ineligible for financial scholarships, grants, and/or fee waivers. Loans were an option for students who did not qualify for other forms of financial aid, but many students worried about accumulating debt. Some students recounted problems involving financial aid ceilings or course load and grade requirements, and expressed regret that they had not received more financial guidance at the beginning of college, to help them understand restrictions on aid and to identify available options.

Several stalled students spoke of delaying transfer to a four-year institution because they did not have the money to pay for tuition. Similarly, many dis-enrolled students viewed the decision to leave school temporarily as a necessary consequence of their economic situation. Students accepted that their decisions to stop and start their studies or limit their course loads were financially necessary.

FINDING SIX:
Student Attitudes and Attributes, and Their Perceived Links to Degree Persistence and Accessing Services

The vast majority of students identified personal attributes and skills that they believed helped them to progress in school. Students considered successful or stalled identified persistence and motivation, good study skills, and commitment to the child development profession as contributors to their school success more frequently than did dis-enrolled students. Slightly more than one-half of interviewed students, across all student groups, also mentioned personal attributes and behaviors that they believed inhibited their progress, such as procrastination, an inability to prioritize, a lack of study skills, and low self-confidence. Most students provided examples of strategies they pursued to overcome these unhelpful behaviors, such as using a planner, participating in CDWFI study skills classes, and seeking encouragement and guidance from others.

Eighty-five percent of students, in similar proportions across student groups, mentioned personal attributes that had helped them to succeed in school. Fewer students (57%), in similar proportions across student groups, mentioned personal qualities that may have been obstacles to their progress or success in school.

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Not surprisingly, students who had transferred or graduated, or were about to, were three times more likely than students who had left school, and almost twice as likely as those considered stalled, to mention specific personal traits that had helped them to succeed in school. Many credited their own determination as a significant factor.

Some students described themselves as having performed well at school since childhood. In contrast, a number of successful students reported having become more motivated to succeed as they got older, often after repeated attempts to complete school. Their motivation was frequently linked to their families, whether from being the first family member to earn a college degree, or from wanting to serve as a role model to younger family members.

Students also described behaviors that contributed to their success, including "not being afraid to ask for help," being "well-organized, always on top of things," and "taking advantage of everything," such as scholarships, counseling, or other services offered by the CDWFI or their college. A sizeable number of students mentioned their commitment to the child development field, and their interest in young children as important contributors to their school success.

When students described personal characteristics and behaviors that were obstacles to school success, they mentioned lack of motivation, procrastination, and poor study skills, such as difficulty in prioritizing multiple tasks. Students identified strategies to overcome these unhelpful behaviors. Study skill classes appeared to help many students manage their time better and develop useful skills, such as making a daily and weekly plan to help them focus their attention. Learning how to take good notes was particularly important, especially for those for whom English was a second language, as this enabled them to ask others to explain idioms or words they did not immediately recognize. Mentors or instructors also helped many students to become more aware of their stalling behaviors, and also to recognize that these behaviors were not unique or unusual.

FINDING SEVEN:
Balancing Work, Family, and School

Students across student groups reported being overwhelmed by the competing demands of college, work, and family responsibilities. Support from family members, friends, colleagues, and CDWFI projects played a critical role in helping students manage these multiple claims on their time and energy. Students also spoke of coping strategies, and help from CDWFI personnel and services, that enabled them to make steady progress toward their educational goals. A sizeable proportion of students considered stalled or dis-enrolled had done so intentionally in order to preserve their well-being, resolve untenable conflicts, or fulfill work or family obligations.

In light of rising educational costs, the luxury of attending college without financial or familial obligations is almost unheard of among today's student population. Students, therefore, recognize that the ability to balance school demands with work and family responsibilities is necessary for school success, and students discussed proactive strategies for acclimating to school life and handling stress. Students also spoke of learning to recognize what they could and could not handle, and to make necessary, often difficult, adjustments or choices. For some, this meant limiting their course loads and taking a longer time to transfer. Others chose to postpone their studies because of financial or family circumstances.

For most, being a student meant foregoing social activities and missing family events. Many students, however, recognized the time-limited nature of attending school, and found comfort in recognizing they would not have to juggle so much indefinitely.

Many students, across all student groups, described participating in the CDWFI as a transformative personal and professional experience, leading them to view themselves and their futures more positively. In addition to helping them make progress toward their educational goals, students described personal changes stemming from participating in the CDWFI, such as increased feelings of self-confidence and responsibility, improved communication and organizational skills, and a new sense of professional pride and ability. Most students expressed the intention to continue their education beyond the community college—in the overwhelming majority of cases, in early childhood studies. Notably, four-fifths of students designated as stalled were satisfied with the progress they were making toward their degrees, and nearly 90 percent of dis-enrolled students reported intending to return to their studies.

It is commonly understood that education has the potential to awaken students not only to new information, but also to new possibilities. Such appears to have been the case for many students participating in the CDWFI projects. Students were eager to respond when asked about the ways in which they thought they had grown personally and professionally as a result of the CDWFI projects. Several mentioned how important it was to be supported and welcomed into an educational community. A number of students focused on positive emotional shifts in themselves that they attributed to the CDWFI projects.

Students also spoke of learning time management and organizational skills through the CDWFI projects—skills that were helpful not only in school

but also in their family and work lives. Students described "opening up," being "better at asking questions," "knowing how to be interviewed by a supervisor for a job," and "being more comfortable talking with a wide range of people," as a result of their CDWFI experience.

Better communication skills, in combination with newly acquired knowledge about child development, changed many students' attitudes and behaviors at work. They spoke of better relationships with children as a result of learning classroom management strategies, as well as better relationships with children's parents. Several students mentioned how the CDWFI had helped them to become involved in projects in their communities, to look for better early childhood jobs, or to clarify their career goals.

Nine out of ten successful students reported they planned to earn a B.A. degree, with more than three-quarters planning to major in early childhood. Four-fifths of stalled students declared themselves satisfied with their progress toward transfer or graduation. About three-quarters believed they were following the educational plan they had outlined with CDWFI personnel, and considered themselves able to complete their courses successfully. Most of them also planned to continue to major in early childhood studies. Almost all students who were dis-enrolled considered themselves on hiatus, rather than dropped out of school or finished with it permanently. Eighty-nine percent planned to re-enter school in the future, and all but one-quarter of these planned on majoring in early childhood. Notably, nearly three-quarters of the dis-enrolled students had not consulted with CDWFI personnel before deciding to suspend their studies, and beyond an expressed desire to return, few offered specific time frames for re-entry, or suggested additional support services that would enable them to return to or remain in school.

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Section Three:
Discussion and Recommendations

Discussion

To create a pipeline of degreed early childhood education (ECE) practitioners who are prepared to meet the needs of Los Angeles' diverse young child population, Los Angeles Universal Preschool (LAUP), with support from First 5 LA, established the Child Development Workforce Initiative (CDWFI).[9] Currently operating at seven community colleges in Los Angeles County, the CDWFI will expand to three new colleges[10] in 2013-14. To determine how best to direct resources to established and new CDWFI projects, this evaluation sought to identify which support services were most helpful to different groups of students. Specifically, the evaluation was designed to identify how students who appeared to be struggling to meet their educational goals might be better served.

To explore these issues, the perspectives of both CDWFI staff and students were examined. A striking finding that emerged from this investigation is the parallel perspectives of CDWFI staff and students with respect to the challenges students face and the success of the CDWFI core services in helping the students overcome these challenges to achieve their educational goals. Another finding, however, points to the divergence of staff and student perspectives with respect to why students did not participate in all available services, and how they assess students' progress. Both the alignment and divergence of CDWFI staff and student perspectives are discussed below, as well as their implications for program design.

CDWFI Services

CDWFI project designs reflect the extant evidence and professional wisdom regarding services that promote educational success among community college students, particularly those considered nontraditional. They reflect a deep understanding of the academic, personal, financial, and workplace challenges that students face, including a recognition that multiple and often unpredictable factors, such as illness or job loss, play a powerful role in shaping students' academic journeys. The core services offered by the CDWFIs (dedicated counseling and advising, financial aid, mentoring and facilitated peer support, and academic tutoring and workshops) have been identified in the research literature as contributing to student retention, progress, and in some cases, degree completion and transfer (Dukakis, Bellm, Seer, & Lee, 2007). For example, sufficient financial assistance is among the strongest factors likely to increase ECE student retention (Dukakis et al., 2007; Whitebook et al., 2008; Whitebook, Sakai, Kipnis, Bellm, & Almaraz, 2010) and working adult student success (McClenney, Marti, Nathan, & Adkins, 2007). Similarly, research examining the role of dedicated counselors/advisors for community college students indicates that students receiving enhanced advisement are more likely to return to school for the next two semesters, and to earn more credits, than their counterparts who have access only to traditional advisement (Scrivener & Coghlan, 2011).

From the perspective of the interviewed students, whether considered successful, stalled or dis-enrolled, the CDWFI projects were a success. This was particularly true for those students who

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[9] The CDWFI project is one of the many partners of the Los Angeles County Early Care and Education Workforce Consortium, managed by LAUP and funded by First 5 LA. http://laup.net/early-care-education-workforce.aspx

[10] The new CDWDFI projects will operate at Antelope Valley College, Southwest College and Pasadena City College.

had started their college journeys before the CDWFI project was established, and had struggled with taking the courses needed for graduation and financing their education. Overall, most students considered the menu of supports and services provided by the CDWFI projects to be well aligned with their needs and interests, and judged them to be of high quality and extremely helpful to their college careers. In addition, almost all students considered their CDWFI experience to be personally and professionally transformative. They shared how their self-confidence and communication skills had improved, and how they had obtained a great sense of efficacy and commitment in their work with children. Despite the long and often arduous roads that most interviewed students had traveled, they remained committed to their educational journeys and enthusiastic about the field of early childhood education.

Both CDWFI staff and students, when asked what additional forms of support would be helpful, talked about an expansion of existing support, such as extending available hours and locations, rather than proposing new services or supports. The one exception was assistance with child care expenses and services, which several students felt would help them with studying and attending more CDWFI events.

CDWFI staff and students' perceptions diverged when they were asked about the actual use of services. CDWFI staff expressed concerns about stalled and dis-enrolled students who had not used certain services often, or at all. CDWFI staff tended to attribute lack of participation to student characteristics, such as a lack of direction or poor organizational and time management skills.[11] In a small minority of cases, lack of participation stemmed from students not knowing the full range of services available to them, but most students reported they did not use particular services due to competing demands on their time and energy. This was particularly true for those considered dis-enrolled. For example, some students worked off campus in jobs with inflexible hours, and could not rearrange their schedules to attend CDWFI events, or return to campus to access tutoring during the hours it was offered.

Definition of Student Success

These different understandings of why some students did not access services reflect a greater gap between how students and staff define school success. Implicit in the CDWFI staff perspective were expectations about the pace at which students should follow their educational plans. CDWFI personnel and others in the colleges may view students classified as stalled as moving too slowly toward their stated goals, but many of the students so classified did not share this view. They assessed their progress as realistic and appropriate to their life situations. Similarly, disenrolled students often viewed the decision to leave school as both a temporary and a rational response to their financial and/or family situations.

Notably, students, perhaps more so than CDWFI staff, also recognized that some situations they faced were beyond the reach of CDWFI services and support. Both stalled and dis-enrolled students reported that they had participated in CDWFI support services whenever possible, but that events beyond their control, rather than a lack of services or direction, were the major factor in determining the pace of their academic journeys. Despite the support and services provided by CDWFI and by family and friends, prioritizing work or family was, for some, the best option for balancing multiple responsibilities, even when it meant reducing one's school load or putting studies on hold. Based on the student interviews, the presence or absence of familial, financial or health crises, rather than demographic characteristics, personal motivation or school skills, emerged as the most telling differences among those categorized as successful, stalled or dis-enrolled.[12]

Thus, in seeking to enhance student support, the issue facing CDWFI projects is less one of revamping what they currently provide by redesigning or adding

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[11] It is possible that classifying students into three groups, and subsequently asking questions about the students who comprise those groups, biased staff responses to questions about the characteristics of students in those groups.

[12] In general, we found no indication of differences between interviewed students and all core CDWFI members along the following key characteristics: gender, age, English fluency, and personal income. Students sampled for the interview (49 percent) were somewhat less likely to be Latino/Hispanic than the total CDWFI population (62 percent). Two-thirds of students interviewed for this study (67 percent) reported that they were employed in early care and education, compared to 37 percent in the total CDWFI population. This difference reflects an intentional sample recruitment strategy, as the study was designed to include at least one student working in early care and education in all student groups (successful, stalled, and dis-enrolled) for each of the seven CDWFI projects. Additionally, differences in work-related variables between the two groups should be interpreted with caution, as student employment status appears to be unstable. When CSCCE made recruitment calls, a number of students reported that they were working, although their student application data suggested that they were not.

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services, than one of making decisions about membership and who has access to the full complement of services offered. Should the CDWFI programs restrict membership to students who show greater likelihood of progressing at a steady pace? Should the CDWFI establish two membership levels, with different expectations and supports, based on a more realistic assessment of what different students can confidently accomplish? Certain adjustments to CDWFI services and to home institutions' policies may boost students' utilization of services and their likelihood of success (see recommendations below). But fundamentally, the CDWFI projects can only be reasonably expected to help with some of the multiple challenges facing students who enter college academically under-prepared, must work to support themselves and/or a family, and typically earn very low incomes. In particular, in the absence of better academic preparation in high school, students attending community colleges will continue to face difficulties in completing degrees or transferring in a timely fashion.

Recommendations

The CDWFI projects and their home institutions might consider the following recommendations:

1. *Services:*

    Core CDWFI services—dedicated counseling and advising, financial aid, mentoring and facilitated peer support, and academic tutoring and workshops—are well-utilized and highly valued by students, and these should be continued in order to help students meet their educational goals. To the extent possible, all core and supplemental services should be offered at multiple times for students in easily accessed locations. Services available only during the day, such as college tours and job fairs, may need some re-design to accommodate the varied work and school lives of CDWFI students. To ensure better participation in services, all new and returning members should be required to attend a CDWFI orientation to become familiar with the full array of available support. Resources permitting, assistance with students' child care costs should be considered.

2. *Expectations for membership:*

    The CDWFI project should revisit the definition of successful student progress, and develop a process for CDWFI staff and student applicants to jointly assess whether students' financial, employment and familial situations will allow them to meet project expectations during a given semester. Criteria for ongoing membership should include a session with a CDWFI staff member (counselor, advisor or mentor) to re-assess the student's capacity to continue to meet program expectations, and to identify available services that may enhance success.

3. *Relationship with the ECE community:*

    CDWFI projects could assist students who work in ECE settings by providing information to current and potential employers that familiarizes them with the CDWFI project and the potential benefits to their workplace as staff gain additional education. CDWFI projects should forge intentional partnerships with ECE employers who already understand the importance of education and are willing to accommodate students' schedules, offer encouragement and assistance with their studies, and create a supportive adult learning environment where students can apply what they are learning.

4. *Publicizing CDWFI and joining with other stake-holders:*

    CDWFI programs are an importantmodel for colleges, serving both ECE and other nontraditional students, and efforts should be made to share information about promising practices and lessons learned and to engage with others to ensure that higher education institutions implement policies that help, rather than undermine, nontraditional students. Examples include mandating placement assessment for all students, regardless of course load, to guide them to classes appropriate for their skill level; reviewing criteria for priority status for general education courses; promoting financial aid options, such as AB540, that can assist students regardless of immigration status; and developing financial aid options for students who attend less than part-time.

