

Blackboard survey reveals support “gap” for at-risk students and students of color

Nearly 80% of students considering discontinuing their studies believed their institution can do more to keep them enrolled

RESTON, VA – A survey from global EdTech leader Blackboard Inc., conducted in consultation with Qualtrics, revealed a significant gap in critical student support services for at-risk and minority students at their institutions. The survey of more than 2,100 postsecondary students across the United States released today also found that a more personalized and proactive approach to support services at higher education institutions could play a critical role in helping students at risk of dropping out persist.

“Real gaps for at-risk and minority students emerged in the survey results,” said Richa Batra, Vice President of Student Success at Blackboard. “At-risk student populations were less likely to have received support in the past, less likely to know where to find it, and found it more difficult to receive it. It’s a triple red flag for institutions.”

While the majority of students (52 percent) said they were satisfied with the level of support they received during COVID, the survey also found that students of color and those “at risk of not returning” had much less confidence they could find the support they needed across all categories of student support. For example, at-risk students were nearly half as likely to feel confident they could find academic/tutoring support (32 percent vs 60 percent) and students of color were 13 percentage points less confident they could find academic/tutoring support than their white peers.

But there’s hope—79 percent of at-risk students believe their institutions can or might be able to take action to keep them on track.

“Students made it clear, there’s a path to preventing stop out. Quality support matters—now more than ever,” said Batra. “And it starts with being intentional about making support available.”

The survey found that support became increasingly important during the pandemic and students want support services that meet them where they are. They valued round-the-clock availability and support that was faster and easier to find. It also revealed there isn’t a one-size-fits-all approach to student support and a personalized experience tailored to the student could potentially be the most effective strategy—particularly for more vulnerable student populations. For example, to improve their schools’ support services, students of color favored making them technology-enabled while at-risk students were much more likely to prefer automated services like chatbots and self-service phone menus for receiving support.

“Students, especially at-risk students, can’t take advantage of support if they can’t find it or if it’s not available when they are,” said Batra. “By identifying at-risk students and proactively engaging them with a personalized approach that meets their unique needs, institutions can truly make a difference by keeping students on path toward success.”

Mental health also emerged as a critical area of support for all students – tied with financial aid as the most important support service. Despite its importance, mental health received the lowest marks across all services for access to support and level of satisfaction. At-risk students also cited mental health as the second most important factor (44 percent) impacting their ability to stay enrolled (following financial aid at 50 percent).

Blackboard’s Student Success Solutions offer a holistic framework for institutions to help students reach their full potential. Those solutions use mobile student engagement tools and robust data insights to help identify at-risk students, tailor interventions, and improve outcomes increasing student satisfaction, retention, and graduation rates.

An executive summary of the survey results with additional insights is available [here](#).

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