

Quality Coaching is Rooted in Relationships

Principle 4

- Principle 1: Centered on education-to-career-outcomes
- Principle 2: Driven by student agency
- Principle 3: Foundation and universal
- Principle 4: Rooted in relationships
- Principle 5: Informed by data and evidence



This principle emphasizes grounding education-to-career coaching in trusted relationships with faculty, staff, and coaches, while intentionally connecting students to networks, resources, and services that support their goals. It centers engagement with students' communities of support, including family, peers, and mentors, as critical to confidence, persistence, and long-term success.

In practice, this approach positions a broader community of support around students, where strong relationships turn advising into real opportunities by connecting them to networks, resources, and services within and beyond the

institution. As a result, students build confidence, expand their social capital, and are better equipped to navigate their education and career pathways successfully.

Research on this Quality Coaching principle suggests that sustained, relationship-based career coaching improves students' confidence, readiness, and academic outcomes, especially when it is personalized, identity-informed, and embedded within comprehensive support systems. Evidence highlights the importance of consistent relationships, tailored programming, faculty engagement, and integrated services in driving student success.

What the Evidence Shows¹

Consistent, sustained relationships improve outcomes. Frequent, one-on-one interactions with advisors, coaches, or mentors are associated with stronger academic persistence, greater credit accumulation, and increased career confidence. Evidence shows that both the frequency and duration of engagement matter, particularly when paired with ongoing academic monitoring and timely support for students who are struggling, leading to better retention in wraparound services and support programs.²

Shared identities and personalized relationships build trust. Research highlights the importance of shared backgrounds and identities — especially for students of color and first-generation students — in fostering trust, validation, and a sense of belonging. These relationships also expand access to professional networks and information that students may not otherwise reach.³

Engaging faculty, staff, and near-peers strengthens career advising. Studies point to the value of decentralizing career guidance by equipping faculty, staff, and near-peer mentors to support students' career development. Students often report more frequent contact with faculty advisors and greater confidence in their guidance, with regular engagement increasing students' clarity and confidence about post-graduation labor market options.⁴

Integrated and comprehensive supports drive success. Programs that intentionally integrate career guidance with academic advising, tutoring, financial aid, and other support services – often through dedicated staff and coordinated teams – demonstrate positive impacts on academic progress, degree attainment, and career clarity for students. Coordinated supports allow programs to respond more effectively to students’ multiple and intersecting needs.⁵

Targeted, intensive, career-focused programs improve career readiness and earnings potential for historically underserved students. Evidence is particularly strong for low-income, first-generation students and students with disabilities, for whom these programs are associated with improved employment outcomes. These effects often are driven by sustained, trust-based relationships with staff, faculty, and employers that provide

structured mentoring and personalized guidance. For students with visual impairments, vocational rehabilitation and informed college-to-coaching relationships help students navigate accommodations, clarify career goals, and connect to employment opportunities.⁶



Spotlighting Effective Practices and Models in the Research

The Year Up program and its college-based Professional Training Corps are workforce development models implemented across multiple states that combine technical training, career coaching, internships, and employer connections to support young adults’ transition to college and careers. A defining feature of these programs is the presence of dedicated staff who provide structured coaching, monitor student progress, and coordinate academic, professional, and internship experiences in collaboration with college faculty and employer partners. This model reflects a case management approach, in which staff deliver individualized, ongoing support, track participant outcomes, and intervene as needed to address professional and personal barriers to success. The program integrates classroom learning with real-world work experiences and sustained mentorship, helping students build both technical and professional skills. Rigorous evaluation findings indicate positive impacts on participants’ earnings outcomes, the largest reported to date for workforce programs tested using a randomized controlled trial design.⁷

iMentor is a school-based mentoring model implemented in New York City that pairs high school students with mentors to build long-term, relationship-centered support for postsecondary and career readiness. A defining feature of iMentor is its structured, technology-supported mentoring relationships, which are facilitated by program staff who coordinate mentor matching, curriculum, and ongoing engagement over multiple years. The program emphasizes consistent mentor-student interaction, career exploration, and goal setting, helping students navigate postsecondary planning with guidance from a trusted adult. iMentor has been shown to improve mentoring access, career exploration skills, and postsecondary aspirations, while also increasing resilience and critical thinking skills.⁸

Endnotes

¹ [A group of national experts developed the five Principles for Quality Education-to-Career Guidance which guided this systematic literature review.](#) The review examined U.S.-based peer-reviewed and high-quality grey literature published between 2016 and 2025, including studies, policy briefs, and reports focused on high school and higher education populations. Sources were selected using replicable inclusion criteria to ensure relevance to education-to-career coaching and guidance practices.