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CDWFI projects can hone their already impressive track records in helping ECE students advance their education by working closely with other stakeholders seeking to improve high school education, improve ECE and other low-wage jobs. Hopefully they will serve as a model for other institutions of higher education striving to meet the needs of their many non-traditional college students.

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Appendix A:
CDWFI Staff Perspectives on Community College Students' Educational Success

Study Design

In January 2013, researchers from CSCCE conducted focus groups with staff from each of the seven CDWFI projects. Each focus group lasted approximately two hours. Depending on staffing structure and size, three to seven staff members participated in each group. In total, 27 CDWFI staff from the seven CDWFI projects participated in a focus group; as described in Appendix C, they represented a variety of job roles, demographic and educational backgrounds, and levels of experience in the ECE field.

The focus group protocol included a series of open-ended questions that began by asking CDWFI staff about the characteristics of students in three different groups: those considered successful in obtaining or close to obtaining an A.A. or A.A.T.[13] degree; those who had stalled in their progress; and those who had interrupted or discontinued their studies ("dis-enrolled"). Focus group questions asked CDWFI staff about the prior academic preparation of different student groups; what factors contributed to their success or lack thereof (e.g., family support, work support, personal characteristics); the major obstacles that different student groups encountered while working toward their degrees; the role of the CDWFI in student success; and how different student groups did or did not access CDWFI and community college support services. Focus group questions also queried participants about whether and how the CDWFI's home institution and partner four-year universities supported or hampered their success. (For more detail on the questions posed, see Appendix C.)

For ease of reading, we use the term "focus groups" or "CDWFI project staff" to delineate when all participants in a focus group agreed on a topic. We use the term "a CDWFI staff member" to distinguish when a topic was raised by one member of the focus group.

Findings

> **FINDING ONE:**
>
> Preparation for College, Academic Performance, and School Success Skills

Most CDWFI project staff agreed that almost all students, whether successful, stalled, or dis-enrolled, came to their A.A. degree programs academically under-prepared. All CDWFI staff, however, noted that successful students exhibited better school success skills, such as managing time efficiently and setting priorities, from the onset of college attendance; had a clearer sense of their academic and career goals; and participated more actively and consistently in CDWFI support structures and services.

Prior Academic Performance

Most CDWFI project staff indicated that almost all students came to their A.A. degree programs academically under-prepared. Prior performance in high school, as indicated by grade point averages (GPAs), was not considered by most CDWFI staff as an accurate predictor of how well a student would perform in an A.A. program. Some CDWFI staff noted, however, that successful students from the onset of their college

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[13] The A.A.T. (associate degree transfer) indicates that the student has completed the necessary courses to transfer to a four-year California State University. The A.A. degree does not indicate transfer-ready status.

studies exhibited a better command of English, and communicated their ideas more effectively, than stalled or dis-enrolled students. Some focus groups also noted that less successful students typically entered their A.A. degree programs with fewer technology skills, had lower placement test scores, and/or were more likely to have identified learning disabilities.

School Success Skills

All CDWFI project staff agreed that successful students, from the onset of their college studies, appeared to be better prepared for school success and for juggling multiple priorities in their lives. CDWFI staff perceived successful students as having better time management, priority management, and organizational skills. Several CDWFI staff also thought that successful students, unlike their stalled or dis-enrolled counterparts, began their A.A. programs with a better-honed sense of purpose. This included clarity in educational and career goals, and knowing the steps they needed to follow in order to earn their degrees or to become eligible for transfer to a four-year university.

Use of Academic and Other CDWFI Support

CDWFI staff also noted differences among more and less successful students in their approach to accessing and using services, with successful students being more willing to pursue services to help them build skills related to school achievement. Respondents mentioned that successful students, for example, were willing to address gaps in their preparation, and sought help quickly. Some CDWFI staff noted that successful students were more likely to take their college's student success or personal development courses in order to hone their study, note-taking, and time management skills. The majority of CDWFI project staff shared impressions that when stalled students were required to take student success or personal development courses, their academic skills improved, even though some remained unengaged with the content.

Differences also emerged in the type of CDWFI-sponsored functions that members of different student groups attended. The majority of focus groups noted that successful students tended to take advantage of the full array of services offered and, in particular, attended events that had been specifically designed to build academic skills, child development knowledge, and a deeper understanding of career pathways. These included such services as content workshops (such as math), permit clinics, and tutoring. Successful students tended to use these support structures consistently throughout their academic careers at the colleges.

By contrast, the majority of focus groups indicated that stalled and dis-enrolled students tended to use services initially, but that their attendance at events was sporadic and often tapered off. Several focus groups mentioned that less successful students were often those who showed up at social events, but not at others that were geared toward building knowledge and skills or providing information about requirements for transfer.

The majority of CDWFI focus groups also noted that successful students, both at the beginning of their course of study and consistently each semester, made use of advisors or counselors in order to develop or revise their educational plans for transferring to a four-year degree program or pursuing a chosen career track. Two focus groups noted, however, that particularly savvy students were competent at enacting their plans more independently, after only an initial consultation with a counselor or advisor.

Alternatively, some stalled and dis-enrolled students met only sporadically with advisors, and dis-enrolled students frequently missed advisement appointments, leaving them without an educational plan and/or reliant on academic guidance from peers that was not always correct.

As a result of successful students' active and consistent participation in the CDWFI support structures, several focus groups noted that these students tended to have higher and more consistent GPAs than the stalled students, whose GPAs varied substantially from semester to semester, and from dis-enrolled students, whose GPAs tended to be lower.

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Each CDWFI is required to provide core services, such as dedicated counseling and financial support, but individual CDWFI projects vary in when and how often these are structured for students, whether they are mandated, and how they are supplemented with other supports. This flexibility allows each CDWFI to craft its program to meet the specific needs of its student population. Such variation, however, makes it difficult to establish consensus about when and how often services are used by students, which services are most beneficial, and which should be expanded. Still, across CDWFIs, there was agreement that a constellation of services, including dedicated counseling and advising, mentoring, financial aid, facilitated peer support, and academic tutoring and workshops, were all necessary in order to meet the varied and complex needs of the CDWFI student population. Further, there was general agreement that students use certain services more often at the beginning or end of their academic careers, while others are used throughout, and that all CDWFI projects could use additional resources to expand or deepen some aspect of their programs.

Each CDWFI is required to provide certain core services—including orientation, counseling or advising, educational planning, tutoring, academic and career workshops, mentoring, and financial support—but individual CDWFI projects vary in when these are offered to students, whether they are mandated, and how they are augmented with additional services. This flexibility allows each CDWFI to craft its program to meet the specific needs of the student population. Focus group participants were asked to discuss how often, and when, students used various services during their tenure in the program; which services CDWFI staff considered most beneficial; and which ones they would like to expand. Wide variation in responses to these questions, however, made consensus difficult to establish.

Use of Services Over Time

While it was difficult to draw conclusions about how students' use of services changed over time, all CDWFI staff agreed that students relied on some services in the beginning and end of their tenure at community colleges, and others throughout the course of their academic careers. Several focus groups agreed that students tended to use the following services at the beginning of the CDWFI project: counseling/advisement to develop educational plans, informational meetings to learn about CDWFI and community college services, and center tours that they felt helped students to develop a clearer vision of being a teacher.

Other services, according to CDWFI staff, tended to be used throughout a student's academic career, such as advisement to keep on track with one's educational plan, student clubs, teacher/family resource rooms, support groups, book lending libraries, and an array of workshops. Most focus groups also indicated that students used mentoring consistently; one group, however, noted that while students used mentoring initially, their contact with mentors tended to taper off as they became better able to navigate school. Other services tended to be accessed only when specifically needed, including tutoring (used later in a semester or near final exams), disability services, and writing classes.

As might be expected, services geared toward finding jobs or transferring, such as transfer workshops, permit clinics, and college tours, were more likely to be accessed toward the end of a student's matriculation through an associate degree program.

Essential Services

Focus groups agreed on a certain constellation of services, including dedicated counseling and advising, mentoring, financial and facilitated peer support, and academic tutoring and workshops, that were necessary for meeting the varied and complex needs of the CDWFI student population.

Support services that facilitated student relationships with each other and with CDWFI and college staff were seen as vital to helping students succeed. Most focus groups, for example, noted that student clubs and support networks gave students an opportunity to learn new teaching techniques, form study groups, and share ideas about balancing family and

school life (such as sharing child care). The majority of focus groups also noted the importance of dedicated academic advisors to students, and to a slightly lesser extent, the importance of mentors. Because dedicated advisors and mentors have direct knowledge of early childhood career opportunities and career ladders, they were able to help students choose appropriate classes for meeting their career and educational goals. They also offered such tools as planning calendars and time management strategies.

Most focus groups recognized financial support as critical to student success. In some cases, the CDWFI project provided the majority of financial support; in others, the community college helped students to access other sources, such as government support. Several focus groups noted the importance of stipends and tuition waivers provided by CDWFI projects, as well as Board of Governors and Equal Opportunity Program grants offered through the community college. One focus group noted the importance of financial aid workshops that helped students understand the full array of support available to them, and assisted them in filling out the necessary paperwork. Several focus groups noted that book lending libraries helped students save on textbook expenses.

Educational supports offered through the CDWFI projects and community colleges were also frequently mentioned as necessary for student success. For the majority of focus groups, these included disability services, writing and language labs, student success classes, and technology labs.

Although they did so in different ways, all CDWFI projects worked with their institutions to provide access-based supports for members that they agreed were important to student success. These included priority class enrollment in Child Development and general education classes for CDWFI members; a CDWFI lead who could negotiate adding a class that was needed for transfer, if it had been cut; and flexible options including daytime, evening, weekend and online classes. Two focus groups noted having created experiences to help certain sub-groups of students, such as a cohort that allowed family child care providers to take classes together, and general education cohorts that enrolled only child development students. Several focus groups mentioned the importance of small amounts of funding directed to such services.

Finally, two focus groups noted that programmatic designs that linked community colleges with B.A. programs were critical to student success and willingness to transfer. These included holding B.A. classes on community college campuses, and negotiating priority enrollment for CDWFI students into impacted child development departments and classes.

Priorities for Expansion

CDWFI staff were asked to discuss which services they would like to expand or add. There was a great deal of variation in these responses, reflecting the variation in program design among the seven CDWFI projects. At most, any given service was nominated by about one-third of the focus groups. This category included mental health services for students, additional dedicated advisors that students could access earlier in their academic careers, and support for contextualized general education classes. While nearly one-half of the focus groups wanted to see an expansion of educational services, such as dedicated tutoring, content workshops, and ways to identify students with learning disabilities more quickly, no consensus was reached on priorities.

Similarly, nearly one-half of CDWFI focus groups suggested expanding or improving specific programmatic design options or structural features of classes at the community colleges. While no consensus was reached on which structural features were most important, recommendations included more cohort models, smaller class sizes, technology labs open during nontraditional hours to support working students, and work coaches that could help students apply in their classrooms what they were learning in school. Two focus groups mentioned the need to expand financial support; one indicated a need for more scholarships and stipends; and another proposed more funds for book lending libraries, to reduce students' financial burden in buying textbooks.

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All CDWFI staff identified general education classes as gatekeepers to students' ability to remain in school, earn degrees, and/or achieve transfer status. Successful students, as well as their stalled and dis-enrolled peers, found math requirements particularly challenging, but the former were more realistic about their limitations, took advantage of tutoring services, and allocated the necessary study time to pass general education classes. Stalled and dis-enrolled students, by contrast, did not develop strategies for overcoming math and writing barriers. Certain institutional barriers also increased many students' difficulties with general education; these included insufficient spaces in classes, incorrect advisement, and policies that prevented students from retaking failed classes at their home college.

CDWFI project staff unanimously identified general education classes as gatekeepers to students' remaining in school, earning degrees, and/or achieving transfer status. Math courses, in particular, presented challenges to all students, even those whom CDWFI staff considered successful. In the opinion of all CDWFI staff, difficulty with math resulted from insufficient preparation in high school, which in turn fueled a fear of being unable to meet college-level math requirements.

Developing and Pursuing a Strategy

Several CDWFI focus groups explained that successful students, whom they identified as having better academic skills, were more realistic about their math and writing limitations, and consequently allocated the necessary study time to pass general education classes. These CDWFI staff also indicated that stalled and dis-enrolled students, by contrast, were not able to estimate or arrange sufficient study time to pass these classes.

The majority of CDWFI project staff also noted that successful students were more likely to meet with counselors and advisors regarding their general education classes, as with all their other studies. They were also more likely to take placement tests, and to tackle general education classes early on in their college careers, interspersing challenging classes such as math with less demanding ones.

CDWFI staff agreed that stalled and dis-enrolled students tended to lack an organized strategy for overcoming math and writing barriers, and did not take advantage of advising services, leading them to wait too long to tackle the general education requirements for earning a degree or transfer. In some instances, fear of math led students to take only lower-level general education math classes, resulting in their being able to earn only a terminal A.A. degree, not the transfer-ready A.A.T. that required higher-level courses.

Less successful students also resisted placement tests to accurately assess their abilities, unless they were required to take them. As a result, many less successful students failed classes that were too advanced for them, and such frustration led some stalled students to dis-enroll.

The majority of CDWFI focus groups noted that successful students also used tutoring services more readily than those who were less successful. One focus group suggested that successful students also networked with other students to find out which instructors were the best, and some students were even willing to take math classes at another institution, if it was known for having better math instructors.

Instructional Format

In addition, two focus groups noted that successful students adapted more easily to the format of general education classes, which could often be less personal than child development classes, with more cut-and-dried expectations. By contrast, differences in instructional formats between general education classes and child development classes appeared to prompt many stalled students to avoid taking general education classes, or to do poorly in them.

Institutional Challenges

Institutional challenges related to general education classes were noted by the majority of focus groups as hampering students from making progress and transferring. For example, two focus groups indicated that budget cuts caused long waiting lists for general education classes, which slowed students' progress in fulfilling their requirements. The majority of focus groups also noted poor advice from some counselors serving the whole college population (i.e., not those specifically designated and trained to work with CDWFI students), who often steered students toward terminal A.A. degrees that carry different

general education requirements than those required for transfer, resulting in students taking either more courses than needed, or the wrong courses, to achieve their academic goals. As a result of such advisement, focus group participants reported that some students thought that they were ready to transfer, only to find out that they needed to take additional general education classes they had not known about.

In addition, one-third of the CDWFI focus groups noted that new mandates on community colleges now prevent students from retaking a class in their home college district after failing it three times. Therefore, the fear of going to a new school, including time and travel costs involved, either kept students stalled or prompted them to drop out.

FINDING FOUR:

Navigating Work and School

All CDWFI staff agreed that low-paying jobs with inflexible schedules created additional stress for many students, and that successful students tended to work in more supportive environments that allowed them to take classes when needed, attend CDWFI-sponsored events, and even, in some ECE settings, receive help with school assignments. For many less successful students, in contrast, frustration with ECE jobs, and especially with pay, served as a disincentive to pursue their educational goals or to stay in the field. All CDWFI projects offered a variety of services to help students obtain jobs when they graduated, or find more supportive working environments while enrolled in school.

