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Barriers to Success in College Education:

Preparedness: Students are not prepared for the rigors of college when they arrive. Many students have not mastered basic math and writing skills so they start out taking remedial classes to hone skills that should be taught in K-12. This means they struggle in the early classes they take. When this happens the entire foundation of their college education is shaken. They doubt themselves, question their ability to succeed at college level work and many will quit because they believe they are going to fail. Others do fail and just give up while some fail and try again. Some do find the way to succeed, but it is a difficult road.

We need to recognize K-12 as the foundation of a lifetime of learning, a key piece of the success of every individual in every walk of life. Then we need to teach our students from kindergarten on how to be a successful learner. Not how to pass a test or regurgitate information, but how to think about, retain and use the information they are given.

Access: This is a difficult point. At the end of the day education costs money. We need to find a way to reduce or eliminate the barrier of wealth in education. We also need to revamp the student loan system so that it does not become a lifetime burden on a student who could not pay cash for their education. Creating debt before they have even started, then facing up to 20 years of payments (and that is only if they get everything done correctly) is a daunting thought for students who have grown up in environments of poverty or low income. It creates a stress and a NEED to succeed that puts too much pressure on a student trying to navigate higher education. The stress only increases the probability that they will not make it to graduation.

We need students to be able to come to college and graduate without adding additional stress from outside factors. They already face the stress of college courses, life away from home, learning how to be adults and take actions to advocate for themselves, and potentially working while doing all of this. The cost of education will always be prevalent in a student's mind, but it should not cause so much stress that it detracts from the focus of their courses.

External Barriers: I have seen, multiple times, students having to work jobs to send money home. The families were relying on the student to contribute upon graduation from high school and cannot afford to have them gone to college. The students exhaust themselves trying to do everything. The result is that nothing is done well making them feel like they are failing. The reality is many of them are failing their courses.

We need to find a way to support these students on campus. Help them prioritize their goals so that they can succeed. They are young and have not yet developed the life skills to be able to recognize the barriers in the path, much less the way around them. They are also fighting the culture they come from that says family is everything and should always come first, not recognizing they will be better able to help their family if they succeed in higher ed. We have to find a way to allow them to focus on their education while remaining true to their family and culture.