COMMUNITY COLLEGES OF
APPALACHIA

RURAL EDUCATOR ACADEMY (REA)
BACKGROUND, BRIEF & CORE COMPETENCIES

THE COMMUNITY COLLEGES OF APPALACHIA'S
RURAL EDUCATOR ACADEMY PILOT PROGRAM

RADICALLY REIMAGINING EDUCATIONAL EQUITY IN ACTION

Background & Vision

Earlier this year, The Community Colleges of Appalachia (CCA) embarked on our journey to create our first leadership academy for our Rural Educator Academy (REA). The goal was to design and pilot a professional development program to enhance the skills that faculty, staff, and leaders at CCA member colleges need to improve rural student outcomes.

We are pleased to announce that we received the Ascendium Education Group grant and have partnered with LAUNCH Student Success not only to bring this vision to fruition but to ensure your REA is created and executed in excellence.

The Rural Educator Academy (REA) is a unique, two-pronged approach to professional development that will yield sustained improvements in rural student success. Recognizing change must occur at the institutional and course levels; therefore, the Rural Educator Academy is designed as two complementary experiences: (1) an REA for institutional leaders and (2) an REA for faculty and student services staff.

Through this professional development academy, CCA will create a community of practice across Appalachia focused on ways to improve Rural Black Indigenous and People of Color (BIPOC) student success throughout the Appalachian Region.

As part of the initial steps in developing the Community Colleges of Appalachia Rural Educator Academy Pilot, quantitative and qualitative survey data were collected.

Quantitative data was collected using the Rural Educator Academy (REA) Initial Evaluation. This survey was designed to understand the profile of rural students in the Community Colleges of Appalachia and how staff, faculty, and leaders are currently delivering support inside and outside the classroom to improve success for all rural students. For the purposes of this study, we define student success as the holistic development of students as they reach their personal and academic goals in higher education.

Qualitative data were collected through individual interviews and focus groups. Individuals interviewed, and groups who took part in these discussions included executive committee members, leaders, faculty, staff, and community members.

As you move through this brief, you will notice quotation marks around key phrases representing direct quotes from the qualitative survey responses and/or focus group feedback. The full report will also note numerical annotation after certain competencies that indicate the report and/or article found during the literature review process that edifies said competency.

The LAUNCH Student Success Evaluation process included the completion of the following milestones to identify the core competencies listed in this brief. Below is a summary of the evaluation steps taken to draft the preliminary REA core competencies for leaders, staff, and faculty:

- Evaluating the Purpose and Goals of the REA
- Literature Review (Aspen, ARC, OACC, State of Ohio Leadership Institute, Etc)
- Regional Leader Interviews
- REA Executive Committee Member interviews
- Staff, Faculty, Leader, Community Member & Student Focus Group Administration
- CCA Wide-Evaluation via Survey for Staff, Faculty, Leader, Community Members & Students

The Rural Educator Academy Initial Evaluation was designed to understand the profile of rural students in the Community Colleges of Appalachia and how staff, faculty, and leaders are currently delivering support inside and outside of the classroom to improve success for all rural students.

The survey was opened on Monday, March 21st, and closed on Monday, April 18th, 2022. The survey was emailed to all college presidents affiliated with the 96 Community Colleges of Appalachia. There were 713 respondents to the survey across 25 colleges.

The breakdown of roles amongst the 713 respondents are noted in the table below.

CATEGORY	COUNT	PERCENTAGE
STUDENTS	150	21.04%
COMMUNITY MEMBERS	18	2.52 %
STAFF	221	31.00 %
FACULTY	171	23.98 %
LEADERS	72	10.10 %
SKIPPED RESPONSES	27	3.79 %
DECLINED CONSENT	54	7.57 %
TOTAL	713	100 %

Because student data was not collected via focus groups (zero students signed up to participate in the focus groups), the quantitative summary data shared will focus on student responses. **150 students participated in the survey across 17 CCA member colleges.** The qualitative summary data will focus on the perspectives shared by community members, faculty, leaders, and staff.