Based on student application data from Fall 2012, slightly more than one-third of students who were members in CDWFI reported working in the early childhood field, with many others, according to CDWFI staff, employed in non-ECE settings.[14] All CDWFI staff agreed that employment was an added stress for students, particularly if they were employed in unsupportive settings, whether in ECE or in an unrelated field. CDWFI staff defined unsupportive work settings as those that paid low wages, required inflexible work schedules, and did not encourage students to apply what they were learning in their classes. CDWFI staff noted that successful students tended to work in more supportive environments that allowed them to take classes when needed and to attend CDWFI-sponsored events. Several focus groups noted that most students, even successful ones, earned inadequate compensation.

The majority of focus groups noted that less successful students working in ECE environments often had schedules that changed frequently, or were required to work more hours in order to keep their jobs. Another focus group noted that many less successful students working outside the ECE field were in jobs where supervisors did not place value on their educational pursuits and were unwilling to arrange work schedules to accommodate attending classes. In such environments, students often felt forced to prioritize work above school. Such inflexible schedules also limited the classes that students were able to take, often resulting in having to withdraw from classes and being unable to engage in CDWFI services, such as tutoring, that could help them build their skills. Two CDWFI focus groups noted that many students who ultimately dis-enrolled did so because they had to work all day and attend classes at night, and simply became exhausted; something had to give, and typically, it was school.

For less successful students, according to several CDWFI focus groups, low-paying and poor-quality ECE work settings served as a disincentive to education. They saw no economic reward in pursuing a four-year, or in some cases even a two-year, degree. Several CDWFI focus group staff noted poor compensation as helping motivate some dis-enrolled students to change fields in hopes of making a better wage.

All CDWFI projects offered a variety of services to help students obtain jobs when they graduated, or find more supportive working environments while enrolled in school. Supports included center tours, job fairs, and portfolio and resume writing workshops. The majority of CDWFI focus groups noted that successful students were more likely to take advantage of these services. Several CDWFI staff reported that many successful students also frequently sought the support of CDWFI mentors and advisors to learn skills in dealing with unsupportive working conditions. One CDWFI project engaged students in role modeling conversations with work supervisors to advocate for more flexible schedules.

[14] From *Los Angeles Universal Preschool Child Development Workforce Initiative: A Description of Community College Core Members,* A Memo Based on CDWFI Student Application Data Prepared for First 5 LA by the Center for the Study of Child Care Employment, University of California, Berkeley

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In addition, two CDWFI focus groups noted the value of providing students with paid on-campus jobs in child development centers. Such jobs were structured to allow students to attend classes and CDWFI-sponsored events when needed, and students received support from supervisors and seasoned teaching staff with homework assignments.

CDWFI staff also explored whether and how working in the ECE field contributed to student success or lack thereof. About one-half of the focus groups noted that those working in the ECE field had a head start on those not currently doing so, because they grasped what teaching in ECE entailed and were able to make connections between coursework and their work experiences. In addition, students working in the field were described as motivated to progress up the career ladder, and conscious that education was the key to making this happen. Alternatively, those not working in the field were not always able to understand the value of course content, and sometimes had unrealistic views of the field. Those not in the field often lacked clarity about career pathways, assuming that a degree in child development was a stepping stone to working with older children, when it typically is not.

Several focus groups noted that working in ECE did not guarantee a passion for the work or for more education, and that those who were forced to enroll in school to retain their jobs differed from those who pursued degrees of their own volition. Two CDWFI focus groups noted that many students, regardless of age or experience, who were required to attend school lacked excitement about their courses, and about how to apply what they were learning to their jobs with children.

FINDING FIVE:

Family Circumstances, Support, and Values, as Related to School Success

All CDWFI staff identified students' relationships with their families as playing a major role in how they navigated their educational careers. Successful students typically received emotional and daily living support from family members, which contributed to their school success. Some family members of less successful students were equivocal about the value of education and its impact on the family, and consequently offered less support. Most CDWFI projects emphasized the importance of providing services to help garner family support for students, such as family resource rooms and family social events. CDWFI staff recognized that multiple and sometime unpredictable factors, such as illness or job loss, played a powerful role in students' lives that shaped their academic journeys.

Family Support and Values

All CDWFI focus group participants identified family support—emotional, practical, and financial—as influential to students' academic careers. Most CDWFI staff agreed that successful students entered their A.A. degree programs with more family support than did less successful students, allowing them to prioritize their studies. The majority of CDWFI focus groups agreed that successful students had a constellation of family members who provided moral support and encouragement, and were willing to contribute more actively to household operations such as child care, house cleaning, and transportation for their student to and from school and other activities.

Successful students varied in whether they were the first in their families to go to college. Among the first-generation students, family members understood the importance of education in leading to a better life for their children, and were willing to support them by assuming more household duties, thus helping the student carve out study time. Successful non-first-generation students, according to two CDWFI focus groups, were expected by their families to succeed academically. These students received guidance in how to navigate the college system, providing them with better understanding of where to find resources, and how to enroll in courses—tips that may have reduced student stress and contributed to greater degree persistence.

Successful students also had families who understood the length of the journey through school, and that the student might have to sacrifice other facets of life.

Stalled students, on the other hand, often had families who were initially unsupportive of their going to school. Approximately one-third of the CDWFI focus groups suggested that this meant students were unable to dedicate as much time as they needed to their education, because they received little help from family members in juggling family responsibilities. One CDWFI focus group noted that many stalled students had families that only provided help for a short time, not fully understanding the length of their children's or spouses' educational journeys. This often meant that students' families pressured them to stop at a two-year degree, rather than pursuing a B.A.

Almost one-third of the CDWFI focus groups mentioned cultural beliefs about the value of education for women as a factor in why certain students failed to make progress. In these cases, CDWFI staff noted cultural norms that women should care of all family responsibilities first and foremost, making education a lower priority.

In recognition of these issues, the majority of CDWFI projects provided services to help garner family support for students, such as family resource rooms and family social events. Approximately one-third of CDWFI focus groups noted that families of both successful and stalled students came to these events. During many social events, CDWFI staff helped families understand the length of the academic program by sharing the student's educational plan; such events helped some students receive more encouragement and support from family members. In turn, this helped move some stalled students to more successful status, as their families recognized and valued the importance of what the student was doing, and how it would impact the family in the future.

Family Circumstances

All CDWFI staff noted that exceptionally challenging home lives were a key reason why students dropped out, even if they had good grades. Their challenges included such issues as family and personal health, pregnancy, deportation, job loss, extreme financial instability, and homelessness. As a result, some stalled students took classes during some but not all semesters, and others demonstrated a pattern of inconsistent GPAs. All CDWFI staff agreed that less successful students tended to face much more difficult life challenges than did successful students. Several CDWFI staff noted that less successful students were less likely to seek out counseling, and either dropped out of school or attended inconsistently, while more successful students tended to seek advice from CDWFI staff on strategies to handle difficult situations, especially if they were considering dropping out. Such strategies included connections to community resources or mental health counseling.

The majority of CDWFI focus groups also noted that family structure played a role in whether students stalled or dropped out. Two CDWFI focus groups noted that students who became pregnant or were single mothers were more likely to drop out, feeling that they could not balance all these life demands, and hoping to return to school once their children were older. Child care and transportation difficulties, among other issues associated with living in poverty or near-poverty, were also thought to lessen students' chances of degree persistence. CDWFI staffs recognized that multiple and often unpredictable factors, such as illness or job loss, played a powerful role in shaping students' academic journeys, and that a number of these challenges were beyond the reach of CDWFI services and supports.

> FINDING SIX:
>
> Securing Financial Resources to Support Schooling

All CDWFI staff identified finances as critical to student success. Some successful students benefited from family financial support that enabled them to persist in their studies, while others were particularly savvy about leveraging scholarships and financial aid resources to augment their low incomes and remain in school. Most staff viewed the lack of organization and follow-through as a reason why less successful students failed to access certain sources of financial support offered by the college or government. Some institutional financial aid requirements also contributed to students stalling in the A.A. programs, doing poorly in school, and/or failing to transfer.

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All CDWFI focus group participants agreed that the ability to secure adequate financing for school played a major role in determining student success.

Family Financial Support

Three-quarters of CDWFI students lived in low-income households, with one-half living near or below the poverty level.[15] When families with greater financial resources were able to offer financial help, students were more likely to persist in their educational journeys. Such help included having a rent-free place to live, or tuition assistance from parents or spouses.

Financial Aid

All CDWFI project staff agreed that successful students with limited means often took full advantage of available financial resources—for example, by seeking multiple sources of aid. Several CDWFI staff called such students "financially savvy," able to predict the amount of money they needed and to develop a plan to secure it. Most focus groups also agreed that more successful students were likely to seek out financial aid information, attend financial aid workshops, and complete all necessary paperwork in a timely fashion. One focus group noted that this was especially true for students in dire financial need. As a result, several focus groups indicated that those who succeeded in securing financial support were more able to focus on coursework and move through a degree program.

Financial Accountability and Planning

Two focus groups suggested that accountability for finances played a role in student success, noting that if students paid for classes themselves or if their families were paying, they were more likely to stick with their studies. Those who received aid with no requirements, however—such as the expectation of maintaining a certain GPA—were more likely to withdraw from classes.

The majority of focus groups indicated that less successful students often did not take advantage of financial aid information and opportunities sponsored by the CDWFI project, frequently waiting until the last minute to learn about aid requirements, or

not learning about such opportunities at all. Less successful students, if they did apply for aid, often struggled to fill out applications, and often missed deadlines, which in some instances caused them to delay their studies for a semester.

Financial Aid Requirement Barriers

Almost all CDWFI staff noted that institutional financial aid requirements also contributed to students stalling in their A.A. programs, failing to transfer, or doing poorly in school. Most focus groups noted, for example, that students who needed to work to maintain family financial stability often took fewer than 12 units, making them ineligible for some types of financial assistance, and slowing their progress if taking one or two classes was all they could afford. Others noted a lack of availability of classes needed for transfer, which prompted students to stray from their educational plans in order to maintain the 12 units needed for aid. One focus group noted that for some students, taking fewer classes while enrolled in more demanding general education classes was an important strategy for academic success. Financial aid requirements, however, limited students' ability to take fewer classes as a strategy, since this could mean losing a scholarship or grant. Such students, therefore, often continued to take a full course load, became overwhelmed, and failed classes or dropped out of school.

CDWFI staff noted that transferring was often delayed or avoided because of financial issues. Some students who had completed the necessary coursework did not apply for transfer, according to many CDWFI staff, because they had already depleted all of the financial aid available to them by failing and repeating courses, or by taking unnecessary coursework. Almost all focus groups noted that recent immigrant students needed to wait until their immigration status changed in order to qualify for aid at the B.A. level, and therefore continued to take classes at the A.A. level.

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[15] From *Los Angeles Universal Preschool Child Development Workforce Initiative: A Description of Community College Core Members,* A Memo Based on CDWFI Student Application Data Prepared for First 5 LA by the Center for the Study of Child Care Employment, University of California, Berkeley.

All CDWFI staff identified individual student attributes that they felt contributed to or hampered students' ability to accomplish their educational goals. CDWFI staff viewed successful students as dedicated, resourceful, and optimistic about themselves. In contrast, they felt that less successful students tended to lack motivation, procrastinated, avoided seeking or accepting help, and suffered from low self-esteem. CDWFI staff held differing opinions about how age influenced student success.

All CDWFI staff identified a variety of individual student attributes as contributing to or hampering their ability to accomplish their educational goals. CDWFI staff tended to agree about the constellation of personal attributes that were typical of both successful and less successful students.

Motivation and Commitment

Successful students were viewed as dedicated and committed to their studies and degree choice, while less successful students tended to be equivocal about their education and goals and, consequently, appeared less motivated.

Successful students, as noted earlier, also tended to be more resourceful, self-reflective, and open to accessing and learning from the services made available to them through the CDWFI projects. In contrast, CDWFI staff described stalled or dis-enrolled students as wary of seeking help and tending to procrastinate in following suggestions or utilizing services. In most cases, unless otherwise noted, focus group participants mentioned the same characteristics for stalled and dis-enrolled students. Over one-third of the focus groups noted that less successful students, particularly those who dis-enrolled, were less dedicated to the program, did not place school as a priority, or lacked a clear sense of purpose, and as a result, failed to follow through with tasks and missed deadlines.

In some instances, such lack of motivation and dedication prompted students to drop out of school altogether. In the case of stalled students, fear, depen-dence, or avoidance of risk-taking often prevented them from initiating transfer to a B.A. program, per-haps because they did not feel comfortable in a larger university or were fearful of leaving the intimacy of the community college.

Outlook and Self-Esteem

Successful students, in the opinion of CDWFI staff, displayed optimism and confidence about deal-ing with setbacks or moving to the next stage of their education, while staff described less successful students as having low self-esteem and lacking resil-ience, which sometimes prevented them even from acknowledging their own abilities or embracing their successes.

Student Age

CDWFI staff described their perceptions of the role a student's age played in academic success and degree persistence. Of the CDWFI student members completing the fall 2012 CDWFI student application, about one-third were younger than 25, and two-thirds were 36 or older.[16] Focus groups were almost evenly split about whether or not younger students were more likely to achieve educational success.

Three CDWFI focus groups, for example, felt that younger students were more likely to be successful because they were more motivated and assertive, were clearer about their educational goals, and tended to take more initiative in asking questions and seeking out resources.

But four focus groups disagreed, saying that many younger students lacked the positive personal characteristics noted above, as well as certain skills associated with student success, such as time and priority management, efficient note-taking and study skills, the ability to delay gratification, and articula-tion of clear goals.

Similarly, focus groups were evenly split about whether or not older students (over 36 years of age) were more likely to succeed. Four focus groups noted that their older students were very persistent and motivated, intentional about returning to school, and clear in their career goals. Two focus groups noted that maturity and the timing by which older students came back to school enabled a clearer focus.

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[16] From Los Angeles Universal Preschool Workforce Initiative: A Description of Community College Core Members, A Memo Based on WFI Student Application Data Prepared for First 5 LA by the Center for the Study of Child Care Employment, University of California, Berkeley.

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Four focus groups, however, felt that many older students came to school academically under–prepared, particularly in the areas of technology, math, English, and writing skills, and that this appeared true whether they were second language learners or native speakers of English. Three focus groups noted that returning students who had not previously experienced academic success were often fearful and insufficiently prepared for general education classes, which led some to consider abandoning their studies.

CDWFI projects' relationships with their home institutions and four-year colleges and universities play an important role in their efforts to support student success. Supportive relationships with campus leaders and faculty helped many CDWFI projects to understand institutional structures, negotiate policies, manage grants, and find space, all of which contributed to their capacity to serve students effectively. Conversely, some CDWFI projects experienced an absence of such support, which posed barriers to smooth program operations. Strong collaborations among CDWFI projects and four-year institutions also helped to promote policies and services that aided students' transfer and integration into B.A. programs.

Most CDWFI focus groups spoke about the importance of buy-in from campus leadership and faculty to their program's success. College presidents and deans appreciated the funds associated with the program, and the strong graduation rates among CDWFI students. Campus leaders, in turn, have helped to build and strengthen several CDWFI projects by helping CDWFI staff negotiate policies, manage grants, and find space, enhancing their capacity to serve students. Conversely, some CDWFI projects experienced an absence of such support, posing difficulties with processing grants, securing space, and addressing human resource issues when CDWFI staff were not regular college employees.

