For over a decade, colleges have relied on early alerts, submitted by faculty, to surface at-risk students and ultimately prevent them from slipping through the cracks. When successfully managed, early-alert programs can improve academic outcomes as well as retention and graduation rates. But too often, these programs have critical gaps that make them uncoordinated and inefficient.

Through our work with more than 500 Student Success Collaborative members, we uncovered the five building blocks of successful early-alert programs and strategies to bridge the gaps.

1. **Goal Setting**
   - CHALLENGE: Most early-alert programs don’t have an objective beyond “identify and assist students who may be at risk.” Without clear parameters, faculty flag large numbers of students, overwhelming staff with too many alerts.
   - SUGGESTED REPAIR: Establish clear early-alert program objectives that include specific outcomes and well-defined student populations. Ensure program objectives align with larger institutional goals.

2. **Collection**
   - CHALLENGE: Early-alert programs depend on strong faculty participation to succeed. Without clearly outlined expectations—such as when alerts are due and what follow-up they can expect to see—faculty are unlikely to participate.
   - SUGGESTED REPAIR: Make your program faculty-friendly. Provide a short list of descriptive early-alert reasons, set clear expectations and reporting deadlines, nudge non-responders, and close the loop when early alerts are resolved.

3. **Triage**
   - CHALLENGE: Once an early alert is submitted, there is typically no formalized triage process that determines who is responsible for following up and in what timeframe.
   - SUGGESTED REPAIR: Determine your early-alert triage process based on available resources. Across the Collaborative, some schools have a single office triage all alerts, others ask advisors to triage alerts, and others configure EAB Navigate to automatically triage certain alert reasons.

4. **Intervention Pathways**
   - CHALLENGE: Without clear guidelines for what to do after an early alert is triaged, staff respond in varied ways, impacting the quality and consistency of care.
   - SUGGESTED REPAIR: Establish “Intervention Pathways,” or blueprints, for responding to different types of early alerts. Intervention Pathways determine a single, scalable intervention for each early alert.

5. **Assessment**
   - CHALLENGE: Most schools don’t measure the impact of early-alert interventions, preventing them from understanding which efforts worked, determining which efforts to scale, and using evidence to promote the program.
   - SUGGESTED REPAIR: Conduct rigorous and regular evaluation to understand the program’s impact and iterate accordingly.

**IN YOUR Early-Alert Program**

- **National Louis University**
  - Leaders selected first-time, day-time, full-time students (a new student population) as the target population for their early-alert program and set a goal of 90%.
  - 90+% Retention rate for target population, achieving goal

- **Pueblo Community College**
  - Leaders achieved almost universal faculty participation by making it easier for faculty to integrate early-alert campaigns into their workflow.
  - 94% Faculty participation in early-alert campaign for TRIO students

- **Danville Community College**
  - Some early alerts trigger an email to students with self-service resources, including links to sign up for tutoring.
  - 14% Increase in pass rates among at-risk developmental math students

- **Mercy College**
  - Intervention Pathways function like a manual for staff who respond to early alerts and keep students on track, making it easier for them to provide coordinated care.
  - 8 Number of robust Intervention Pathways established to improve staff efficiency

- **Clayton State University**
  - Every year, staff compare midterm and final grades for flagged students who met with support staff—and use this data to evaluate impact and make improvements.
  - 0.94 Grade increase between midterm and final for flagged students with appointments

Learn more about how to improve student outcomes.