² David Fein and Jill Hamadyk. "Bridging the Opportunity Divide for Low-Income Youth: Implementation and Early Impacts of the Year Up Program. Pathways for Advancing Careers and Education. OPRE Report 2018-65." (Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Children & Families, Office of Planning, Research and Evaluation, 2018); David Fein and Rebecca A. Maynard. "Improvement Testing in the Year Up Professional Training Corps Program: Final Grant Report." (Rockville, MD: Abt Associates, October 2022); David Fein, Rebecca Maynard, Rebecca Baelen, Azim Shivji, and Phomdaen Souvanna. "To Improve and to Prove: A Development and Innovation Study of Year Up's Professional Training Corps." (Rockville, MD: Abt Associates, October 2020). Bryan C. Hutchins, Emma Alterman, Cassie Wuest, John Sludden, and Julie A. Edmunds. "The Role of High School Career-Focused Advising in Students' Postsecondary Planning: A Qualitative Study." (Greensboro, NC: University of North Carolina at Greensboro, Early College Research Center, October 2024); Joseph A. Kitchen, Adrianna Kezar, and Liane I. Hypolite. "At-promise college student major and career self-efficacy ecology model." *Journal of Diversity in Higher Education* 16, no. 3 (June 2023): 369-383; Tamara Linkow, Erin Bumgarner, Hayley Didriksen, Kelly Lack, Austin Nichols, Emily Dastrup, Samuel Dastrup, and Beth Gamse. "The Story of Scaling Up: Interim Report on the Impact of Success Boston's Coaching for Completion." (Rockville, MD: Abt Associates, October 2019); Cynthia Miller and Michael J. Weiss. "Increasing community college graduation rates: A synthesis of findings on the ASAP model from six colleges across two states." *Educational Evaluation and Policy Analysis* 44, no. 2 (June 2022): 210-233; Cynthia Miller, Camielle Headlam, Michelle Manno, and Dan Cullinan. "Increasing Community College Graduation Rates with a Proven Model: Three-Year Results from the Accelerated Study in Associate Programs (ASAP) Ohio Demonstration." (New York: MDRC, January 2020); Susan Scrivener, Himani Gupta, Michael J. Weiss, Benjamin Cohen, Maria Scott Cormier, and Jessica Brathwaite. "Becoming College-ready: Early Findings from a CUNY Start Evaluation." (New York: MDRC, July 2018); Brett Ranon Nachman, Laura G. Maldonado, Catherine Hartman, and Sarah A. Deal. "How career coaches employed by community colleges shape students' postsecondary and professional pathways in North Carolina public high schools." *Community College Journal of Research and Practice* 48, no. 12 (December 2024): 773-788; Natassia Rodriguez Ott, Sandra Staklis, and Jonathan Boyette. "The effectiveness of student coaching in community colleges." *Community College Journal of Research and Practice* 44, no. 8 (August 2020): 549-562; Christin Spatz, Kara Romanowski, Jordan Wolfheimer, and Tanja Adonizio. "Novel career coaching model: A descriptive, interim program evaluation for undergraduate medical student career advising." *The Guthrie Journal* 73, no. 2 (December 2021): 34039.