Positive relationships between CDWFI project staff and the staff of B.A.-granting institutions led to collaborations that aided the transfer process for CDWFI students. These included such practices and policies as four-year colleges' willingness to hold B.A. classes on community college campuses, in order to reduce student stress and transportation needs; honoring articulation agreements that helped students achieve B.A. degrees in a clearer, more efficient way; and ensuring that CDWFI members also received special status in being accepted into departments that were either not accepting new students, or placing grade restrictions on new students as majors, due to budget cuts.

The majority of focus groups, in particular, reported having built strong relationships with key faculty at the California State Universities (CSUs), helping to ease students' transition from A.A. to B.A. programs. Two CDWFI projects, however, noted paying for their CDWFI mentors to support B.A. students when they were unable to persuade the CSUs to provide an equivalent service. Two focus groups also identified difficulties with private four-year college transfer schools, noting that while private colleges were more likely than CSUs to host classes on community college campuses, and to offer accelerated B.A. programs, they did not always honor articulation agreements, and did not provide such key supports as mentoring or advising. CDWFI staff reported that these policies caused some students to spend a longer time earning their degrees, and to face additional financial burdens.

Appendix B:
CDWFI Student Perspectives on Their Educational Success

Study Design

From February through April 2013, researchers from CSCCE conducted individual interviews with students from each of the seven CDWFI projects who were considered successful, stalled and/or dis-enrolled. Six to twelve students from each CDWFI project participated in a phone interview lasting 45 to 60 minutes. Interviews were conducted with 61 students from the three student groups: 23 successful, 20 stalled, and 18 dis-enrolled. A detailed description of the recruitment and sampling procedure is included in Appendix C.

The student interview protocol included a series of closed- and open-ended questions that began by asking students about their histories in the community college and the CDWFI project, and whether they had come to the community college knowing that they wanted to study child development. Interview questions then asked students why they had joined the CDWFI; what factors had contributed to their success (e.g., family support, workplace support, or personal characteristics); the major obstacles encountered while working toward their degrees, including the aforementioned factors in addition to general education classes; whether and how they had overcome obstacles; and which CDWFI and community college services they had accessed and found useful. Students were also queried about how they attempted to balance work, family and school life, how they managed the financial aspects of attending school; and the ways

they thought they had grown personally or professionally as a result of their participation in the CDWFI.

Successful and stalled students were also asked to reflect on what additional skills or resources they needed or wished the CDWFI projects offered to assist them in their B.A. or A.A. degree program; dis-enrolled students were asked about what resources or support they would need in order to re-enroll in school. The interview concluded with questions about student employment status and type of work, their tenure in the early childhood field, their own annual income, their age, their ethnic and linguistic backgrounds, and their family constellation. For a list of specific questions posed to students, see Appendix C.

Students interviewed for this study, similar to the overall population of CDWFI core members,[17] were primarily women of color between 25 and 49 years of age. As a group, they were linguistically diverse. Like their fellow CDWFI members, most interviewed students were single and lived in low-income households. Students interviewed did not differ from the CDWFI population with respect to gender, age, English fluency, or personal income. The CDWFI population as a whole, however, was composed of a higher percentage of Latinas (62.1. percent) than the sample of interviewed students (49.2 percent). Additionally, a higher proportion of students interviewed for this study reported that they were employed in early childhood settings while attending school, compared to the CDWFI population as a whole.[18] Most of these

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[17] A CDWFI core member is defined as someone who is working toward a degree and has already taken several child development classes. Core members have access to the full array of CDWFI services. Descriptions of the CDWFI population are drawn from data provided by 683 students who completed CDWFI member applications in the fall of 2013 (CSCCE, 2013). Demographic and workplace data comparing students interviewed for this study to the greater CDWFI population could not be statistically computed, because the information about the 61 interviewees comprising the sample for this study is embedded in the CDWFI population data base, and could not be excluded for analytical purposes. In addition, 70 percent of interviewed students and of the CDWFI population as a whole who work in ECE reported being employed in center-based jobs. Work-related data for interviewed students are reported for center-based employees only, due to the small number of students working in other early childhood settings.

[18] The sample recruitment strategy emphasized including students who were employed in early childhood settings from all student groups (successful, stalled and dis-enrolled), and all seven CDWFI projects. This may account for this difference. For further discussion, see the sample recruitment section of Appendix C.

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students reported employment in center-based programs. These students did not differ from the population of CDWFI members with respect to their tenure in the ECE field, with their current employers, or in their current positions. They also did not differ with respect to the average hours they worked per week, or average months they worked per year, in early childhood settings. More detailed information about the interviewed students is included in Appendix C.

Table 1B provides a description of interviewed students with respect to demographic characteristics, family constellation, employment status, and income. Among the 61 interviewed students, there were no differences in personal characteristics, employment, or income based on their student group (successful, stalled, or dis-enrolled). For more detail about the characteristics of interviewed students in each student group, see Appendix C.

Table 1B. Characteristics of Interviewed CDWFI Students

Characteristics	Percentage of students
Demographic characteristics (N=61)	
Gender	
Female	93.4%
Male	6.6%
Age	
Average age	35 years
20-24 years	21.3%
25-35 years	42.6%
36-49 years	21.3%
50 years or older	14.8%
Ethnicity	
Latino/Hispanic	49.2%
Caucasian	13.1%
Asian/Pacific Islander	9.8%
Black/African-American	9.8%
Other	16.4%
Declined to state	1.6%
Languages spoken fluently	
English and Spanish	49.2%
English only	26.2%
English and another language – not Spanish	*21.3%
English, Spanish and another language	*3.3%
Family characteristics (N=61)	
Marital status	
Single	55.7%
Living with spouse or domestic partner	31.1%
Divorced	11.5%
Declined to state	1.6%
At least one dependent child living at home	39.3%

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Characteristics	Percentage of students
Employment characteristics	
Employment status (N=61)	
Employed in ECE field	67.2%
Not employed	24.6%
Employed outside ECE field	6.6%
Declined to state	1.6%
ECE setting (N=41)	
Center-based	70.7%
Other ECE	17.1%
Family child care	12.2%
Center-based job role (N=29)	
Teacher or head teacher	37.9%
Teacher aide/assistant	34.5%
Other ECE job role	27.6%
Tenure for students working in center-based settings	
Mean years in ECE field (N=28)	7.3 years
Mean years with current employer (N=29)	3.7 years
Mean years in current job position (N=29)	3.4 years
Financial status	
Personal annual income (N=61)	
Less than $10,000	41.0%
$10,000 - $19,999	24.6%
$20,000 - $29,999	11.5%
$30,000 - $49,999	4.9%
$40,000 - $49,999	1.6%
Don't know/declined to state	16.4%
Center-based ECE earnings – mean hourly wages	
Other ECE job role (N=8)	$16.89 per hour
Teacher (N=10)	$13.72 per hour
Teacher aide/assistant (N=10)	$11.00 per hour

*No other individual language was identified as the primary language of more than 5% of interviewed students. Other language(s) included Armenian, Cantonese, Farsi, and Korean.

Findings

All student groups identified academic support, particularly educational counseling, as their main reason for joining the CDWFI and considered it invaluable to have access to someone knowledgeable about the courses they needed for transfer or graduation. Many students also mentioned CDWFI financial support as a reason for joining the CDWFI, and viewed it as essential to their school progress. While students may not have joined the CDWFI because of other services, such as tutoring or academic or career workshops, most students credited these services with helping them improve their academic skills and learn how to navigate the college environment. Mentoring and/or peer support provided by CDWFI projects were widely used and valued. Additional services offered by some CDWFI projects, particularly lending libraries and one-stop resource centers, were well used and appreciated by students. A minority of students, most frequently those considered dis-enrolled, found it difficult to access some CDWFI services, typically due to scheduling conflicts and time constraints.

All CDWFI projects offer a constellation of services, including dedicated counseling/advising, mentoring, financial aid, facilitated peer support, and academic tutoring and workshops, but individual projects vary in how these services are structured. Each CDWFI project supplements these core services with others they deem helpful for meeting the varied and complex needs of their student population. In addition to asking students why they had joined the CDWFI, interviewers asked whether they had taken advantage of each of the core and specific services offered by their CDWFI projects, and whether or not they had found them useful.

Why Students Join CDWFI

The vast majority of students across all student groups identified academic support as the primary reason for joining the CDWFI project at their college. Regardless of their age or work status, students mentioned counseling and educational planning most frequently, but most also mentioned multiple forms of academic support, including tutoring, mentoring, and workshops, as having drawn them to the CDWFI. In addition, they widely mentioned financial support.

A few students, mostly those considered successful and already working in the early childhood field, joined CDWFI because they thought it would be a good way to learn more about career opportunities:

> *What caught my interest were all the support systems, all the things that a student needs to have direction in school. I heard they help you get the classes you need, they get you priority registration, and there are special counselors who help you with your class schedule and your math and English.*

> *I appreciated that [name of CDWFI] was not only offering to pay for your books, but that they were making you see a counselor and made sure that you were working toward something.*

> *Our instructors let us know that they pay for a lot of things, like book gift cards, which was a big help. Half the reason that I couldn't take classes before was that I didn't have the money to afford the books. A lot of them are $100 each, so if you take two or three classes, it adds up.*

Many students described how they learned about the CDWFI, typically through a visit by CDWFI personnel to their classes or from fellow students and instructors who encouraged them to join. A number of students mentioned that the warm welcome they encountered at their initial CDWFI experience increased their interest in joining:

> *They're very kind. You feel you're almost in a family, and it reduces a lot of stress. I wasn't born here, and English is my second language, and this is my first time studying in an American institution. You feel welcomed, and it gives you more confidence.*

Academic Guidance: Counseling, Tutoring, and Educational Planning

Almost every student, regardless of status, mentioned counseling/advising and/or educational planning as particularly helpful. Although students didn't always distinguish between counseling and educational planning, they recognized the value of these services in helping them identify an educational path, learn to navigate the college systems, and find available supports and resources. "Without CDWFI, I would have been lost," said one success-

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ful student, echoing the sentiments of many who appreciated being assisted with identifying the necessary steps toward getting ready for transfer. One younger student noted:

> When you first go to college, you have an idea about what you want to do, but the counselor can narrow it down so you'll have a pathway. That way, you can reach your goal more quickly.

At least once a semester, students are expected or encouraged to see the CDWFI counselor. Students explained that access to a specific person who knew their situation helped them stay on track and informed about changes in school or permit requirements. "I wasn't just a number; she knew who I was," stated one successful student:

> She knew what was realistic for me: "Do not take math, because you're already taking two general education classes this semester. Let's take something that you'll just enjoy."

Many students mentioned the expertise of the dedicated child development counselors provided by the CDWFIs, "who knew specifically," in one student's words, "what you wanted to do, who you could talk to, and how to get there." Another added, "They had me take the right classes, and not waste time." These sentiments stood in stark contrast to their assessment of the general counselors available to all students at the various colleges, whom many students felt had misled them about the specific courses needed for transfer or graduation:

> Every time I went to meet with a counselor before the [name of CDWFI project], it was a different one, and everyone advised me differently. So it was like starting all over again each time. They said they knew child development, but it wasn't true.

> I was all ready to quit. I went to the counselor, and she told me to take this class. Then I went to another counselor, and she told me I didn't need that class. So I went to my instructor, and said, "So what should I do? " She said, "I'm glad you came to me." She told me about [name of CDWFI counselor], and got me connected with her not even two weeks later. [The counselor] helped me make a career plan, and I was able to follow it.

Because of their child development-specific knowledge, CDWFI counselors were also able to assist students with Child Development Permit applications, which are required for many early childhood jobs. Sometimes, students were unaware that they had completed the necessary courses for earning their permits:

> I saw the counselor, and she said, "Did you know that you've already taken the classes for your permit? All you need to do is fill out an application, and you can get your 12-course permit. You've actually been eligible for a long time." I hadn't done it because I didn't know. She simplified it for me, telling me what I had to do next.

Many students spoke of how counselors encouraged them to use computers in or near their offices to fill out financial aid and other forms, so that they felt assured of getting assistance if they ran into any problems.

Financial Assistance and Guidance

Second to counseling and educational planning, students identified financial support offered by the CDWFI as critical to their success. Students valued the specific financial support that CDWFI projects made available to them, and appreciated the flexibility in how they were able to use the resources, e.g., for books, parking, or tuition. Students also appreciated the information they received about other financial resources, such as the Educational Opportunity Program (EOP), designed to improve college access and retention for historically low-income and educationally disadvantaged students. Some students also found assistance in applying for and using resources particularly helpful:

> I make $800 per month, and my books as a full-time student were going to cost $600 or $700, so I couldn't pay for them because of my other bills. If I hadn't gotten those gift cards, I wouldn't have been able to stay in school, because I wouldn't have been able to buy the books.

> I don't have a computer, so when my instructor learned I was one of the lucky students to receive a scholarship, she said, "I think it would be a good idea for you to invest in a computer." I had no idea of what would be good, but she gave me information about where to buy one and what type I should buy.

The minority of students who had not accessed financial supports and services offered by the CDWFI typically were ineligible because of their citizenship status, or did not qualify for a specific type of financial support related to working with children. A few students mentioned not knowing about and/or not having time to learn about what the CDWFIs offered. Most often, students who had not accessed CDWFI financial services while in school were those who had dis-enrolled.

Mentoring and Peer Support

While they are structured in various ways, mentoring and peer support services were highly valued by the majority of students across student groups and CDWFI projects. In addition to relying on mentors and facilitated peer support groups for academic guidance, most students looked to mentors and peers for emotional support and assistance in handling the many demands in their lives, or as one student described them, "different and greater challenges than I had ever faced before."

When I find that I need to talk, or something is weighing on me and I'm overwhelmed, I can always call her. She's always there to listen, because I can email her and she will [respond] right away. If I need to see her, she'll set up a time and meet me at school.

For a while, I was feeling like I didn't want to go to school anymore—I was so overwhelmed by papers and issues at home. [My peers] were able to show me a reason to stay in school: "This is the outcome if you stay in school, this is the outcome if you don't." It was an eye-opener. They also showed me how my papers are supposed to be done.

Students found it encouraging to connect with mentors who had undergone similar challenges and had succeeded in earning degrees:

My mentor and I meet once a month in person, and we exchange texts or phone calls maybe two or three times a month. She talks to me about my journey here at [name of four-year institution], how it was for her, what I can do here, and people that will help me. And she makes sure that I'm keeping up with my course work. She's like a student counselor.

Peer support groups composed of students struggling with similar school, work, and family issues served to help bolster students' commitment to continuing on their educational paths:

All the people in my group were at the same level of education as I was, and you could talk about things that you experienced in school. And I'd realize, girls that are at [name of four-year institution] took the same math class seven times! So then my two times are nothing, and it's those stories that gave me the inspiration, hope, and motivation I needed. We would laugh, too, and it would lighten up our struggles. I would always go there thinking about my difficulties, and how there are women that have been there already.

The importance of being matched with a mentor or peers with whom students had life situations in common was captured by one student, who stopped connecting to her mentor because "she didn't have children, she's not my age, and so she didn't know what I was going through."

Tutoring, and Academic and Career Workshops

Students did not specifically join CDWFI because of tutoring or academic or career workshops, but most, particularly those who were considered successful or stalled, credited these services with helping them improve their academic skills and learn how to navigate the college environment. They also described these services as providing tips on how to improve their work with children, and opportunities in the child development field.

