

## Spotlight on Success

Student success in higher education is a complex and boundless topic.<sup>1</sup> For years, success plans have followed one another, support measures have multiplied and the many stakeholders involved have tried to understand the "challenges" facing the student population. The Fédération des cégeps added its voice to those of other organizations by publishing the report *La réussite au cégep: regards rétrospectifs et prospectifs* [Student Success in College: Looking Back and Looking Forward, Ed.], which takes stock of two decades of student success efforts at the college level and presents avenues for future action, strongly oriented toward the classroom. The challenge is to mobilize and, above all, to provide adequate tools to the main stakeholders in this complex learning environment in order to make it a place where everything is possible.

*Pédagogie collégiale* offers a series of two articles—a summary of the report published by the Fédération des cégeps and an interview with the coordinator of the work on student success by the Fédération des cégeps, Ms. Carole Lavoie—in order to better identify the issues and avenues for reflection underlying student success in college.

<sup>1</sup> Editor's note: In the spring of 2017, *Pédagogie collégiale* published a pedagogical reflection on success in college based on an interview with three figures from the world of higher education who care about student success; this reflection remains, today still, worthy of interest. Readers interested in learning more about this topic can read the article "Voir autrement la réussite des étudiants au collégial" (vol. 30, n°3).

# Success in CEGEP

## Looking Back and Looking Forward

Carole Lavoie, in collaboration with Annie-Claude Prud'homme

**CEGEPs have always sought to provide students with the best possible conditions to ensure that their academic career leads to success and, ultimately, to a qualification. The study conducted by the Fédération des cégeps, which led to the report *La réussite au cégep : regards rétrospectifs et prospectifs*,<sup>2</sup> a summary of which is presented here, is an additional contribution to this ongoing quest.**

After several decades of development in the area of student success in CEGEPs and having implemented four or five generations of success plans, the Fédération des cégeps has undertaken a vast project on student success, considering the situation from two complementary angles, namely the institutional commitment defined by each CEGEP and the consideration of systemic aspects,<sup>3</sup> which call for a broader approach, carried out cooperatively by the institutional stakeholders in consultation with the Ministère de l'Enseignement supérieur (MES).

<sup>2</sup> See on this subject Fédération des cégeps. "La réussite au cégep : regards rétrospectifs et prospectifs," May 2021 [https://fedecgeps.ca/others/2021/10/la-reussite-au-cegep-regards-retrospectifs-et-prospectifs]. Note that some passages in the article are taken verbatim from the report's conclusion.

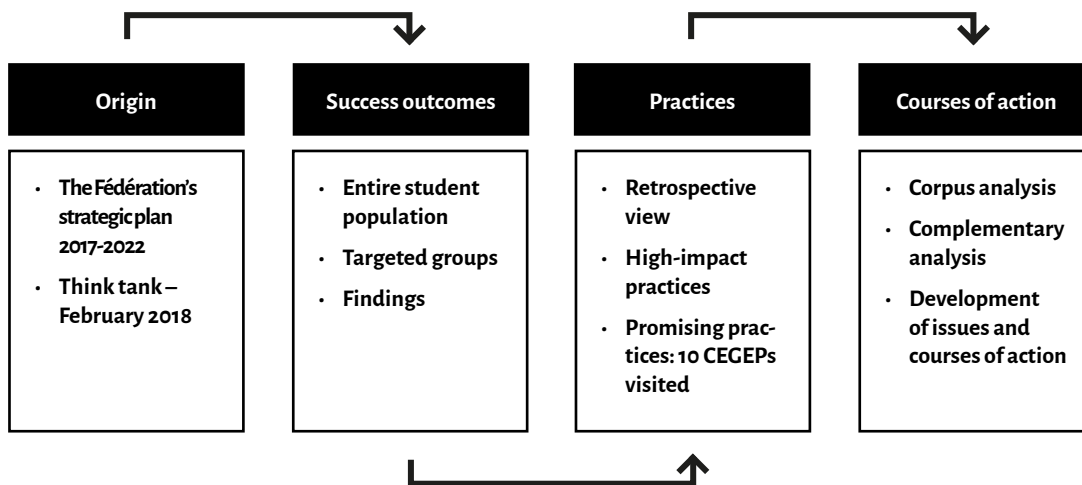
<sup>3</sup> By systemic aspects, we mean contextual elements that do not depend on the CEGEP, but that are established by the Ministère de l'Enseignement Supérieur (MES), among others, and that have an impact on the way the institution carries out its mission. The regulatory framework, as defined by the College Education Regulations, or the implementation of a national test may be examples.