³ Pamela E. Krieger Cohen and Ane Turner Johnson. "Career counselors self-disclosing to first-generation college students: A grounded theory study." *Journal of Career Development* 49, no. 3 (June 2022): 491-504; Ariana L. Garcia, Mary Dueñas, and Blanca E. Rincón. "Culturally responsive mentoring: A psychosociocultural perspective on sustaining students of color career aspirations in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM)." *Journal of Diversity in Higher Education* 18, no. S1 (September 2025): S461-S472; Erik M. Hines, Edward C. Fletcher Jr., James L. Moore III, and Donna Y. Ford. "Culturally responsive postsecondary readiness practices for Black males: Practice and policy recommendations for school counselors." *Journal of School-Based Counseling Policy and Evaluation* 4, no. 1 (June 2022): 32-43; Dorian L. McCoy, Courtney L. Luedke, and Rachelle Winkle-Wagner. "Encouraged or weeded out: Perspectives of students of color in the STEM disciplines on faculty interactions." *Journal of College Student Development* 58, no. 5 (July 2017): 657-673; Christopher D. Slaten, Kate Wadley, Paul C. Harris, Bini Sebastian, Jisu Lee, and Bradley R. Curs. "'We try to build relationships': The role of school community and belonging on career preparedness." *Journal of Career Development* 51, no. 5 (October 2024): 560-578.

⁴ Ashley A. Boat, Alejandra Miranda, and Amy K. Syvertsen. "Enhancing education and career pathways through peer and near-peer social capital." *Journal of Youth and Adolescence* 51, no. 7 (July 2022): 1287-1304; Neilan S. Chaturvedi and Mario A. Guerrero. "Career preparation and faculty advising: How faculty advising can improve student outcomes and prepare them for life after graduation." *Journal of Political Science Education* 19, no. 1 (2023): 34-47; Kitchen et al., "At-promise college student major and career self-efficacy ecology model"; Michael Lanford and Tattiya Maruco. "When job training is not enough: The cultivation of social capital in career academies." *American Educational Research Journal* 55, no. 3 (June 2018): 617-648; Kristin M. Vespia, Stephanie D. Freis, and Rebecca M. Arrowood. "Faculty and career advising: Challenges, opportunities, and outcome assessment." *Teaching of Psychology* 45, no. 1 (January 2018): 24-31.

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Endnotes

⁵Miller and Weiss, "Increasing community college graduation rates: A synthesis of findings on the ASAP model from six colleges across two states"; Miller et al., "Increasing Community College Graduation Rates with a Proven Model: Three-Year Results from the Accelerated Study in Associate Programs (ASAP) Ohio Demonstration"; Scrivener et al., "Becoming College-ready: Early Findings from a CUNY Start Evaluation."

⁶Karla Antonelli, Jamie O'Mally, and Anne Steverson. "Participant experiences in an employment mentoring program for college students with visual impairments." *Journal of Visual Impairment & Blindness* 112, no. 3 (May-June 2018): 274-286; Karla Antonelli, Anne Steverson, and Jamie O'Mally. "College graduates with visual impairments: A report on seeking and finding employment." *Journal of Visual Impairment & Blindness* 112, no. 1 (January-February 2018): 33-45; Fein and Hamadyk. "Bridging the Opportunity Divide for Low-Income Youth: Implementation and Early Impacts of the Year Up Program. Pathways for Advancing Careers and Education. OPRE Report 2018-65"; Kitchen et al., "At-promise college student major and career self-efficacy"; Jamie O'Mally and Karla Antonelli. "The effect of career mentoring on employment outcomes for college students who are legally blind." *Journal of Visual Impairment & Blindness* 110, no. 5 (September-October 2016): 295-307; Shelley A. Phelan, Shannon M. Harding, and Amanda S. Harper-Leatherman. "BASE (broadening access to science education): A research and mentoring focused summer STEM camp serving underrepresented high school girls." *Journal of STEM Education: Innovations and Research* 18, no. 1 (January-March 2017): 65-72; James K. Winfield. "TRIO works: The impact of student support services on the career self-efficacy of first-generation students." *Opportunity Matters: Journal of Access and Opportunity in Education* 4 (Summer 2022): 102-125.

⁷Fein and Hamadyk, "Bridging the Opportunity Divide for Low-Income Youth: Implementation and Early Impacts of the Year Up Program"; Fein and Maynard, "Improvement Testing in the Year Up Professional Training Corps Program: Final Grant Report"; Fein et al., "To Improve and to Prove: A Development and Innovation Study of Year Up's Professional Training Corps."

⁸Lisa Merrill, Rachel Cole, Jasmine Soltani, and David Kang. "iMentor's College Ready Program: Examining Implementation and Impacts for 10th Graders. Report." (New York: Research Alliance for New York City Schools, December 2017).