COMMUNITY COLLEGES OF APPALACHIA
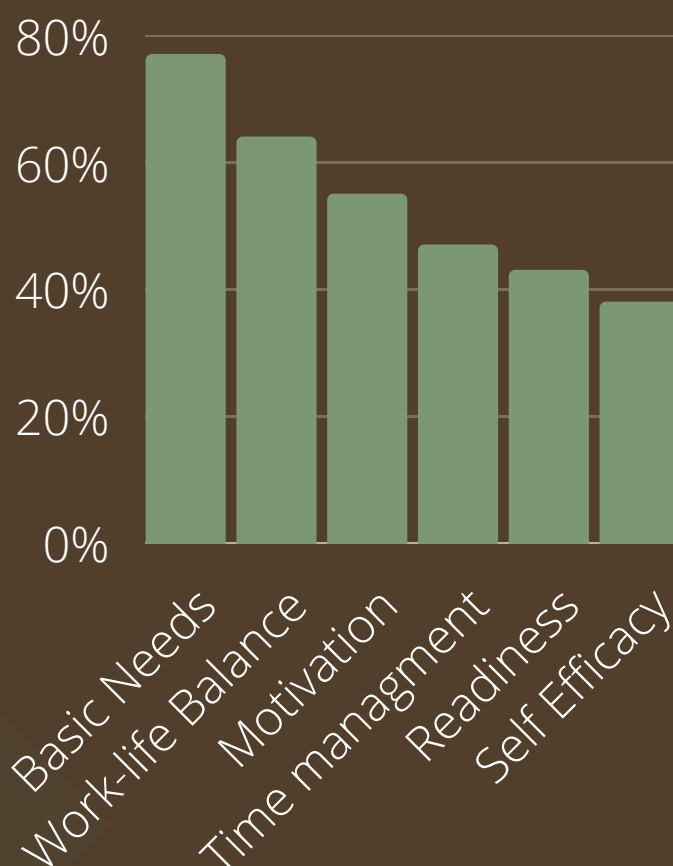
STUDENT RESPONSES WERE OVERALL POSITIVE

- A majority of the student respondents felt that they were capable of success **(70% agreed or strongly agreed).**
- When asked how the students rated their own self-efficacy, **78% rated themselves strong or very strong.**
- **77%** of students agreed or strongly agreed that the campus is able to assist them and their fellow students with their needs.
- **75%** of students agreed or strongly agreed that they knew what they needed to be successful as a student.
- **62%** of students believe that their campus provides enough resources to help them and their fellow students succeed.
- **67%** know what campus resources are available to them.
- **57%** of the student respondents believe that their campuses check in regularly with them and their fellow students on their goals.

In reviewing the survey data related specifically to students, there are a few limitations to note. While all students across the Community Colleges of Appalachia were invited to take the survey, this data represents just a subset of the overall student body. While the students who completed the survey had high self-efficacy scores overall, this may not be reflective of the majority of students. The students who completed the survey may be highly engaged students who were not only aware of the survey but had the space and time to complete it with positive responses overall.

WE ASKED 150 STUDENTS ACROSS THE CCA, "WHAT HOLDS STUDENTS BACK FROM ACADEMIC SUCCESS?"

HERE WERE THE TOP 6 RESPONSES:

1. Lack of financial resources (77%)
2. Balancing college work and family (64%)
3. Lack of motivation (55%)
4. Time management (47%)
5. Lack of college readiness (43%)
6. Limited self-efficacy (38%)

A bar chart showing percentages from 0% to 80% for the categories: Basic Needs, Work-life Balance, Motivation, Time management, Readiness, Self Efficacy.