Although students were often unsure about the role of the CDWFI in making tutoring services available (some were provided by the college itself), about one-half reported relying upon them for help with assignments for both general education and child development classes. Students generally seemed more comfortable with in-person versus online tutoring, and appreciated being able to drop in to ask questions about their homework. They particularly appreciated tutors who were familiar with child development and could help them interpret the meaning of what they were reading or being asked to learn.

Workshops covered a variety of topics of interest, and students expressed appreciation of and satisfaction with the skills of the presenters and the topics

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covered. Dis-enrolled students who had attended workshops found them helpful, although as a group they were less likely to have attended them, often due to scheduling conflicts. Students appreciated various career-related workshops, including those that helped with getting Child Development Permits.

Students seemed particularly appreciative of workshops that informed them on how being a child development major translated to the world of work—whether it was how to search for jobs online, or hearing about jobs that former child development majors currently held:

> The ones that I went to were given by preschool teachers, and they were inspirational. They reminded me of why I wanted to be a teacher.

> We heard from different people who are actually in the field, who have a child development degree. I didn't know that you could major in child development, and later take some extra classes and become a speech pathologist. They also talked about being a special education teacher or resource teacher.

Workshops that focused on working directly with children provided teaching ideas that were applicable on the job, and helped those with limited or no experience with children to begin to see how what they were learning might be applied in the world:

> There were workshops on how to read to children, how to choose books. Others that I found helpful were how to redirect a child and offer positive guidance, or how to do art or math. I used these ideas with my brother and the babies I take care of.

Students also appreciated strictly academic workshops on such essay-writing topics as punctuation, grammar, and how to cite resources.

CDWFI Project-Specific Services

About one-half of the interviewed students, across all groups, reported that they had attended a CDWFI orientation, which helped them become familiar with the array of core and special services and support provided by their campus CDWFI project. Among the most common services provided by CDWFI projects, in addition to the core services described above, were college tours, job fairs, permit clinics, lending libraries, and resource centers.

Students who had used CDWFI project-specific services typically found them helpful, and as with core services, issues of scheduling and general time constraints were the reasons most often cited by students who had not used them. Job fairs and college tours were particularly difficult for working students to access, since they commonly occurred during the work week. Permit clinics and first aid classes were helpful to students who had not previously applied for a Child Development Permit or taken the health and safety classes required for their employment. Students also appreciated that the attendant costs of the class and permits were typically covered by the CDWFI.

Some form of lending library was made available by most CDWFI projects, and students widely used and appreciated these. Access to a librarian was viewed as a particularly helpful feature of the lending library.

Students found centralized services to be especially convenient. One CDWFI created a "one-stop" teacher resource center that housed all CDWFI services, including the computer lab, tutoring, the lending library, and materials for class projects. Students often could not distinguish between services offered by the CDWFI project or by the college, in part because many CDWFI projects served as the gateway or connector for students to such college services as computer labs, writing centers, and tutoring centers. Numerous students mentioned relying on both the computer lab and the library for access to a well-functioning Internet connection and printer. Students also mentioned the importance of access to the child development or family resource center, where they could gain experience volunteering with children, amassing the supervised hours necessary for their permit, and conduct child observations.

Overall, most students considered the menu of support services provided by the CDWFI projects to be well aligned with their needs and interests, and judged them to be of high quality and extremely helpful to their college careers. Students who reported having not used a particular service most often attributed this to competing demands on their time and energy, rather than the service itself. This was particularly true for those considered dis-enrolled. When asked what additional services would help them succeed in school, students essentially asked for more of the same, especially tutors; their suggestions focused primarily on services being offered more often, for extended hours, at multiple sites, and on

weekends to make them more accessible. The one exception was child care, which several students felt would help them with studying and with attending more CDWFI events. A minority of students would appear to benefit from more outreach about services, since they were unaware either of the full range of services available to them or how they might be useful.

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FINDING TWO:

Navigating General Education Requirements

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Two-thirds of all student groups reported that general education requirements prevented them from making steady progress toward their degrees. Students found math requirements for transfer or degree attainment the most daunting, and cited tutoring services, study groups, seeking out well-regarded professors, and their own perseverance as their primary strategies for completing required math courses. Fewer students reported challenges related to literacy and writing. Additionally, students cited an inability to access general education classes, as well as misguided counseling, as institutional obstacles affecting their ability to fulfill general education requirements.

General education classes, such as math or English, are commonly identified by college faculty and administrators as gatekeepers to students' ability to remain in school, earn degrees, and/or achieve transfer status. Depending on their level of pre-college preparation, many students face remedial coursework or multiple classes before they can enroll in the classes they need for transfer or graduation. Students often postpone enrolling in prerequisite and required classes and/or fail to pass them, in some cases repeatedly.

Two-thirds (67 percent) of successful students, as well as an equivalent percentage of their stalled and dis-enrolled peers, answered affirmatively when asked whether general education classes had prevented them from making steady progress toward their degrees. Math requirements were most frequently identified as challenging, even for many students who had successfully transferred, one of whom noted, "Math was the only class I couldn't do on my own." One stalled student commented, "I've passed every class, but math just seems to keep me down." A dis-enrolled student captured the experience of many by stating, "When I'm in a math class it seems like I've got it, but when I'm by myself, I get confused and lost." Many

students recognized their math-related challenges as stemming from inadequate preparation in high school. One stalled student lamented, "I tested so low on the math placement when I entered college right after high school, that I had to take four semesters of classes before I could get to the math that I needed to transfer."

To overcome math-related challenges, students used a variety of strategies. Successful students, in particular, accessed math tutoring services and study groups. Students with less flexible work schedules, most typically those who had dis-enrolled from college, found it difficult to take advantage of tutoring or study groups, whether because of scheduling conflicts, lack of time, or transportation issues:

> *The last time I took math was when I had a crazy, hectic work and school schedule. I wasn't able to get tutoring as much. I knew there were times when the teacher offered study groups, and I wasn't able to go all of them, so I can't even remember if I got a D or an F.*

Students who were classified as successful, stalled or dis-enrolled recognized that the math instructor's approach influenced their ability to complete a course successfully. One stalled student noted, "For me it takes longer to process certain things, and if I'm not getting it, I lose focus and interest." A dis-enrolled student commented, "They're good teachers, but they are on a schedule too, and need people to move along. But I am slow. If I don't get it, I'm lost." Another dis-enrolled student noted her relief in finding a math instructor suited to her learning needs: "He really takes time to show you step-by-step. Even if you are confused, he doesn't mind showing you a different way, because he understands that each person learns differently."

Several successful students mentioned considering faculty members' reputations when selecting their classes, seeking a slower-paced and more individualized approach:

> *My first professor just wrote on the board, this is how you do it, and only gave one example. That was really hard for me to get. The professor that gave me the A, actually did it step by step. She gave several examples, and didn't move on until most of us understood. If you still had a problem, she would let you stay after class and would help you figure it out.*

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Successful students referenced their own determination as playing a part in overcoming math-related barriers. One student, who had previously earned a C in math, repeated the course in order to raise her average, stating, "I just stuck with it until I knew I understood the concepts." For students with inflexible work schedules or greater financial and family responsibilities outside of school, it was less feasible to select courses based on a teacher's reputation, or to repeat a class to earn a higher grade. As one student who had dis-enrolled from school due to scheduling issues explained the difficulty of returning to campus for tutoring: "I didn't have a car, so I had to take the bus back and forth to campus if I took classes in the morning and evening. It was just too much."

English courses also posed a challenge to many students, particularly stemming from inadequate preparation related to writing and grammar, or because they were not native English speakers. To overcome these challenges, students accessed tutoring and English as a Second Language (ESL) services offered by all of the colleges. One CDWFI project offered an English class focused on child development topics, which students identified as particularly helpful, because it allowed them to practice reading and writing in the context of their chosen major.

Institutional barriers and policies also increased many students' difficulties with general education. Most notably, students mentioned incorrect advisement, prior to enrollment in the CDWFI project, as a major obstacle. Another serious challenge was oversubscription of general education classes, since these were required of all community college students seeking to transfer to a four-year institution or complete an associate degree. One student lamented, "Every single class either had a waiting list or wasn't working with my schedule." This was a particular problem for part-time students who did not have priority enrollment, or for those who delayed taking math placement tests or hadn't realized that placement tests from previous semesters had expired. In such cases, classes were often full by the time students received their placement test scores.

Overcrowding on California State University campuses and at community colleges proved to be an obstacle for some students, as did articulation issues among child development programs. As one student explained,

I switched my direction to another Cal State campus, Dominguez Hills, because of the impacted classes at CSU Long Beach. I wanted to go where I could get just as great an education, and get done. But it also meant I needed a different set of classes, and some that I had taken for Long Beach I no longer needed. One was a BA program in Child Development, and the other was a BS.

Policies that prevented students from retaking failed classes more than three times at their home college also posed difficulty for some students.

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FINDING THREE:

Employment and School Success

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Three-quarters of interviewed students were employed, most of them in early childhood settings. While most students identified encouragement and support from colleagues as contributing to their school success, nearly one-half of employed students identified work as an obstacle to their progress. Lack of support, inflexible schedules, and job demands were cited as the leading problems. Work-related challenges led some students with financial constraints to suspend their studies.

Attending college classes while employed is a necessity for most students, and this can pose a particular challenge for older students who have greater family and financial responsibilities than those of traditional college age. Supportive employers, however, can play a positive role in helping working students achieve their educational goals. About four-fifths of the working students interviewed for this study, in similar proportions across all student groups, reported that their co-workers and/or supervisors had helped them succeed in school by offering advice and encouragement, assisting with school tasks, and providing flexibility in work hours and/or some form of financial assistance. Half as many working students (approximately two-fifths), however, reported that work-related challenges had prevented them from making steady progress toward their degrees, due to scheduling inflexibility, lack of support, or job demands.

Students who received workplace support for their studies most commonly described encouragement and advice from colleagues and supervisors about the importance of school for their immediate and future

job performance. Often, it was encouragement from others at work that had launched students into their educational pursuits, with supervisors emphasizing the importance of college studies to their career goals and co-workers serving as role models and cheerleaders:

> *After I finished high school, it wasn't my intention or idea to go to college, to be honest, but my supervisor encouraged me, even pre-enrolled me for classes, took me on a field trip to the college, and helped me with the FAFSA.*

Students also mentioned help from co-workers with school supplies and assignments, whether related to general education or child development courses, by helping explain challenging material or allowing students to conduct course-assigned child observations.

A small proportion of students received some form of financial assistance from their workplaces, such as money for books, help with tuition, or paid time off to visit other sites to learn about different teaching strategies. In a few cases, students mentioned receiving a bonus or raise each time they completed a certain number of units.

Dis-enrolled students were twice as likely to report work-related obstacles than those who were still in school or who had earned their degrees or transferred to a four-year institution. Many such students identified lack of support for their studies, and rigorous demands at work, as problems.

Many students cited flexible work schedules as enabling them to pursue their studies while employed. Most commonly, students mentioned policies that allowed them to craft their work schedules around their classes, or to reduce or rearrange their work hours to arrive at class on time, complete a project, study for a test, or attend CDWFI events. But many other students identified inflexible scheduling policies as the major obstacle to working while attending school, and these often forced students who needed to work full-time to withdraw from school for a semester or longer:

> *They [employers] want everybody to continue their education. But in reality, I couldn't make it to my classes on time, because they were constantly demanding that I stay late. And they wouldn't work around my schedule, so I had to take classes from six to ten at night, which was just brutal. I couldn't stay awake, so part of why I left was my work schedule.*

> *It took me a while to get my A.A. because I had to drop some classes; I could not keep up with the heavy demands of school and work. I could only take two classes at a time, and sometimes not even that.*

In the absence of more evening and weekend classes and services, such students recognized that their employment and financial challenges were beyond the reach of CDWFI services and support. However reluctantly, they deemed the decision to leave school to be the best option for overcoming obstacles posed by work.

FINDING FOUR:
Family Circumstances and Support, and School Success

Nearly three-quarters of the students identified encouragement and practical support from family members as contributing to their progress in school. Nearly one-half of students, however, also identified family responsibilities, such as child care, household chores, and financial pressures as challenges to school success. Successful students were as likely as stalled and dis-enrolled students to mention such family challenges, but dis-enrolled students often mentioned a family crisis, such as illness, death, divorce, or job loss, as having led to the decision to suspend their studies.

Almost three-quarters of interviewed students across all student groups identified multiple ways in which their families supported them while they were attending school, including assistance with such daily chores as cooking, cleaning, laundry, and coordinating family schedules. Many students also spoke about emotional support from family members, in the form of encouragement to keep going when the challenge of school seemed overwhelming:

> *A lot of times I would get frustrated and I wanted to stop, and my children kept saying, "No, Mom, you're already in. You have to keep going."*

> *My husband says, "If you're frustrated, it's okay. You'll get through it. I am going to take the children with me. You study." Then he tests me before I go to sleep: "Let's go over what you're studying. Let's make sure you remember."*

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My parents wanted me to go to school. They couldn't provide me monetary support, but they were there emotionally. It was so important to them that I was educated.

A sizeable number of students also relied on financial support from their families to cover school-related expenses such as gas, parking, books, or tuition. Some also received help with rent and living costs, which enabled them to work fewer hours and/or pursue a heavier academic load.

Despite such acknowledgment of support from family members, however, nearly one-half of students answered affirmatively when asked whether family-related challenges had prevented them from making steady progress toward their degrees.

For students with children living at home, child care assistance by husbands, partners, parents, or siblings was mentioned most frequently as the help that allowed them to pursue their college goals. Yet finding and affording child care while they attended classes was stressful for many others. Finding time to study amidst a household of children was also challenging for many, particularly when children needed the student's attention for their own homework or activities. Those who overcame these challenges typically enlisted families to help with child care, took weekend classes, and utilized online services to reduce their time away from home. Those who were not able to secure help in meeting child care responsibilities were more apt to interrupt their schooling or relegate their schoolwork to the bottom of the family priority list. Several students spoke of making too much money to receive a child care subsidy, but not enough to afford to pay for child care.

For some students, other family responsibilities posed even greater obstacles than child care, particularly those involving a crisis or major life transition, such as a parent needing care, illness, or divorce. Dis-enrolled students often identified such family crises as tipping the delicate balance against allowing them to remain in school:

I took a semester or two off because almost every day we were driving my uncle to the hospital for chemo, radiation or surgery, and it took a toll on me emotionally. It was hard going back after the break.

I was doing well until my mom got sick. She was in the hospital for a while, and I was working at the same time, so I stopped going to school for a couple of years and took care of her. I thought work was more important so that I could pay the bills. When she finally got better, I went back to school, and I've been going ever since.

Such students recognized that events beyond their control had played a powerful role in shaping their academic journeys. For some, despite the support and services provided by CDWFI and by family and friends, the solution to balancing multiple responsibilities meant reducing their school load or putting their studies on hold.

FINDING FIVE:
Managing the Financial Aspects of Going to School

All students struggle with covering the cost of education. Most students were eligible for financial assistance for school costs from the government, their college, and/or the CDWFI project, and some received help with living or school expenses from their families. When financial assistance was insufficient or they were ineligible, students pursued other strategies, often reluctantly, such as increasing their work hours, limiting the number of courses they took, or suspending their schooling until they had amassed sufficient funds.

College costs are daunting for all students, particularly for low-income students who have families to support, as is the case for most students participating in the CDWFI projects. Two-thirds of the students interviewed for this study reported receiving financial support from their CDWFI projects, and one-half reported financial aid from other sources as well. Three-fifths of dis-enrolled students reported that finances had played a role in their decision to leave school, many stalled students identified financial issues as slowing their academic progress, and more than three-quarters of successful students expressed concern about how they would finance their B.A. degrees. Low-paying jobs in the early childhood education field also contributed to students' financial challenges.

