



# **Empowering Diverse Learners: A Strengths-Based Approach to Teaching and Advising in Technical Colleges**

**Dr. Robyn Mixon- Davis**

**August 2025**



**DR. ROBYN MIXON-DAVIS**

# About me

- Transition Specialist (3 years)
- Post- Secondary Coordinator
- Special Education Teacher (17 years)
  - Core Replacement & Resource
- Adjunct Professor at Tri County Tech
- Dorchester 4 School District
- Author of the book *For the Love of Maddie*



# Objectives

## Objective 1

Discuss strategies and considerations for inclusive communications from a strengths based perspective.

## Objective 2

Identify opportunities and resources and assistive technologies outside of the classroom.

## Objective 3

Explain the impact of seeking support on student performance and postsecondary environments.



# Teaching students with barriers to learning...

(National Council on Disability, 2024; Nation Center of Education Statistics, 2024)

- 65% of students with a reported disability reported disability no longer present in college

- 37% of students who report having a disability informed their college

- Only 12 to 13 % of students who has a disability report it at 2 and 4 year colleges

- 85% of students at 4 year colleges report receiving accommodations compared to 57% at 2-year colleges

# Becoming Ready to Work

(National Council on Disability, 2024; Nation Center of Education Statistics, 2024)

- Hard Skills get jobs.
- Soft skills, taught directly and vicariously, are the foundation of a career.

- Demographics
  - career changers
  - skilled trade workers
  - bridge students
  - continuing ed. students
  - Students who want the opportunity at 'college'

# Academic Barriers

- Students with barriers to learning increased from 3% in 1978 to 20.5% in 2020.
  - intelligence or abilities
  - unsupported talent
  - low performing students



# Students with Academic Barriers

- 65% of students report not having a previously existing barrier, including a learning disability
- While only 12 to 13% of students disclose they have a disability impacting learning (*more likely in a 4-year college*)
- Of the 44% with learning disabilities who enroll are placed in remedial courses, 75% will not graduate

(collegeatlas.org, 2024)



# Skill Deficit

(Blasey, Wang, & Blasey 2023; Hudson , 2013)

## Self- advocacy

- when students self-advocate their GPA increases significantly.
- students with barriers to academics are more likely to graduate within 6 years, if they self- advocate.
- students feel respected and heard