ACCESS TO WIFI CONNECTIVITY AND TECHNOLOGY IS CONSISTENTLY SHARED AS AN INFRASTRUCTURE AND FINANCIAL CHALLENGE

While some regions have been able to improve wifi connectivity and provide access to technology that students did not have before, these issues continue to pose a challenge in certain regions. Issues with wifi connectivity and uneven access to technology became most apparent when faculty discovered instances of students writing papers using their smartphones, coming to campus in order to access wifi and take classes, and completing assignments from the parking lot or other areas where wifi access was available (i.e. McDonald's/Starbucks parking lots).

BUILDING AND MAINTAINING STRONG TIES BETWEEN THE COLLEGES AND THE LOCAL COMMUNITY

Some of the successes that colleges shared focused on strong town-gown relations. Colleges with strong partnerships in the community have access to internship programs for students, funding opportunities through lending, seamless workforce placement programs, and trusting relationships to further support students at the community college.

FAMILY IS A STRENGTH AND A CHALLENGE

Leaders acknowledged that families were a source of strength for many students while recognizing that they could also hinder student progress as well. Leaders shared that some families expressed more support for their students to attend a 4-year degree program over a 2-year degree program. Others were not supportive of a community college education at all, feeling that it would not necessarily benefit them going directly into the workforce after high school. In some situations, the student might be married, responsible for caring for aging parents or grandparents, and/or caring for a child or children. Students are thereby challenged with balancing their family life with working as well as being a student.

DEFINING AND DEEPENING THEIR UNDERSTANDING OF THE STUDENT EXPERIENCE OVERALL

One of the leaders shared that when they were in college, the messages they received were that college was the priority. They compared this message with the beliefs of many students in the Community Colleges of Appalachia, which focus on ensuring that they can meet basic needs, be it food, transportation, child care, and related needs, particularly among students coming from families experiencing intergenerational poverty.

PROVIDING RESOURCES AND SUPPORT TO STUDENTS ACADEMICALLY AND NON-ACADEMICALLY

 (address concerns around finances, transportation, childcare, parents, etc.)

Leaders emphasized the need to meet students where they are at, and use empathy to understand that before a student could succeed academically, they needed to ensure that their day-to-day needs were addressed. Successes related to addressing these needs included food pantries, emergency funding programs, child care assistance, and other related student support resources.

ADJUSTING THE CURRICULUM TO MAKE LEARNING RELEVANT AND CONNECTED TO LOCAL INDUSTRY OPPORTUNITIES

An opportunity for improvement in some regions was to provide more relevant connections between the curricular offerings and the strengths of the local industry. For example, if there was a school with a plethora of healthcare opportunities in nursing in the local area, the community college curriculum should have a strong nursing program. Taking that a step further would lead back to the community connections between the healthcare system in the region with the college, providing internship opportunities, job placement access, and other ways to remove barriers to employment.

NEED FOR SUCCESS COACHES, TUTORS, ADVISORS, AND MENTORS TO PROVIDE AN EMBEDDED SYSTEM OF SUPPORT FOR STUDENTS

Some of the colleges shared success stories related to a student success program incorporating coaches who would check in with students at regular intervals. Success stories included tutoring programs that continue to serve students at increasing rates. An idea that was shared was training students to advise and mentor their peers. This could deepen student engagement and connection, thereby enhancing their student experience overall.

VALUE OF HELPING STUDENTS DEVELOP CONFIDENCE AND A GROWTH MINDSET

Leaders noted that some students come from a fixed mindset where they do not have a good grasp on the possibilities that could be. Having potentially grown up in families experiencing intergenerational poverty, with limited resources, and limited support for pursuing higher education, some of these students lacked a growth mindset.

POWERFUL QUOTES FROM FOCUS GROUP PARTICIPANTS

Let's "remove **failure** as an optional student outcome."

COLLEGE FACULTY MEMBER

Our goal is to better evaluate the needs of our community and transition students' family support systems' perspective of higher education from "an unnecessary financial burden" to an "opportunity for financial stability and economic growth."

COLLEGE PRESIDENT

"We (the educational system as a whole) need to get rid of this **false narrative of 'the traditional college-ready student'!** Our job is to meet them (students) where they are at and support their success no matter their background!"