The financial situation was the whole struggle. The classes were O.K., but I had to decide whether I was going to buy a book or borrow it, and whether I could cover the cost of one class before I took another.

With tuition going up and books being expensive— and now my husband's been laid off—it's very hard for me to pay for school.

Students were asked how they managed the financial aspects of attending school. Most described multiple strategies involving working longer hours or second jobs, receiving financial help from family members, accessing financial aid, limiting the number of classes each semester, and strict budgeting. For those who obtained it, financial aid was critical to being able to pursue their studies, even if grants and scholarships fell short of meeting all school-related costs. Some students, especially non-U.S. citizens, were ineligible for financial scholarships, grants, and/or fee waivers. Loans were an option for students who didn't qualify for other forms of financial aid, but many students worried about accumulating debt:

I am working and trying to save as much as possible in order to go to school. Because I am a foreign student, I have to somehow pay for everything. I don't qualify for scholarships.

My parents weren't financially able to help; they would have if they could, and I was scared about going into debt. I didn't want to take out school loans, and I still don't, because there is too much uncertainty in the economy. So many people lost everything a few years ago. I just want to make sure that I am never one of them.

I get some Pell grants, and the rest are loans. I'm concerned that in the end I'm going to be in major debt.

Some students recounted problems involving financial aid ceilings or course load and grade requirements, and expressed regret that they hadn't received more financial guidance at the beginning of college, to help them understand restrictions and identify available options for aid:

About the third or fourth semester into school, I started finding out about aid from someone in the financial office, who helped me apply. Now I am getting it, and it is a big help.

There are times when I can only take one class, and I didn't know that I wouldn't get financial aid if I didn't take more. But at that time, I couldn't handle more. That's why it took me so long to get my A.A.

Many students relied on family assistance with school costs, typically in conjunction with employment. Those whose families were unable to offer monetary assistance typically managed the financial aspects of school by increasing their work hours, picking up occasional work, or taking second jobs:

I have a second job coaching soccer, so I can pay for my classes with that. The amount I get at work does help, but it goes for my bills and my car, because I travel a long way from home.

Many students actively saved money to cover school costs, but avoiding debt or additional fees because of late payments wasn't always possible:

Saving is how I manage. I put aside the money that CDWFI gave us in a school account, and also half of my check from the child development job and then my husband tries to match it, so that way we don't have to worry about money to cover classes.

It took me a year to go into a bank and get a credit card, and then I started using that to pay for school online. That's how I made it, but I guess it put me down in a way, too. I'm still paying my credit card bills now, little by little.

Sometimes I need to keep money from four paychecks to come up with the amount to pay for school. So I pay late, and then I'm not able to take the class I need.

Several "stalled" students spoke of delaying transfer to a four-year institution because they didn't have the money to pay for tuition:

From the start I didn't go to a four-year college because I couldn't afford it. And now that I'm almost ready to move on to one, I'm dreading it because I still can't afford it.

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I can't wait to start, but I am waiting because I am not financially prepared yet. That's what holds me back.

Similarly, many dis-enrolled students viewed the decision to leave school temporarily as a necessary consequence of their financial situation:

Tuition and books went up, and at the same time I had an opportunity to work full-time at the preschool, so I had to ask myself, do I keep going to school? It was a choice. My balance weighed more toward going to work than going to school, since I didn't have financial support from my parents.

Students who succeeded in transferring or graduating expressed continued financial worries about covering the higher costs of education in four-year institutions, especially in conjunction with competing family financial issues:

How am I going to pay for my classes when I transfer to the B.A. program? I went to the transfer workshop for some guidance, because I have a daughter who will be graduating high school this spring. She's my priority; I would try to help her out first.

I can barely afford the community college rates right now. Once I transfer, I'm not going to be able to afford school with my paycheck. If I don't qualify for financial aid, I am not going to be able to go.

Financial exigencies underlie decisions about many students' academic journeys, particularly how heavy a load they carry at any one time and how long they take to earn a degree or to transfer. Students accepted that their decisions to stop and start their studies or limit their course load were necessary in light of their economic situations. Nevertheless, they wanted financial guidance early in and throughout their college careers, and understood its value, in order to move as efficiently toward their goals as their circumstances would permit.

FINDING SIX:
Student Attitudes and Attributes, and Their Perceived Links to Degree Persistence and Accessing Services

The vast majority of students identified personal attributes and skills that they believed helped them to progress in school. Students considered successful or stalled identified persistence and motivation, good study skills, and commitment to the child development profession as contributors to their school success more frequently than did dis-enrolled students. Slightly more than one-half of interviewed students, across all student groups, also mentioned personal attributes and behaviors that they believed inhibited their progress, such as procrastination, an inability to prioritize, a lack of study skills, and low self-confidence. Most students provided examples of strategies they pursued to overcome these unhelpful behaviors, such as using a planner to help set priorities, participating in CDWFI study skills classes, and seeking encouragement and guidance from others.

Students were asked to assess how their personal characteristics contributed to or hampered their ability to accomplish their educational goals. Eighty-five percent of students, in similar proportions across student groups, answered affirmatively when asked whether there was something about themselves that had helped them to succeed in school. Fewer students (57%), in similar proportions across student groups, answered affirmatively when asked about personal qualities that may have been obstacles to their progress or success in school. Students were notably forthcoming about both their personal strengths and their weaknesses.

Not surprisingly, students who had transferred or graduated, or were about to, were three times more likely than students who had left school, and almost twice as likely as those considered stalled, to mention specific personal traits that had helped them to succeed in school. Many credited their own determination as a significant factor, proclaiming, "I keep going and keep going until I do it," or "I'm determined, even if I have to go back 50 times." They spoke of pushing through obstacles in spite of difficult situations at their workplaces or with their children.

Some students described themselves as having performed well at school since childhood. "I was

always the kid that my mom had to fight to stay home from school when I was sick," reported one student. "I don't want to fall behind, and that's always just been me." Another said, "I've always liked school, and no matter how hard it has gotten, I've always wanted to stay." In contrast, a number of successful students reported having become more motivated to succeed as they got older, often after repeated attempts to complete school. As one said, "Because I was an older student, I thought I should have been done already. This time, I was clear on what I wanted to do, and I was just very persistent." Their motivation was frequently linked to their families, whether from being the first family member to earn a college degree, or from wanting to serve as a role model to younger family members:

> *You definitely need motivation, which I didn't have at first. After I became a mother, that changed, and I just wanted to be someone that my daughter would be proud of.*

> *I am being driven by my brother's kids, because I want to show them that if you work hard, good things will come to you.*

Students also described behaviors that contributed to their success, including "not being afraid to ask for help," being "well-organized, always on top of things," and "taking advantage of everything," such as scholarships, counseling, or other services offered by the CDWFI or college.

A sizeable number of students mentioned their commitment to the child development field, and their interest in young children as important contributors to their school success. As one said, "I always knew I wanted to be a preschool teacher, and I just kept going and going and never gave up." Whether aspiring to teach or already teaching, these students experienced a good fit between their interest in teaching children and their course work.

When students described personal characteristics and behaviors that were obstacles to school success, they again turned to motivation and also emphasized study skills. While students across all groups talked about difficulty in getting themselves to "do what had to be done," procrastination often had different consequences. As one student who had left school before completing her degree noted, "Signing up for classes

wasn't on top of my priority list, and then I'd be stuck not being able to break into a class I needed." In contrast, a successful student explained, "I wait until the last minute to do my school work, and although I succeeded in my classes, I'm pretty sure that most of the time, I could have done much better." Some students relied on others, such as parents, to prod them in their studies, while others were their own cheerleaders. As one reported, "I realized that once I started working, the world wasn't going to tolerate that laziness."

Difficulty in prioritizing surfaced as a common problem. One student making slow progress in school described her struggles with juggling multiple demands on her time: "I need to prioritize. When I have so many things to do at once, I get overwhelmed, frustrated, and I don't know which of them to do first."

Study skill classes appeared to help many students manage their time better and develop useful skills, such as making a daily and weekly plan to help them focus their attention. One student making slow but steady progress toward her goals said, "I had to learn how to make time slots to study different subjects." Learning how to take good notes was particularly important, especially for those for whom English was a second language, as it enabled them to ask others to explain idioms or words they did not immediately recognize. Relying on mentors or instructors also helped many students.

Classes and discussions with mentors and others helped students to become more aware of their stalling behaviors, and also to recognize that they were not unusual. One student who had left school came to recognize, "I tend to take care of the things that interest me the most first, instead of the most important things." Through a study skills class, she became more aware of how she over-booked herself, and was learning to be more realistic about what she could accomplish. Another student reflected, "There's one class that I worked really hard in, and I could see what I got out of that class versus what I get in the class where I'm a procrastinator. So I try to keep that in mind."

A number of students also mentioned how lack of confidence and self-doubt stood in the way of school success. The willingness to seek help, whether from CDWFI personnel or from fellow students, family, friends, clergy, or therapists, was identified as the most

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important strategy to overcome feelings about themselves that prevented them from making progress in school. A stalled student reflected,

> I'm still learning how not to be so shy in asking questions about my classes. I still don't speak to them [instructors and mentors] in person, but I now get the help I need online, through email, or talking over the phone.

FINDING SEVEN:
Balancing Work, Family, and School

Students across student groups reported being overwhelmed by the competing demands of college, work, and family responsibilities. Support from family members, friends, colleagues, and CDWFI projects played a critical role in helping students manage these multiple claims on their time and energy. Students also spoke of coping strategies, and help from CDWFI personnel and services, that enabled them to make steady progress toward their educational goals. A sizeable proportion of students considered stalled or dis-enrolled had done so intentionally in order to preserve their well being, resolve untenable conflicts, or fulfill work or family obligations.

In light of rising educational costs, the luxury of attending college without financial or familial obligations is almost unheard of among today's student population. Students therefore recognize that the ability to balance school demands with work and family responsibilities is necessary for school success:

> Balancing school, work, and the kids was crazy. Sometimes I would forget an assignment, or that I had volunteered to help at my son's school. I want to be there for my kids, and at the same time I want to do well in school. I'm a preschool teacher, so I also have to prepare lesson plans, and talk to parents. As my kids are getting older, they're a bit more understanding.

> Sometimes I would get out of work late and go home very stressed. I would just lock myself up in the room and cry before I could do what I had to do for school or for my parents. Finally, I set up a schedule: "I'll be with you guys and do this for you at this time, and I will do my homework at this time."

Many students described how they had acclimated to school and gotten better at handling the stress it added to their lives:

> In the beginning, I struggled with finding family time with my husband and my two kids, and study time. But eventually, with the support of the school here, I learned to balance my time and schedule. Saturday classes helped, too.

> It was very challenging at first because my son was still small, and I had to depend on my family for child care. The burden lightened up when he was old enough for preschool, and it was a lot easier for me to extend my hours at school so that I could finish up more classes.

But on the more negative side, many students spoke of sacrificing sleep in order to study:

> Right now I try to get to school a little earlier, maybe 7:00. That leaves me about an hour and 15 minutes to get some work done in the morning in the library. On the weekend, sometimes I'll wake up in the middle of the night to work, because that's when it's quiet. I'll go back to sleep and then wake up early in the morning, around 6:00, and do some more work. I just have to play with time.

> I would make sure that everything that needed to be done during the week work-wise was done, so that anything that needed to be done for the house was left for the weekend. But honestly, I stayed up very late at night working on my studies, and then I would get up early in the morning just to get a refresher on what I was doing.

Students also spoke of learning to recognize what they could and couldn't handle, and to make necessary, often difficult, adjustments or choices. For some, this meant limiting their course load and taking a longer time to transfer. Others chose to postpone their studies because of financial or family circumstances:

> For one year I was away from my kids a lot; I was on campus many hours each week, and I hardly got to see them. I had to switch my schedule to make sure I saw them at least three times a week after school.

I realized I couldn't handle more than two classes. Otherwise it was too hard to even try to find time to do the reading and the homework, along with everything else.

It's not that I'm quitting school; it's not that I don't want to do it any more. It's just that I had stuff to take care of and I needed to start working more. But it's like a scale; it has tipped, and it's hard to balance it again.

For most, being a student meant foregoing social activities and missing family events. Many students, however, recognized the time-limited nature of attending school, and found comfort in recognizing that they would not have to juggle so much indefinitely:

Most of the time it was "go to work in the day and go to school in the evening." I'd get home at 10:30 and be dead tired. You feel like you're losing your social life; you don't even get weekends anymore. But luckily I was taking classes with some friends, so I wasn't stuck all by myself. During our lunch break we would go out to eat and do homework together—kind of hang out, but also work.

Sometimes it is hard, and sometimes it can drain you, but I try to keep my eye on the prize. I see that diploma hanging on the wall in my mind. I'm just trying to get there.

Many students, across all student groups, described participating in the CDWFI as a transformative personal and professional experience, leading them to view themselves and their futures more positively. In addition to helping them make progress toward their educational goals, students described personal changes stemming from participating in the CDWFI, such as increased feelings of self-confidence and responsibility, improved communication and organizational skills, and a new sense of professional pride and ability. Most students expressed the intention to continue their education beyond the community college—in the overwhelming majority of cases, in early childhood studies. Notably, four-fifths of students designated as stalled were satisfied with the progress they were making toward their degrees, and nearly 90 percent of dis-enrolled students reported intending to return to their studies.

It is commonly understood that education has the potential to awaken students not only to new information, but also to new possibilities. Such appears to have been the case for many students participating in the CDWFI projects. Students were eager to respond when asked about the ways in which they thought they had grown personally and professionally as a result of the CDWFI projects. Several mentioned how important is was to be supported and welcomed into an educational community where they were surrounded by, as one said, "great teachers, and well-educated women." A number of students focused on emotional shifts in themselves that they attributed to the CDWFI projects:

In the first two years of college I was in a rut, and did not know what to do. Once CDWFI picked me up and put me on my feet, I gained confidence in myself, in choosing what I want to do, and became more responsible for taking my life in my hands, and not just looking to other people. They helped me to be a better person, and I feel lucky and privileged.

I've gotten to know myself more. I've become better able to understand relationships now, and I've definitely become a better mother.

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Because of all the support in the last two years through [name of CDWFI project], I can be in charge of my own education; I can be the captain of my boat. I know what I have to do in order to pursue my goal because of their guidance. The next step will be a four-year degree. I am not alone or lost anymore.

Students also spoke of learning time management and organizational skills through the CDWFI projects—skills that were helpful not only in school but also in their family and work lives. Students described "opening up," being "better at asking questions," "knowing how to be interviewed by a supervisor for a job," and "being more comfortable talking with a wide range of people," as a result of their CDWFI experience.

Better communication skills, in combination with newly acquired knowledge about child development, changed many students' attitudes and behaviors at work. They spoke of better relationships with children as a result of learning classroom management strategies, as well as better relationships with children's parents:

I am better able to articulate to the parents what I want to say. I can describe something the children are learning, or why it's important that children learn through play. I had to write my goals for children in a class, and now when I meet a new parent, I can tell them my goals for their child.

I get along with parents now, because I can set rules. I am also able to speak with my employees, and say what is and isn't O.K.