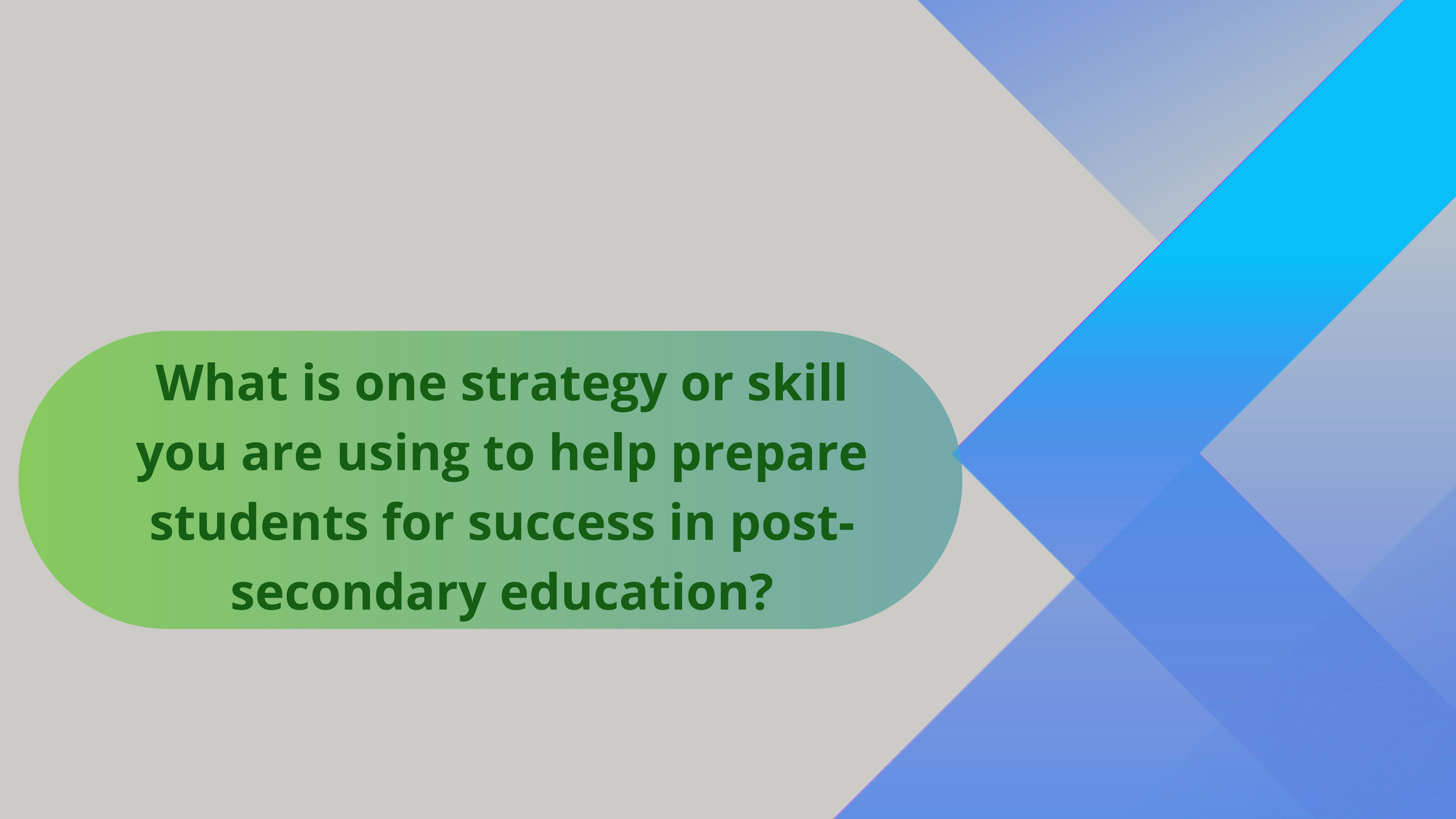


AWARENESS

**(Hirano & Rowe, 2016)**

## **Educator's Awareness**

- Developing a positive relationship with students.
- Having an understanding and approachable demeanor
- Knowing student's goal for taking the course.
- Awareness of students' and class cross-comparison of similarities and differences.
- Offer suggestions to students who are struggling.
- Acknowledge student's strengths



**What is one strategy or skill  
you are using to help prepare  
students for success in post-  
secondary education?**



# An educator's influence

- We serve a range of students
- Some students can benefit from knowing the practical resources that we use to navigate as professionals, and understand that it is acceptable to use support
- The manner in which we support can influence student's behavior, enrollment, attendance in our colleges
- Advising students from a strengths based perspective with respect can impact them in school and as a professional.

# Suggestions for Educators





## Effective Communications

- **Time to listen (flexibility)!**
  - Encouraging self- advocacy
  - Asking for help
    - **Suggest Peer Connections**
      - Discovering Interest
      - Purpose



## Attentiveness to Learners

- **Recognize barriers**
- **Suggest support services**
  - *(tutoring centers or writing labs, disability services for accommodations, financial aid offices, counseling service, food pantries, or housing support)*
- **Highlighting Exemplars**



## Assistive Technology Recommendations

- Set up Microsoft or Google Calendar reminders
- Spelling and grammar checks
- GPS/ Study sites (quizlet, etc.)
- Suggesting supplemental resources for support
- Captioning, Speech-to-text, etc.
- *Virtual courses:* Creating a video to explain content and assignments.

**What other suggestions  
might be helpful to  
students?**

# THANK YOU

## CONTACT INFORMATION

rmixonda@tctc.edu  
rmixon@dd4.k12.sc.us



Dr. Robyn Mixon-Davis  
Tri- County Technical College  
Dorchester 4 School District