COLLEGE PRESIDENT

"Midterms and finals are not the (ideal) time to start conversations about tutoring and basic needs. Systems of Support should be offered prior to and/or early in the term to ensure we are setting our students up for success."

COLLEGE STAFF MEMBER

"We are only as successful as our **most disproportionately impacted** students."

COLLEGE STAFF MEMBER

" "I have seen students writing full research papers on their cell phones. I am confident they have the drive to succeed, so I want to do all I can to connect them to the resources they need to ensure their success."

COLLEGE FACULTY MEMBER

" We go to these conferences and learn all of these new promising practices, then the conversation ends, and we have nowhere to share our success or work through our (programmatic and institutional) challenges." The creation of collaborative spaces may be the key to long-lasting success.

COLLEGE STAFF

"Establishing course offerings and rotations that are deemed relevant and necessary to the communities we serve is essential for moving the needle on completion (rates) ... Our students' intrinsic motivation can be directly tied to our institution's ability to ensure timely completion."

COLLEGE FACULTY MEMBER

As we begin to embark on this collective journey to create equitable cultures of student success for our BIPOC and rural Appalachian students, we first must identify the core competencies to be achieved by our faculty, staff and leader participants. Following Bloom's Taxonomy to encourage higher-order thought, there are a set of core competencies that all three groups will accumulate together to solidify a "common language" among all participants. You will find that the first set of competencies, titled **"Core Competencies,"** follows the first three levels of behavioral and cognitive learning outcomes. These competencies will provide a common "knowledge, understanding, and application" of cognitive principles among cohorts and students. The second set of core competencies, titled **"Equitable & Cultural Impact (College Core Competencies)"** are the learning outcomes derived from the initial surveys, interviews, and focus groups outlining specific areas to be addressed by each group/cohort on their respective campuses. The achievement of these competencies will foster in-depth analysis, evaluation, and creativity as the REA participants work towards a more equitable culture of rural student success on their campuses and within the CCA.

COMMON CORE COMPETENCIES FOR ALL PARTICIPANTS AND FACILITATORS

UPON COMPLETION OF THE REA PILOT PROGRAM, ***FACULTY, STAFF & LEADERS WILL BE ABLE TO…***
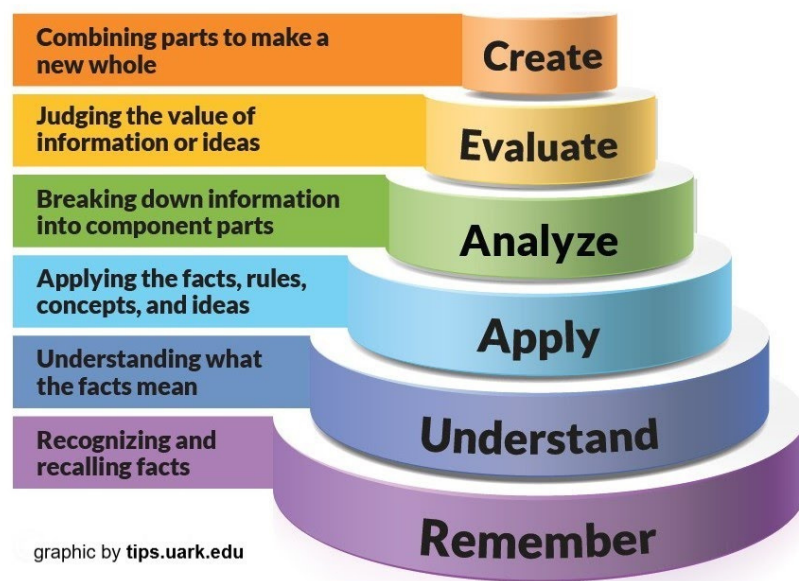
- Examine and discuss the concept of self-efficacy and the value of goals/goal-setting in their personal and professional ability to help increase rural student success in and out of the classroom.
- Articulate personal and professional cognitive blindspots to help develop an increase in rural student success in and out of the classroom.
- Define the components of the mind in relation to the root causes of conscious and subconscious decision-making.
- Examine and express their personal and professional understanding of how beliefs are formed.
- Describe habits and attitudes, their importance to accomplishing goals, and how to visualize new habits and attitudes to help increase rural Appalachian student success in and out of the classroom.
- Identify the three dimensions of self-talk (words, pictures, emotions) and describe how self-talk builds belief systems.
- Articulate and develop their own personal and professional plan to form their self-concept and self-image with their own self-talk.
- Define and examine the root causes of culture (HABEs – Habits, Attitudes, Beliefs, Expectations), discuss what culture is designed to do, and change productivity through this lens.
- Differentiate limiting and liberating HABEs (Habits, Attitudes, Beliefs, Expectations) that impact student success for Appalachian rural students.