Several students mentioned how the CDWFI had helped them to become involved in projects in their communities, to look for better early childhood jobs, or to clarify their career goals:

I knew I loved children. But they asked me to think about what it is that I love about being with them, and what do I want to do? That got me to narrow down the age I want to work with, and figure out the kind of program I want.

Despite the long and often arduous road that most interviewed students had traveled, they remained committed to their educational journeys and enthusiastic about the field of early childhood education. Nine out of ten successful students were well on their way to earning a B.A. degree, with more than three-quarters planning to major in early childhood. While CDWFI personnel and others in the colleges may view students classified as stalled as moving too slowly toward their stated goals, four-fifths of stalled students declared themselves satisfied with their progress toward transfer or graduation. About three-quarters believed they were following the educational plan they had outlined with CDWFI personnel, and considered themselves able to complete their courses successfully. Most of them also planned to continue to major in early childhood studies. Almost all students who were dis-enrolled considered themselves on hiatus, rather than dropped out of school or finished with it permanently. Eighty-nine percent planned to re-enter school in the future, and all but one-quarter of these planned on majoring in early childhood. Notably, nearly three-quarters of the dis-enrolled students had not consulted with CDWFI personnel before deciding to suspend their studies, and beyond an expressed desire to return, few offered specific time frames for re-entry, or suggested additional supports that would enable them to return to or remain in school.

Appendix C:
Study Procedures

This evaluation study is composed of two components: 1) a series of focus groups conducted with CDWFI staff, and 2) phone interviews conducted with students who were participating or had recently participated in a CDWFI project. This appendix provides detailed information about study design, including question protocols, analytic procedures, and sample descriptions, for both the CDWFI staff and student components.

CDWFI Staff Focus Group Study Methods

Sample Development

In January 2013, CSCCE researchers conducted focus groups with each of the seven CDWFI projects. Twenty-seven CDWFI staff, ranging from three to seven staff members per CDWFI project, attended focus groups. Five of the seven groups were conducted by two researchers, and two groups by one researcher. Prior to each focus group, participants were asked to sign a form indicating their consent to participate, and to give verbal consent to allow the group to be audiotaped. All participants indicated consent, and also filled out a short demographic survey. Each focus group lasted approximately two hours, and all audio tapes were transcribed by Ubiquis. In addition, researchers conducting the focus groups took detailed notes on respondent comments.

Focus Group Questions

CDWFI staff were posed the following questions about student characteristics:

1. Do successful students come to their A.A. degree programs more academically prepared than unsuccessful (stalled or dis-enrolled) students?

2. What factors do you think contribute to students earning their A.A. or A.A.T. degrees and becoming transfer-ready? Probing questions explored the roles of family support, financial support, working conditions, personal characteristics, and general education classes. Questions also included how different student groups overcame possible barriers in each of these areas.

3. What are the main factors that keep stalled students from making progress and/or becoming transfer-ready? Probing questions explored the roles of family support, financial support, working conditions, personal characteristics, general education classes, and community colleges and four-year universities.

4. What are the primary factors that contribute to students dropping out of school? Probing questions explored the roles of family support, financial support, working conditions, personal characteristics, and general education classes.

5. What role does working in the ECE field, or a student's age, play in the student's academic preparation, success in school, and use of services?

A second set of questions focused more explicitly on services provided by the CDWFI projects and community colleges, and whether and how students accessed them:

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6. Are there differences in how successful, stalled, and dis-enrolled students use CDWFI and community college services?

7. What services do CDWFI staff perceive to be the most useful?

8. Does the use of services vary, based on where students are in their academic careers? Probing questions focused on services that all CDWFIs provided, including scholarships, stipends, or fee waivers; advisement or counseling; developing educational plans; and mentoring; as well as additional services that individual CDWFI projects provided.

9. What services would CDWFI staff expand if provided with additional resources?

The focus groups concluded with questions about any institutional supports or barriers existing in their community colleges or their four-year partner schools that supported or hindered the CDWFI projects in meeting their goals:

10. What role does your home institution play in supporting or hampering your goals?

11. How do relationships with four-year partner schools help or hamper student success and willingness to transfer?

Analytical approach

Qualitative methods: Once focus group discussions were transcribed, the transcriptions and interview notes were inspected line by line to identify themes across interviews, which were then coded. Codes were not predetermined, but emerged from patterns found in the focus group responses (Creswell, 2012). Next, researchers engaged individually in a process of categorical aggregation, reading the chunked excerpts of themed text related to each code to generate a sense of the meaning given to the code across focus group participants. The researchers then reviewed codes and generated a revised list that better captured the meanings of participant responses.

Quantitative methods: Descriptive statistics were calculated on key demographic variables for all CDWFI staff participating in the focus groups.

CDWFI focus group participants represented a range of job roles, with 10 (37 percent) in leadership roles, such as coordinators and project directors. Fourteen CDWFI focus group participants (51.9 percent) worked in service-related job roles, such as advisors, mentors, transfer coordinators, and resource room directors. The remaining three participants (11.1 percent) held administrative support roles, such as secretaries.

Table 1C displays information about the tenure in the ECE field of CDWFI staff who participated in the focus groups, tenure with their current employer, and tenure in their current positions. The table also describes the percentage of time that CDWFI staff worked directly with CDWFI member students. CDWFI staff represented a wide range of years of experience in the field, with those who had worked longer in the field typically holding such positions as instructors, CDWFI directors, and advisors.

Table 1C. CDWFI Staff Tenure and Time Spent Working with Students, by Job Position

	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	N
Years Employed in ECE Field				
Leadership Staff	.3	40.0	21.5	10
Service Staff	2.0	40.0	11.3	14
Support Staff	2.0	3.0	2.5	3
Total	.3	40.0	15.0	27
Years at Current Employer				
Leadership Staff	.3	35.0	10.0	10
Service Staff	.4	16.0	8.1	14
Support Staff	1.5	7.0	3.7	3
Total	.3	35.0	8.3	27
Years in Current Position				
Leadership Staff	.3	35.0	8.1	10
Service Staff	.3	15.0	4.3	14
Support Staff	1.5	2.0	1.8	3
Total	.3	35.0	5.6	27
Percentage of Time Working with CDWFI Students				
Leadership Staff	20.0	100.0	67.8	10
Service Staff	0	100.0	77.0	14
Support Staff	50.0	90.0	71.7	3
Total	0	100.0	73.0	27

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Of the CDWFI staff members who participated in focus groups, 21 (77.8 percent) were female, and six (22.2 percent) were male. Table 2C displays additional demographic data on focus group participants, including race/ethnicity and languages spoken. Table 3C displays participants' educational levels.

As can be seen in Table 3C, 88.8 percent of focus group participants held either B.A. or graduate degrees. More variation was noted, however, in the degree focus, with 55.5 percent holding B.A. or graduate degrees focused on ECE or child development. As would be expected, CDWFI project managers and instructors tended to have higher ECE-related education levels than those in administrative roles, or in support roles such as advisors and mentors.

Table 2C. Ethnicity and Language of CDWFI Staff, by Job Position

	Number of Leadership Staff	Number of Service Staff	Number of Support Staff	Percentage of Staff
Race/Ethnicity				
Asian	0	1	0	3.7
Black/ African American	1	1	0	7.4
Latino/Hispanic	1	8	2	40.7
White/Caucasian	8	4	1	48.1
N	10	14	3	27
Primary Language				
English	10	9	3	81.5
Spanish	0	4	0	14.8
French	0	1	0	3.7
N	10	14	3	27
Language Fluency				
English only	10	5	2	63.0
Spanish/English	0	7	1	29.6
French/English	0	1	0	3.7
Hebrew/English	0	1	0	3.7
N	10	14	3	27

Table 3C. Education Levels of CDWFI Staff, by Job Position

	Number of Leadership Staff	Number of Service Staff	Number of Support Staff	Percentage of Staff
Highest Education Level				
HS/GED	0	2	0	7.4
Some college	0	0	1	3.7
2-yr degree	0	0	1	3.7
4-yr degree	2	4	1	25.9
Graduate	8	8	0	59.3
N	10	14	3	27
Highest ECE Education Level				
None	0	5	1	23.1
Some college	2	2	1	19.2
B.A.	2	4	1	26.9
Graduate	6	2	0	30.8
N	10	13	3	26

CDWFI Student Study Methods

From February through April 2013, researchers from CSCCE conducted individual telephone interviews lasting 45 to 60 minutes with students considered successful, stalled or dis-enrolled from each of the seven CDWFI projects. The final number of respondents was 61 students from the three student groups, as follows: 23 successful, 20 stalled, and 18 dis-enrolled. Six to 12 students from each CDWFI project participated in a phone interview. (See Table 4C.)

Sample development

To recruit students into the study, researchers from CSCCE worked with First 5 LA, and with CDWFI project staff at each of the seven community colleges, to identify student populations of interest. Together, the group defined three target student groups for the study: 1) successful students, defined as students who had graduated with an A.A. or associate degree transfer (A.A.T), and had transferred or attempted to transfer to a B.A. program in 2012, or students who would be attempting to transfer or graduate in 2013; 2) stalled students, defined as those who either repeatedly failed general education courses, took classes that diverged from their educational plan, or continued to take classes at the community college level without initiating the transfer process; and 3) dis-enrolled students, defined as students who had not signed up for classes during the spring or fall 2013 semesters.

The initial sampling goal was to complete interviews with three students per CDWFI in each student group, with at least one student in each group working in the ECE field, for a total of 63 interviews. Given the small number of students within some CDWFI project student groups, however, the final sampling goal was to have relatively equal groups of successful, stalled, and dis-enrolled students across all CDWFI projects, and to have at least one-third of the sample working in the ECE field.

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Table 4C. Number of Students Interviewed, by Student Group and by CDWFI Project

CDWFI (College)	Successful Students	Stalled Students	Dis-enrolled Students	Total
AA2BA Program (Los Angeles City College)	5	2	5	12
Career and Academic Success Team (Los Angeles Valley College)	3	4	4	11
Child Development Workforce Initiative (Mt. San Antonio College)	2	3	1	6
Early Start Pathways (Santa Monica College)	2	5	4	11
Pathways in Early Childhood Education (Pierce College)	3	2	1	6
Project Links (East Los Angeles College)	3	2	2	7
Project Rise (Long Beach City College)	5	2	1	8
Total	**23**	**20**	**18**	**61**

Sample Recruitment

In January 2013, researchers from CSCCE sent a sample template form and student group definitions to all CDWFI leads, asking them to provide the names of student core members[19] who had: 1) completed a 2011/2012 or 2012/2013 academic year CDWFI core member application; and 2) could be categorized into one of the three student groups. In addition, using the student application data, CDWFI leads were asked to indicate whether students were younger or older than 25 years of age, and whether they worked in the early childhood field. For students considered stalled, CDWFI leads were also asked to identify whether students were stalled because they: (1) were not following their education plan; (2) were failing their general education classes; or (3) had completed all classes necessary for a degree, but had not initiated transfer, and were continuing to take community college classes.

Each of the seven CDWFI projects provided CSCCE with three lists, one for each student type, for a total of 21 lists. In total, 420 names of students were provided to CSCCE across CDWFI projects (225 successful, 124 stalled, and 71 dis-enrolled students).[20] A random number function was used to generate a number for each student within the group. Students in each of the 21 groups with the lowest six numbers were selected for the initial recruitment list. We attempted interviews with the first six students in each group.[21] If we were unable to contact a student after eight attempts, we replenished the sample with the next student on the list until we reached our desired number of interviews.

During the initial recruitment call, CSCCE provided the student with an overview of the study, including its purpose and procedures, and allowed potential subjects to ask any questions they had about the study. If a student initially agreed to participate,

[19] Core members are defined as students who have declared child development as their major. In most CDWFI projects, students need to take a particular number of child development units before having access to the full array of support services offered to CDWFI core members.

[20] It is important to note that the total number of names provided by the CDWFI for study recruitment does not represent the total number of students at each community college enrolled in the CDWFI program. The total number of names provided only represents students who fell into one of the target populations of interest for this study: successful, stalled, and dis-enrolled students. Therefore, within each CDWFI, there could be a significant number of students who were making progress toward their degrees, but were not near graduation. These students were not included in the study recruitment population.

[21] In cases where all six randomly selected students either worked in the ECE field or did not work in the field, the student with the highest number was discarded. The researcher then identified the student assigned the next lowest number who fell within the missing student population group. This student was then placed into the initial recruitment sample.

his or her email address was confirmed, the researcher and the student set up a tentative date for the phone interview, and the researcher asked the student for an address to which the researcher could send a $25 Target gift card once the interview was completed. During recruitment calls, a researcher also confirmed whether the student was working in the ECE field, whether the student was still enrolled in school, and if so, when he or she anticipated obtaining a degree. In several instances, the categorization of students provided by the CDWFI project lead was inaccurate— e.g., listed as dis-enrolled, when he or she had actually transferred to a four-year university—and researchers therefore re-categorized them.

Once verbal consent to participate in the study was given, the researcher emailed the student a link to a study participation consent form housed on Survey Monkey, and an email confirming the date and time of the interview. Approximately two days prior to the interview, the researcher assigned to interview the student called and confirmed the appointment, made any necessary scheduling changes, and reminded the student to complete the online consent form if necessary. No interviews were conducted prior to students completing the online consent form.

Sixty-nine students were reached for recruitment calls. Four declined to participate, and 65 agreed to participate in the study. Interviews were conducted with 62 of these 65 students. Three students were not available for their scheduled interviews, and the researcher was not able to reach them to re-schedule the interview. Overall, data from 61 interviews were used in the final analytic sample, as one student interviewed was found not to fall into any of the identified student groups and was dropped from the sample; she was making good progress toward her degree, but was not near graduation. Successful students comprised 37.8 percent of the completed interviews; stalled students, 32.7 percent; and dis-enrolled students, 29.5 percent.[22] It is important to note, however, that there were fewer dis-enrolled students from which to sample, compared to the overall population of stalled and successful students.

Student Interviews

Each student who consented to participate in the study was administered a series of open-ended and closed-ended interview questions via a 45- to 60-minute audiotaped telephone interview. Prior to administering the interviews, researchers received training on student recruitment, protecting confidentiality, data storage, interviewing techniques, and using prompts with open-ended questions. Interview role-playing was used as a technique to train interviewers, with a senior researcher at CSCCE giving detailed feedback on processes.

Prior to beginning the interview, students were provided a brief description of the procedures and the purpose of the study, and were asked whether the interview could be audiotaped. All but two interviews were recorded; in those two instances, the researcher took detailed interview notes.

Three slightly different interview protocols were used for successful, stalled and dis-enrolled students[23]. Students were posed the following questions:

1. When did you start taking classes at (community college name)?

2. When did you join the (CDWFI name)?

3. Why did you decide to join the (CDWFI name)?

4. Did you come to the community college knowing that you wanted to study child development, or did you change your major to child development?

5. When did you earn your degree, or when are you expecting to earn your degree? Or, when did you dis-enroll?

6. What do you think contributed to your success in achieving your degree (or making progress in your studies to date)?

    a. Did your family do anything to support you while you were in school?

    b. Did your co-workers and/or your supervisor support you in being successful in school? Is there anything your current co-workers and supervisors could do to be supportive of you finishing your degree and/or returning to school?

[22] During recruitment, CSCCE was initially able to secure a sample of 23 students in each stratification group. During the interview process, however, some students provided information that indicated that they had been placed in the wrong student group. For example, a student may have been taking general education classes, or had transferred to a B.A. program, but was labeled as dis-enrolled. In such instances, students were re-categorized into the appropriate student group, and whenever possible, the interviewer switched interview protocols during the interview. This resulted, however, in uneven sample sizes across stratification groups.