A think tank on student success, composed of members from various CEGEP administrations and Fédération staff members, oversaw the work and consulted with the various bodies. The process, which ran from February 2018 to April 2021 (see **Figure 1**), included the following components:

- The study of success outcomes with regard to student population and targeted groups;
- Identification of student success practices in CEGEPs: key practices implemented over the past 20 years in institutions, high- impact practices in higher education acknowledged by research<sup>4</sup> and promising practices with outstanding results, collected during the visit of 10 CEGEPs;
- The development of issues and courses of action based on the analysis of all the data collected during the previous phases.

Figure 1

### Illustration of the Fédération des cégeps' approach to its success project



<sup>4</sup> Readers interested in learning more about this topic can consult Figure 27, *Pratiques d'enseignement à impact élevé en enseignement supérieur reconnues par la recherche* [High-Impact Teaching Practices in Higher Education Acknowledged by Research, Ed.] and Figure 28, *Pratiques à impact élevé relatives à l'environnement éducatif reconnues par la recherche du rapport sur la réussite* [High-Impact Practices in the Educational Environment Acknowledged by the Success Report Research, Ed.] [fedcegeps.ca/wp-content/uploads/2021/10/rapport-la-reussite-au-cegep.pdf].

The analysis of student results and the review of the main actions and structuring measures implemented in CEGEPs over the past 20 years have made it possible to update the state of affairs with respect to success. In this regard, the first finding is that, regardless of the indicator used, student success results have generally remained stable throughout the observation period despite all the efforts made and the many measures implemented in the CEGEPs. However, it must be admitted that, during this same period, the student population, the CEGEP environments and the social context have evolved on several levels. Moreover, the results of certain targeted groups of students are cause for concern. Students with a high school grade point average (HGPA) below 75%, as well as boys and students starting their college career in a Springboard to DCS program have significantly lower success or graduation rates than their peers. The second finding concerns the student success culture of CEGEPs. This culture is well established and is deployed through a wide range of measures and actions, some of which are shared by several institutions, while others are specific to each institution. Each CEGEP has developed an intrinsic culture of student success that reflects its concern to take into account its specific context and the characteristics of its student population. This culture is based on values and principles that colour its vision of student success and that are generally enshrined in its educational mission statement and success plan, among others. It is thanks to the broad mobilization of the stakeholders, each of whom plays a distinct role in the CEGEPs, that the success plans are carried out, with the contribution of the Carrefour de la réussite, the

Fédération des cégeps and the various communities of practice in the college network. While we recognize the undeniable and significant efforts that have been and continue to be made to ensure student success, we note that they have not led to as significant an improvement in results as we would have liked.

How, then, can we increase the impact of the actions and measures implemented by CEGEPs? By looking into high-impact practices in higher education and promising practices currently in use in some 10 CEGEPs, we have explored this question and attempted to answer it. By consulting a large body of scientific literature, we have compiled a repertoire of practices with a high impact on student success in higher education, grouping them according to whether they concern teaching or, more broadly, the educational environment. The context of their implementation is part of a general posture of reflective practice and a critical look at individual, collective or organizational interventions. Among the characteristics of high-impact teaching practices are enriching relationships between teachers and their students, pedagogical methods that promote active, collaborative and contextualized learning, consideration of students' prior learning to ensure learning progression, and criterion-referenced assessment of learning to support students' self-assessment process. With respect to the educational environment, there are several elements to consider in establishing practices that have a significant impact on student learning: students' sense of well-being and integration in the CEGEP, which is based in particular on a good social network and the development of their

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<sup>5</sup> Several elements can be noted with respect to changes in the CEGEP environment, such as regulatory requirements, changes in study programs, and funding methods.



sense of competence; the meaning that learning has for students through relevant and coherent programs as well as through diversified activities that are complementary to teaching; the support offered to students to enable them to adapt more easily to the demands of college; the early identification of students in difficulty; and, finally, services and measures that respond to the diversified needs of students.

The various characteristics of high-impact practices formed the frame of reference used to analyze the data collected from a sample of 10 CEGEPs with outstanding student success results. A number of findings from this analysis were used to put into perspective the practices used by these CEGEPs, which they felt could explain the success of their students. First, there are many practices used to promote and support student success. CEGEPs generally analyze their results by considering the combined effect of these practices, since the

effect attributed to specific measures has not been well defined. We refer to these as promising practices because they have not been validated in terms of achieving their objectives. Second, there is no "magic" recipe or unambiguous explanation for identifying THE defining practice or practices that guarantee the success of students in a given CEGEP. Each CEGEP recognizes the multifactorial nature of the context that promotes student success. Each CEGEP focuses on certain practices based on its understanding of the student population and its needs, as well as its organizational culture, development priorities, principles and values. Third, the practices valued by some may be different from those implemented by others, although some practices remain present in the vast majority, if not all, of the CEGEPs visited.