COMMON CORE COMPETENCIES FOR ALL PARTICIPANTS AND FACILITATORS (CONTINUED)

UPON COMPLETING THE REA PILOT PROGRAM, **FACULTY/STAFF/LEADERS WILL BE ABLE TO...**

- Articulate and experiment with the concept of human comfort zones, how they are created, and how they impact human decision-making.
- Explain the importance of building self-esteem and confidence with self and others.
- Articulate the elements of the subconscious mind, the four functions of the creative subconscious mind, and the importance of teaching rural Appalachian students how to create and achieve their own image of success.
- Define the guidelines to use in writing effective affirmations to be used personally and professionally to help increase rural Appalachian student success in and out of the classroom.
- Experiment with the use of the affirmation process to expand comfort zones and change attitudes for rural Appalachian students.
- Examine the impact of the collective environmental self-image, how the environmental self-image impacts environmental comfort zones, and how the affirmation process can be used to change both for the benefit of increasing student success rates for rural Appalachian students.
- Identify and discuss the two types of motivation and create an environment where everyone can function with freedom, confidence, and without fear.
- Define the Reticular Activating System (RAS), articulate its role in making decisions, and develop a system to utilize the RAS to help self, team, campus and students increase the success rates of Appalachian rural students.

Bloom's Taxonomy

Combining parts to make a new whole — **Create**
Judging the value of information or ideas — **Evaluate**
Breaking down information into component parts — **Analyze**
Applying the facts, rules, concepts, and ideas — **Apply**
Understanding what the facts mean — **Understand**
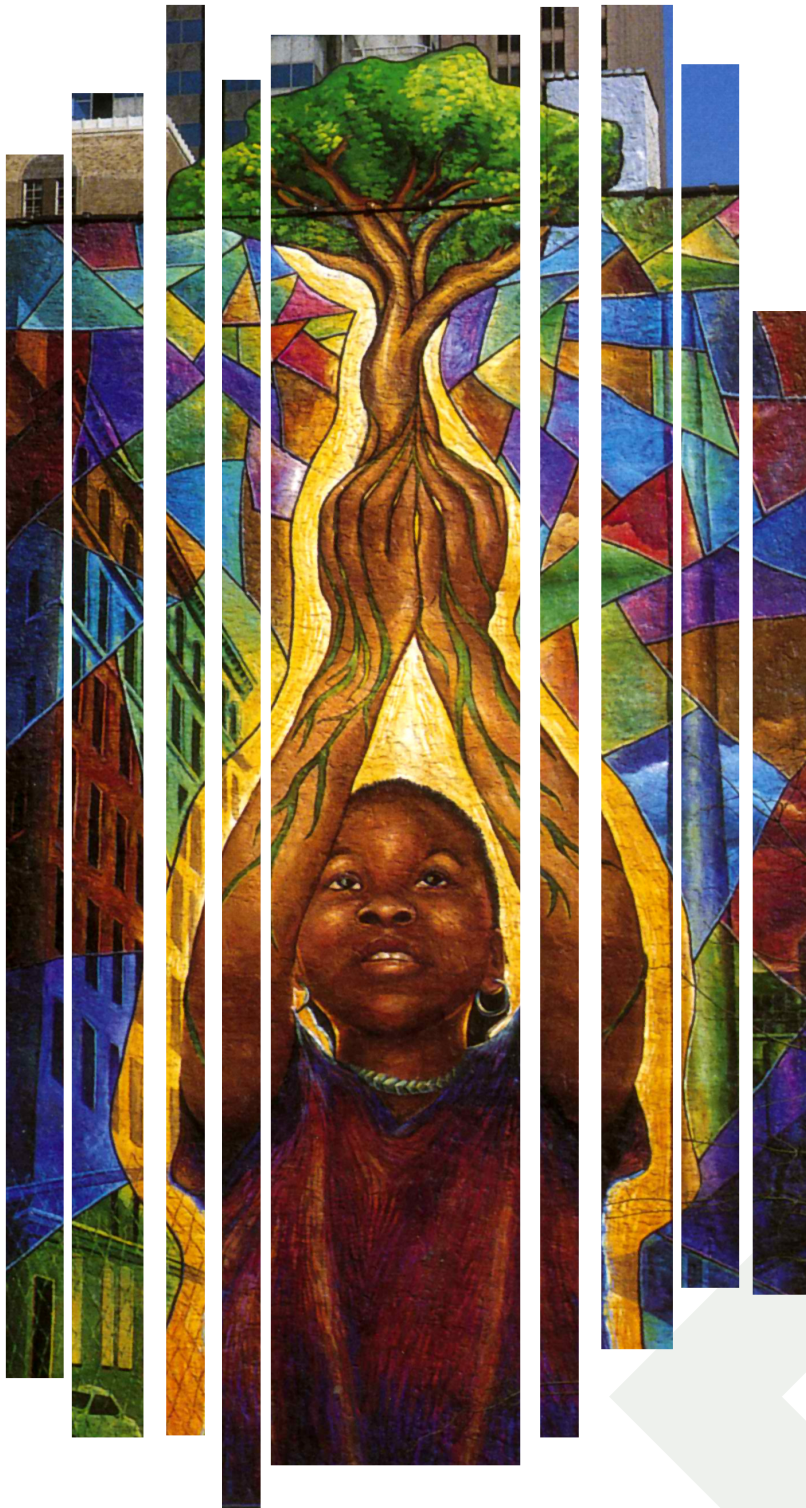Recognizing and recalling facts — **Remember**

graphic by **tips.uark.edu**

EQUITABLE & CULTURAL IMPACT (COLLEGE CORE COMPETENCIES)

UPON COMPLETION OF THE REA, *FACULTY PARTICIPANTS WILL BE ABLE TO:*

- Define, examine, and identify the ideal root causes to a liberated student success experience for Appalachian rural students.
- Collaborate with staff and leaders to structure a success coaching model centered on the rural Appalachian student experience.
- Collaborate with staff and leaders to develop innovative ways to build relationships in the community to increase enrollment among non-traditional students.
- Design and facilitate ways to incorporate the rural student experience into the syllabus/lesson plan to utilize the voices of rural and non-rural students to identify and create ways to increase rural student success.
- Create ways to validate the experience of rural non-traditional students in and out of the classroom
- Outline and design credential programs specific to local target markets.
- Collaborate with staff and leaders to connect with local elementary, middle, and high schools.