[23] Prior to data collection, the appropriate version of the interview protocol was pilot tested with a student not participating in the study who was considered successful, stalled, or dis-enrolled, to determine whether students had any significant issues with comprehending the meaning of questions. The pilot resulted in dropping some questions from the protocol, improving phrasing of questions, and customizing phrases and service names for each CDWFI project.

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c. Are there any workplace policies or programs that have supported your being successful in school?

d. Are there any personal characteristics that have helped you to be successful in school?

7. What do you think were the major obstacles that you encountered as you worked to get your degree/become transfer-ready? (For each below: Were you able to overcome this challenge, and how did you do that? What challenges were you not able to overcome?)

a. Did you face any challenges with your family situation that prevented you from making steady progress toward your degree? Is there anything your family could do to help you finish your degree and/or return to school?

b. Did you face any work-related challenges that prevented you from making steady progress toward your degree?

c. Do you have any personal qualities that may have been an obstacle to your success at school, or stalled your progress toward getting a degree?

d. Did you face any challenges with your general education classes that prevented you from making steady progress toward your degree?

8. Can you tell me about your experiences with balancing the various parts of your life?

9. Can you tell me how you managed the financial aspects of going to school?

a. Are you receiving financial aid from sources outside the CDWFI? If yes, who provides it and what does it cover?

b. Did you receive/are you receiving any financial assistance from the CDWFI? If yes, what expenses did/does it cover?

c. What role do finances play in your ability to make progress toward getting your degree? Do you have any concerns about how to finance your A.A. degree/B.A. degree?

d. Did finances play a role in your leaving school? If yes, what types of financial support would you need in order to return?

10. Can you tell me about the role that (CDWFI name) played in your journey to getting your degree? (For each below: Were you aware of the service? Did you access the service? If not, why not? Was the service helpful? – yes/no, describe)

a. Services provided by all CDWFI projects:

i. CDWFI orientation

ii. Counseling/advising

iii. Educational planning

iv. Tutoring

v. Academic and career workshops

vi. Mentoring and/or peer support

vii. Financial support.

b. Specific services provided by each CDWFI (each interview customized for particular CDWFI projects).

11. Are there (any) other supports that you wished the CDWFI had offered that would have prevented you from leaving school? How would these supports have been helpful?

12. Were there services or supports provided by the community college that helped you be successful in school? Did the CDWFI help you to access services? Why was it helpful?

13. Did the CDWFI help you navigate the community college system: for example, assist you in enrolling in courses, or providing you with information on how to enroll in courses?

14. Did you seek any help from the CDWFI or the community college prior to leaving school to try to assist you in remaining in school? Is there anything else you can think of that could have helped you finish school or could help you return to school? Have you considered re-enrolling in school?

15. Do you plan to pursue more education? If yes, have you applied to the B.A. program? How is that going? What are you planning to major in (ECE or non-ECE)? Are there other skills and knowledge that you think you still need to succeed in a B.A. program? Please describe what types of skills or knowledge you think you still need.

16. Are there any ways that you think that you have grown personally or professionally as a result of your participation in the CDWFI?

17. Now that you have finished your A.A. degree (or are about to finish your degree), do you feel there are other skills or resources that you need to help you succeed in a B.A. program?

Analytical Approach

Completed interviews were transcribed by Ubiqus, and uploaded into Dedoose, a qualitative computer software program. All closed-ended interview questions were entered into an Excel spreadsheet and also uploaded into the quantitative feature of Dedoose.

Qualitative Methods: Transcriptions and interview notes were then inspected line by line to identify themes within interviews, which were then coded. Codes were not pre-determined, but emerged from patterns found in the data (Creswell, 2012). Four researchers met to read one transcript from each student group line by line, in order to agree on key themes that emerged from the text and to assign a code to each theme. Three researchers then individually coded a successful, a stalled, and a dis-enrolled student interview transcript, and reviewed the coding together to verify the initial coding protocol. Next, researchers individually engaged in a process of categorical aggregation, reading the chunked excerpts of themed text related to each code to generate a sense of the meaning given to the code across participants. Then, researchers reviewed codes and generated a revised list that better captured the meanings of participant responses for each question. In total, 39 interviews (63.9%) were coded by multiple researchers to ensure the validity of codes.

Quantitative Methods: Descriptive statistics were calculated on key demographic variables for all core members and for the interviewed sample. Next, descriptive statistics for each demographic variable were calculated for each student group, and where adequate sample sizes permitted, inferential statistics were conducted to determine whether significant differences existed between groups. In cases where differences between students groups were noted, qualitative analysis was used to further explore these differences from the perspective of the students.

Student Characteristics

This section compares the three interviewed student groups—successful, stalled, and dis-enrolled—according to the following key factors:

- Demographic characteristics: gender, age, ethnicity, and linguistic capacity;
- Family characteristics: marital status, children living at home;
- Employment characteristics: employment status; for those working in the ECE field: work setting, job role, ages of children served, full- and part-time status; and
- Income and finances: personal annual income, ECE wages.

Although no significant differences among student groups were identified along the characteristics described below, most tables include information by student group, for interested readers.

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Demographic characteristics

Gender: Almost all (93.4%) of the interviewed students identified themselves as female, and 6.6% identified themselves as male.

Age: The mean age of interviewed students was 35 years (SD= 11.59), ranging from 20 to 62 years of age. There were no significant differences among the student groups. Due to the wide variation of ages across students participating in the CDWFI projects, and because students in different age groups may experience different challenges when pursuing a degree, we categorized students into four age group-ings to determine whether differences existed among student groups with respect to these categories. Table 5C displays age ranges, by student group. Due to the small sample sizes of each student group, it is not possible to test significant differences among them.

Ethnicity: Table 6C displays the percentage of students within different racial/ethnic groups. There were no significant differences among student groups.

Linguistic background and fluency: Students who participated in the study were linguistically diverse with respect to both their primary languages (see Table 7C) and their fluency skills (see Table 8C). No significant differences in linguistic background or fluency were identified among students considered successful, stalled, or dis- enrolled. All interviewed students spoke English fluently. In addition to English, more than one-half (52.5 percent) reported speaking Spanish fluently, and approximately one-quarter (24.6 percent) reported fluency in another language other than Spanish.

Table 5C. Age Range of Students, by Student Group

Age Group	Number of Successful Students	Number of Stalled Students	Number of Dis-enrolled Students	Total	Percentage of Students
20-24 years	8	4	1	13	21.3
25-35 years	8	6	12	26	42.6
36-49 years	5	6	2	13	21.3
50 years and older	2	4	3	9	14.8
Total	**23**	**20**	**18**	**61**	**100.0**

Table 6C. Race/Ethnicity of Students, by Student Group

Race/Ethnicity	Number of Successful Students	Number of Stalled Students	Number of Dis-enrolled Students	Total	Percentage of Students
Latino/Hispanic	8	11	11	30	49.2
White/Caucasian	1	4	3	8	13.1
Asian/Pacific Islander	5	1	0	6	9.8
Black/African-American	3	1	2	6	9.8
Other	6	3	1	10	16.4
Declined to state	0	0	1	1	1.6
Total	**23**	**20**	**18**	**61**	**100.0**

Table 7C. Primary Language of Students, by Student Group

Primary Language	Number of Successful Students	Number of Stalled Students	Number of Dis-enrolled Students	Total	Percentage of Students
English	12	13	11	36	59.0
Spanish	5	4	6	15	24.6
Other* (including Spanish/English)	6	3	1	10	16.4
Total	**23**	**20**	**18**	**61**	**100.0**

Note: One stalled student reported speaking both Spanish and English as her primary language.

*No other individual language was identified as the primary language of more than 5% of interviewed students. Other language(s) included Mandarin/Cantonese, Armenian, Cantonese, Farsi, and Korean.

Table 8C. Language Fluency of Students, by Student Group

Language	Number of Successful Students	Number of Stalled Students	Number of Dis-enrolled Students	Total	Percentage of Students
English and Spanish	10	9	11	30	49.2
English only	5	6	5	16	26.2
English/Other	8	3	2	13	21.3
English, Spanish & Other	0	2	0	2	3.3
Total	**23**	**20**	**18**	**61**	**100.0**

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Family Characteristics

Marital Status. Less than one-third (31.1 percent) of students were married or living with a domestic partner. Table 9C displays the marital status of students by student group. There were no significant differences in marital status by student group.

Children: Slightly more than one-third of students (39.3 percent) reported having dependent children living at home. There were no significant differences among student groups.

Work Status

Approximately three-quarters (73.7 percent) of interviewed students were employed. Table 10C displays students' work status, by student group.

Table 11C displays work settings for students by student group. Across all three student groups, the majority of students were employed in center-based early childhood settings.

Table 9C. Marital Status of Students, by Student Group

Marital Status	Number of Successful Students	Number of Stalled Students	Number of Dis-enrolled Students	Total	Percentage of Students
Single	14	11	9	34	55.7
Married/ Domestic Partner	6	6	7	19	31.1
Divorced	2	3	2	7	11.5
Declined to state	1	0	0	1	1.6
Total	**23**	**20**	**18**	**61**	**100.0**

Table 10C. Work Status of Students, by Student Group

Work Status	Number of Successful Students	Number of Stalled Students	Number of Dis-enrolled Students	Total	Percentage of Students
Working	16	16	13	45	73.8
Not Working	7	4	4	15	24.6
Declined to state	0	0	1	1	1.6
Total	**23**	**20**	**18**	**61**	**100.0**

Table 11C. Work Settings of Students, by Student Group

Work Setting	Number of Successful Students	Number of Stalled Students	Number of Dis-enrolled Students	Total	Percentage of Students
Center	10	9	10	29	64.4
Other ECE setting	2	3	2	7	15.6
Family child care	1	4	0	5	11.1
Outside of ECE field	3	0	1	4	8.9
Total	**16**	**16**	**13**	**45**	**100.0**

Center-based Job role: Table 12C displays the job roles of the students working in center-based settings. Because of small sample sizes, these data were not analyzed by student group.

Age Groups: Interviewed students working in center-based early childhood settings reported working with a variety of age groups of children. Table 13C displays the percentage of sampled students who worked with particular age groups in center-based settings. This table indicates that the students interviewed for this study worked with toddlers and preschool-aged children more than with infants and school-aged children.

Hours/Months Worked: Of the 29 students working in center-based settings who reported on their working hours, the mean number of hours worked per week was 28, ranging from 4.5 to 40 hours. Slightly more than one-half (53.6 percent) worked full-year schedules, and approximately one-third (35.7 percent) worked a school-year schedule, while the remaining three students (10.7 percent) worked less than 10 months per year.

Table 12C. Job Roles of Students Working in Center-Based Settings

Job Role	Number of Students	Percentage of Students
Teacher	11	37.9
Teacher aide	10	34.5
Other role	8	27.6
Total	**29**	**100.0**

Table 13C. Ages of Children Cared For, by Student Group

Age groups	Number of Successful Students	Number of Stalled Students	Number of Dis-enrolled Students	Total	Percentage of Students
Infants	1	0	3	4	9.1
Toddlers	2	5	6	13	29.5
Preschoolers	7	9	8	24	54.5
School-age/ elementary school (incl. transition K)	2	1	0	3	6.8
Total	**12**	**15**	**17**	**44**	**100.0**

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Tenure in Field: The students currently working in center-based settings had worked, on average, 7.3 years in the ECE field, 3.7 years with their current employer, and 3.6 years in their current position. There were no significant differences in tenure by student group, as reported in Table 14C.

Income and Wages

Annual Income: All interviewed students were asked to report their annual personal income. Table 15C displays annual income range by student group. Two-fifths of students (41 percent) reported earning less than $10,000 per year. In addition, no student's annual personal income was greater than $50,000.

Table 16C displays mean hourly wages by job role for students working in center-based settings. Because of very small sample sizes, these data are not displayed by student group. However, interviewed students who worked outside of the classroom earned more per hour, on average, than those who worked as teacher aides (F (2,25) = 3.74, p = .04).

Table 14C. Tenure of Students Working in Center-based Settings, by Student Group

Tenure	Successful Students	Stalled Students	Dis-enrolled Students	N
Mean years in ECE field	6.6	10.5	5.1	28
Mean years employed with current employer	1.6	5.8	4.0	29
Mean years in current position	1.3	5.6	3.6	29

Table 15C. Annual Personal Income of Students, by Student Group

Work Setting	Number of Successful Students	Number of Stalled Students	Number of Dis-enrolled Students	Total	Percentage of Students
Less than $10,000	14	9	2	25	41.0
$10,000 - 19,000	5	3	7	15	24.6
$20,000 - 39,000	1	5	4	10	16.4
$40,000 - 49,999	0	1	0	1	1.6
Don't know/declined to state	3	2	5	10	16.4
Total	**23**	**20**	**18**	**61**	**100.0**

Table 16C. Hourly Wages of Students Working in Center-based Settings, by Job Role[24]

Job Role	Mean Hourly Wages	N
Teacher	$13.72	10
Teacher aide	$11.00	10
Other ECE Position	$16.89	8
Total	**$13.65**	**28**

Interviewed Sample Compared to Overall Core CDWFI Student Members

We compared the students who participated in this study to the overall core CDWFI member population to determine whether one could generalize the findings from the interview data to the overall core CDWFI student member population. To do this, we analyzed demographic data on all core CDWFI members who completed the Fall 2012 CDWFI Core Member Application, and compared their characteristics to responses on similar demographic questions (described below) that were posed to students during the interview. It is important to note, however, that inferential statistics were not performed to determine whether significant statistical differences could be found between the sampled group and the overall core CDWFI member population, as the data drawn from the students in this study were also included in the dataset for the overall population of CDWFI members. Therefore, we rely on descriptive statistics and researcher judgment to note areas where differences may be present.

In general, we found no indication of differences between interviewed students and all core CDWFI members along the following key characteristics: gender, age, English fluency, and personal income. There was, however, one personal characteristic that may indicate slight differences between the students sampled for the interview and the overall CDWFI core member population; namely, 62.1 percent of all core CDWFI members identified themselves as Latino/Hispanic, while only 49.2 percent of the sampled students did so. It is possible, therefore, that there is a slight under-representation in the Latino/Hispanic student population sampled for this study, when compared to the overall core CDWFI member population.

Two-thirds of students interviewed for this study (67.2%) reported that they were employed in early care and education, as compared to 37 percent in the total CDWFI population. This difference reflects an intentional sample recruitment strategy, as the study was designed to include at least one student working in early care and education in all student groups (successful, stalled, and dis-enrolled) for each of the seven CDWFI projects. Additionally, differences in work-related variables between the two groups should be interpreted with caution, as student employment status appears to be unstable. When CSCCE made recruitment calls, a number of students reported that they were working, although their student application data suggested that they were not. No definitive conclusions should be drawn, therefore, about the representativeness of the sample to the overall core member population with respect to work status or job roles, as working situations appear to change frequently within this population of students.

Interviewed students and the CDWFI population who worked in ECE did not differ in job setting, with approximately three-quarters working in center-based settings. No differences existed in their tenure in the ECE field, with their current employers, or in their current positions, or with respect to average hours worked per week or average months worked per year. The majority of the overall population of CDWFI members worked with children from birth to five years, as did the sampled population.

[24] Hourly wage data are not available for family child care providers

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