The in-depth analysis of all the different types of data considered in this study led us to develop 10 courses of action based on the issues

identified. Their implementation concerns various fields of intervention and will be the result of a collective undertaking, based on shared responsibilities within the CEGEPs themselves, within the network or the MES. They suggest avenues to be taken at these different levels to improve student success and to revive the CEGEPs' ongoing commitment to this concern.

## The 10 actions proposed by the Fédération

- 1. Continuously update knowledge of the student population, in both regular and continuing education, and better utilize it for intervention purposes.**

To understand the evolution of the student population and to adapt to the diversity of its characteristics, CEGEPs need to consult the available data and to have their own collection

and analysis tools adapted to their context. With the support of analysts, they benefit from sharing data and working together to interpret it in order to adapt student support based on their observations.

## **2. Support the expanded deployment of high-impact practices related to teaching and to the educational environment in each college.**

Some practices are known to have a positive effect on the learning of all students and particularly on the learning of students experiencing difficulties. Research has demonstrated the high impact of practices related to teaching or to the educational environment. The targeted practices meet certain characteristics in order to promote student engagement and success. In terms of teaching, they concern: teacher-student relations, teaching methods, structuring of teaching and evaluation of learning.

The learning environment is more encompassing. It concerns practices related to the classroom, the program and out-of-class activities. The practices that were identified included: students' sense of well-being and integration into the CEGEP, the meaning of their educational path, the level of expectation and requirements at the college level, and services and support for success that take into account student differences. CEGEPs are implementing some of these practices, but could expand their implementation even further. From this perspective, each CEGEP would benefit from taking stock of its

pedagogical practices and educational environment and from adopting an approach that is consistent with its organizational culture in order to deploy high-impact practices widely across the institution.

## **3. Work to improve students' mastery of French on several levels.**

A good command of French among students has an impact on their success, both in their general education and program-specific courses and with regard to the French Exit Exam at the end of their college studies. Continuing learning with regard to language proficiency at the college level is not only relevant, but necessary. In this regard, explicit teaching, the use of correction software as a learning and teaching tool, and a review of the assistance offered by the help centers are among the means proposed by the Fédération des cégeps.

## **4. Examine the student success rate of the first French and Literature and Philosophy courses and put it in perspective with the corresponding courses in the Anglophone sector.**

The first courses in French and Literature and Philosophy are less successful for students with a HGPA below 80% in comparison with the corresponding courses in English CEGEPs. The gaps are more pronounced for students with a HGPA below 75%. This situation deserves our attention, and the Fédération proposes that a working group, supported by the MES and

including teachers and students, look into the matter further.

## **5. Enrich learning assessment practices with a view to student success**

Learning assessment leads to the certification of studies and has a determining effect on student success. Practices aimed at supporting the development of students' meta-cognitive skills (including the ability to self-assess), criterion-referenced evaluation, enrichment of formative evaluation, as well as pedagogical practices that better take into account the right to error, or that allow for making up for failures in certain contexts, are possible avenues for improvement.

## **6. Structure and systematize data analysis, evaluation, and critical judgment of measures and success plans throughout their implementation.**

CEGEPs implement several measures and actions based on their success plans. The evaluation of the impact of the measures and plans can be based on various types of data (statistical, perceptual or documentary data). CEGEPs will benefit from better defining the impact of measures and plans by systematizing their evaluation.

## **7. Provide a context for continuing education to better deploy success measures.**

The course offer in continuing education is characterized by numerous parameters that are

specific to it and that condition student success. Better integration of student success in this sector within success planning at the CEGEP level, based on an information system enhanced with reliable and more numerous indicators, will enable CEGEPs to take greater account of the particularities of the continuing education context.

**8. Provide a context in each CEGEP that is conducive to the stakeholders' development of expertise in student success, in relation to the proposed courses of action.**

In a context of increased implementation of high-impact practices in CEGEPs, it is important to capitalize on the skills of the various stakeholders. It is important to support their engagement and facilitate the development of their expertise through various means. In this regard, the establishment of communities of practice around the experimentation of high-impact practices seems promising.

**9. Increase the capacity for dissemination, transfer and appropriation of the expertise developed within the network through the contribution of the Carrefour de la réussite, in collaboration with network partners.**

From a network perspective, the deployment of the courses of action will be facilitated by the contribution of the Carrefour de la réussite, whose mandate is being expanded. The Carrefour will support the development and sharing of expertise on student success interventions, particularly through the design of common tools,

the transfer of promising practices and the support of communities of practice within the network.