EQUITABLE & CULTURAL IMPACT (COLLEGE CORE COMPETENCIES)

UPON COMPLETION OF THE REA, *REA STAFF PARTICIPANTS WILL BE ABLE TO:*

- Define, examine, and identify the ideal root causes to a liberated student success experience for Appalachian rural students.
- Identify and outline the many barriers preventing rural student success, reframe this experience through the lens of equity, and create a plan that centers the rural Appalachian experience throughout the campus student support systems.
- Structure a process that validates the rural Appalachian student experience, increasing the awareness and utilization of student support services in a timely fashion to increase rural Appalachian student success.
- Outline and integrate innovative methods to listen to and learn more about a student's background, needs, and reason for being in school.
- Work with leaders and faculty to negotiate and reorganize how support is provided during off-hours and weekends to increase student success for rural Appalachian students.
- Outline, recommend and integrate new HABEs to increase awareness, empathy, and support for rural Appalachian students from their recruitment process to their graduation and into their career fields or next step in academia.
- (Where possible) formulate opportunities to increase partnerships between the college and community to increase student success for rural Appalachian students.
- Compile a working articulation for prospective, incoming, and current rural Appalachian students outlining the value of student experiences and how these experiences, directly and indirectly, translate into employment.
- Reframe and formulate the ideal picture for supporting mental health and rural students with disabilities.
- Design ways to integrate first-generation college celebrations for rural Appalachian students and their families.
- Design and facilitate ways to incorporate the rural student experience into the programming/education initiatives to utilize the voices of rural and non-rural students to identify and create ways to increase rural student success.
- Create ways to validate the experience of rural non-traditional students in and out of the classroom.
- Collaborate with faculty and leaders to connect with local elementary, middle, and high schools
- Structure a process to hear from local manufacturers and industry professionals on what they look for in new employees to incorporate in the support services giving rural Appalachian students advanced insight in professional careers after graduation.

EQUITABLE & CULTURAL IMPACT (COLLEGE CORE COMPETENCIES)

UPON COMPLETION OF THE REA, *REA LEADER PARTICIPANTS WILL BE ABLE TO:*

- Define, examine, and identify the ideal root causes to a liberated student success experience for Appalachian rural students.
- Create ways to validate the experience of rural non-traditional students in and out of the classroom.
- Design and facilitate ways to incorporate the rural student experience into policy to utilize the voices of rural and non-rural students to identify and create ways to increase rural student success.
- Collaborate with staff and faculty to connect with local elementary, middle, and high schools.
- Collaborate with staff and faculty to create a rotation for leaders to teach/co-lead the FYE seminar and/or new student orientation.
- Structure a process to hear from local manufacturers and industry professionals on what they look for in new employees to incorporate in the lesson plans giving rural Appalachian students advanced insight in professional careers after graduation.
- Institutionalize a plan for high school graduates with no intention to attend college the opportunity for a condensed educational session series to prepare them for the next steps of enrollment or a life plan.
- Collaborate with staff and faculty to outreach to marginalized groups in the local community.
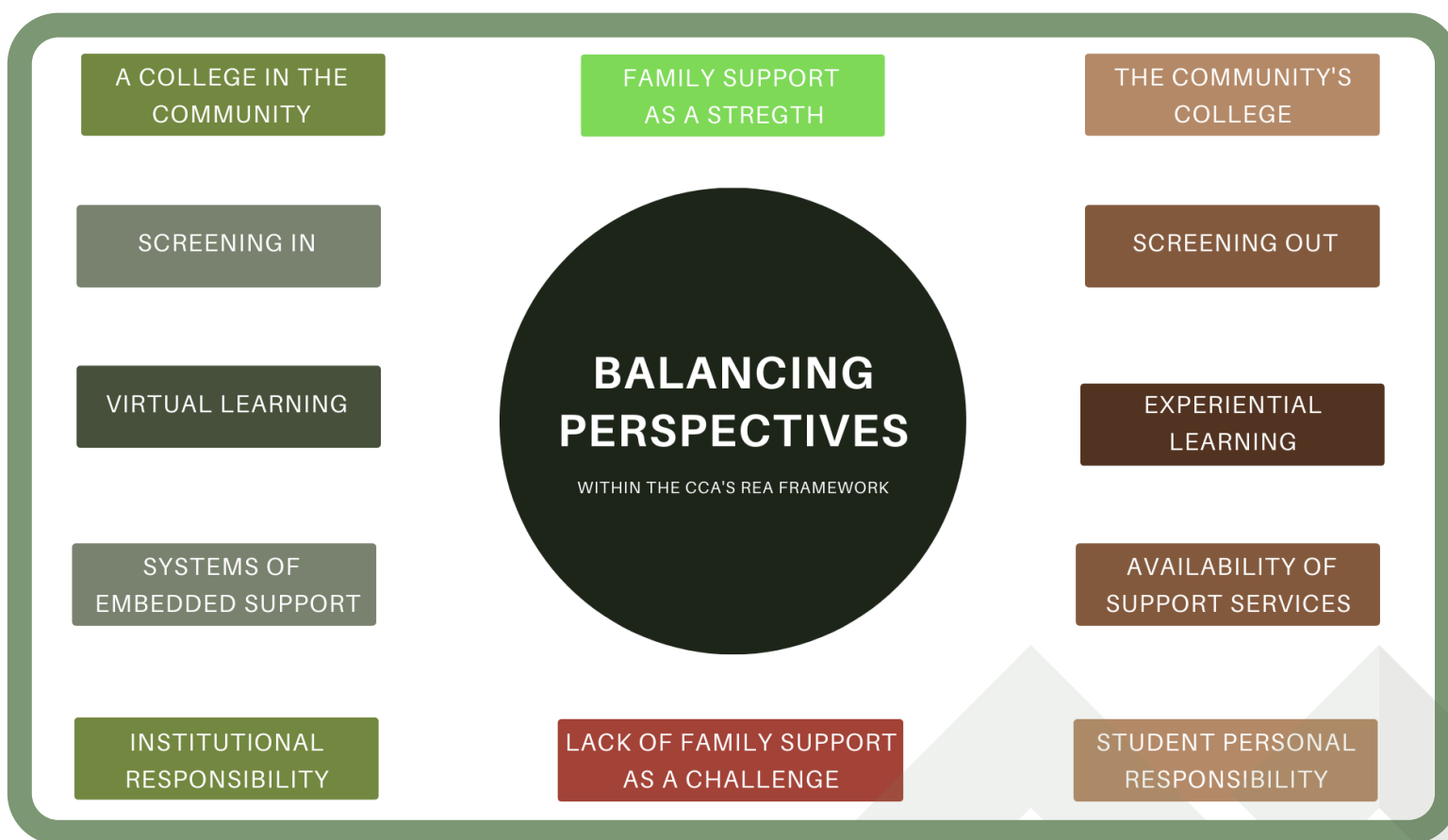
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The community members, executive committee, faculty, leaders, staff, and students shared incredibly rich insight through the focus group discussions, individual interviews, and survey responses. In this brief, as we have walked you through the core of the common themes highlighted, the CCA community membership demonstrated deep care for their students and the further development of the community. In the full report, we will further explore participant feedback through the lens of each constituency group as we continue to the last steps of our curriculum design and alignment process.

A COLLEGE IN THE COMMUNITY	FAMILY SUPPORT AS A STRETGH	THE COMMUNITY'S COLLEGE
SCREENING IN		SCREENING OUT
VIRTUAL LEARNING	**BALANCING PERSPECTIVES** WITHIN THE CCA'S REA FRAMEWORK	EXPERIENTIAL LEARNING
SYSTEMS OF EMBEDDED SUPPORT		AVAILABILITY OF SUPPORT SERVICES
INSTITUTIONAL RESPONSIBILITY	LACK OF FAMILY SUPPORT AS A CHALLENGE	STUDENT PERSONAL RESPONSIBILITY

Want to learn more?

This information will be presented at the 29th Annual Community Colleges of Appalachia Conference on June 5th-7th, 2022 in Asheville North Carolina!
To learn more, visit www.ccofapp.org/events-conferences.

THE APPLICATION PROCESS FOR REA PILOT PROGRAM IS SCHEDULED TO OPEN ON FRIDAY, JUNE 10, 2022