**10. Support the implementation of change by developing the capacity of CEGEPs as a learning organization..**

The culture of collaboration, the resources provided and the commitments found in institutional documents, the use of recognized high-impact practices, the evaluation of the effect of interventions and success plans are all aspects that colour the student success culture of each CEGEP. It is through these means that the evolution of this culture is achieved, based on the critical look that the institution is able to take at its own achievements, adopting a learning organization posture.

By defining a frame of reference for practices likely to have the greatest effect on student success and by presenting various illustrations of promising practices collected from the CEGEPs visited, this study offers a repertoire of practices that can inspire CEGEPs in the actions to be implemented, while being useful for renewing or enriching their success plan. In addition, by raising various questions and sometimes challenging certain paradigms, the in-depth reflection carried out can fuel the thinking within institutions and the development of a common vision regarding the changes to be promoted and supported. It can serve as a support for the dialogue that must be ensured to obtain the commitment of all in the exploration of new avenues for student success.

The reflection is rich, certainly, but it

is neither definitive nor final. Moreover, we do not pretend to present it as exhaustive. In terms of student success, the factors to be considered, the practices to be valued, the groups of students whose results must be monitored, and the characteristics of the evolution of student populations are all aspects that require ongoing analysis and monitoring. In this sense, the situation is evolving and requires openness and critical thinking on the part of those involved in student success as well as institutions. Difficulties in accessing data on the success of certain student populations, such as students with disabilities, first generation students, Indigenous students and international students, have prevented us from addressing the specific situation of these groups. In addition, the actual success rates of students, differentiated by program of study, were not examined. Such a study would have been a major undertaking. These issues remain relevant and could be addressed through additional studies with relevant partners.

The MES has published the *Plan d'action pour la réussite en enseignement supérieur 2021-2026* [Action Plan for Success in Higher Education 2021-2026, Ed.] (PARES), which contains several proposals from the report by the Fédération des cégeps. This plan for improving student success, supported by significant investments, is based on five guiding principles: collaboration and consultation, sharing of expertise, flexibility, equity and inclusion, and complementarity with other ministerial actions to promote success, health and well-being. It is in line with the first two principles that the role of the Carrefour de la réussite, headed by the Fédération des cégeps and funded

by the MES, has been expanded, as proposed in the report (action 9).

Thus, the Carrefour de la réussite continues to support the development of the college network's capacities for analysis, development, dissemination and transfer of expertise in the area of student success. It supports the associate deans in charge of student success and offers services to three communities of practice: student success representatives (Repcar), French language skills representatives (Repfran) and success data representatives (Repstats).<sup>6</sup> It will gradually integrate representatives from continuing education. Project-based groups of representatives from various communities of practice have been established to support the implementation of recommendations from the report and PARES. While offering spaces conducive to knowledge sharing

and to the development of resources adapted to the college reality, the Carrefour de la réussite enables network stakeholders to experiment with collaborative approaches that foster the emergence of collective intelligence, so that the culture of student success can evolve within increasingly learning organizations.

Finally, the report produced could be considered the culmination of the Fédération des cégeps' work on success, but it is more of a step in establishing a widely shared framework for reflection, prior to implementing new means to improve student success. The CEGEP stakeholders are now invited to take charge of the proposed actions in a concerted and progressive manner, for the benefit of all students. Thus, the deployment of the adjustments that will be favoured, by the institutions themselves, by the CEGEP

network, and by the MES, requires a large mobilization of stakeholders with different roles, a differentiation of actions in line with the choices made by the CEGEPs and a planning of the changes to be made in the short, medium and even longer term. Since the report was published, the Fédération des cégeps has been working on developing a network strategy to support the deployment of the courses of action, based on collaboration with partner organizations in the CEGEP community, as well as with the MES, in the wake of PARES. ■

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<sup>6</sup> In addition to the three communities headed by the Carrefour de la réussite, the Fédération des cégeps also leads three other communities of practice: the Réseau des répondantes et des répondants TIC (Réseau REPTIC), the Regroupement des bibliothèques collégiales (REBICQ) and the Réseau intercollégial des intervenants psychosociaux (RIIPSO).



**Carole Lavoie** is a consultant in higher education. Between 2018 and 2021, as project manager for the Fédération des cégeps, she coordinated the work on student success at the CEGEP level and produced the resulting report. Previously, she occupied the positions of Director General, Director of Studies, and Director of Pedagogical and Institutional Development at the Cégep de Sainte-Foy for 18 years. She was also a teacher at Cégep Édouard-Montpetit for about a decade. In 2018, she was named a member of the Ordre de l'excellence en éducation, in recognition of her significant contribution to the quality of Quebec's educational system.

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**Note:** text written in collaboration with Annie-Claude Prud'homme, coordinator of the Carrefour de la réussite (Fédération des cégeps) and facilitator of the réseau des répondantes et répondants de la réussite (Repcar).