Partnering with Parents in Support of Student Persistence in Canadian Higher Education

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Abstract: Student persistence is a challenge in Canadian higher education. Fortunately, parent involvement can encourage students to persist in their post-secondary studies. The following paper recommends that Canadian higher education institutions partner with parents of students by informing students and their parents of the realities of student persistence via program switches, school transfers, leaves of absence, withdrawal and re-enrollment (plan Bs). In partnering with parents of students, Canadian higher education institutions may help students to obtain the additional support they need to persist via alternative credential completion pathways.

Not all post-secondary students in Canada are able to persist through their studies to graduation. Working in Canadian higher education, I have witnessed this unpleasant reality first-hand and have often asked what more can be done to help students persist. Unfortunately, in researching student persistence, I have found no consensus in the literature as to why some students persist while others struggle and eventually withdraw from their post-secondary studies.

Students withdraw from higher education for a variety of reasons and due to a multiplicity of factors. Canadian students have described withdrawing from their post-secondary studies due to (a) a lack of financial resources, (b) a wish to change education programs, and (c) due to feelings of mismatch between themselves and their studies (Finnie & Qiu, 2008; Martinello, 2008). However, my review of the literature on parent involvement in higher education suggests that parents can help students persist in their post-secondary studies.

In the following position paper, I describe both parent involvement and student persistence in the context of Canadian higher education. I argue that parent involvement can be helpful in encouraging student persistence in higher education, particularly if a student's journey to graduation includes persisting via an alternative credential completion pathway. Throughout this paper, I refer to students who persist via an alternative credential completion pathway, as embarking upon a plan B, which may include program switches, school transfers, leaves of absence, withdrawal and re-enrollment. I recommend Canadian higher education institutions inform students and their parents of the realities of plan Bs. Providing parents with information about plan Bs could provide students with additional support for persistence via alternative credential completion pathways.

Parent Involvement and Student Persistence in Canadian Higher Education

To discuss persistence and parent involvement, it is necessary to first define what is meant by parent involvement and student persistence as well as describe and discuss the significance of parent involvement and student persistence in the Canadian higher education context.

What is Parent Involvement?

Below, I elaborate on the term parent involvement with the purpose of explaining my own angle and intention, which is to promote inclusivity and to not take the term's meaning for granted. I also offer my own definition, but first defer to descriptions of parent involvement found in the literature.

At the most basic level, parent involvement has been described as an act (Goodall & Montgomery 2014; Trotman, 2001). Auerbach (2007) defined parent involvement as the wide range of implicit and explicit actions of parents of students. Specifically, Auerbach described parent involvement as "parents taking deliberate steps," both at home and at school, to support students (p. 561). Auerbach also referred to parent involvement as a form of social capital. In the academic literature, references to parent involvement as a form of social capital are frequent (Auerbach, 2007; Bers, 2005; Nichols & Islas, 2016; Perna & Titus, 2005).

Defining parent involvement as a form of social capital accounts for the multiple ways in which parents can be positive resources to students (Perna & Titus, 2005). Perna and Titus explained, "like other forms of capital" parent involvement is a "resource that students may draw upon as needed to enhance productivity […] facilitate upward mobility […] and realize economic returns" (p. 488). As a form of social capital, parent involvement is both visible and invisible (Auerbach, 2007). For example, parent involvement in the lives of post-secondary students can be observed when parents attend on-campus tours with prospective students, assist students in researching post-secondary programs and provide financial assistance to students enrolled in higher education. Student descriptions of how their parents' expectations and family values influence them, and accounts of the emotional support students receive from family members suggests that invisible forms of parent involvement also have a significant impact on student success.

In addition, there is considerable debate within the literature about what, exactly, the term parent involvement means and represents in regards to students' education. Several authors have rationalized the use of alternative terms in describing the behaviours of parents of students. For example, Durisic and Bunijevac (2017) preferred the term parent participation to parent involvement. Durisic and Bunijevac claimed that the term parent participation does not convey any assumptions about how parents ought to behave and what they should or should not do when supporting their students' education.

Similarly, Goodall and Montgomery (2014) alluded that the term parent involvement presents a narrow view of parents' actions and behaviours in terms of their students' education. Goodall and Montgomery reasoned that engagement is a more inclusive word than involvement and preferred to use parent engagement to represent the involvement practices of parents in students' education. They explained that parent engagement not only represents acts within schools, it also represents what parents do in support of student learning at home. Goodall and Montgomery stressed that the term parent engagement reflects that parents do not have to be involved directly in the school environment in order to be engaged in and supportive of their students' learning.

Kiyama and Harper (2018) also claimed that the term parent involvement represents a limited view of the relationships between students and their parents. Kiyama and Harper preferred the term family engagement to parent involvement. They claimed that using the term engagement to describe parenting actions and behaviours offers a better representation of the multiple ways that parents and other family members are engaged in the lives of post-secondary students. In particular, Kiyama and Harper cautioned that the term, parent involvement, fails to acknowledge the "diversity of parents" and the multiple ways in which parents are engaged in students' education (p. 371). For example, the term parent involvement often represents "a heteronormative, White ideal" in which the "normative family unit is seen as never-divorced, two (opposite sex) parents with two children" of moderate wealth (p. 369). Kiyama and Harper also claimed that the term parent involvement insinuates a preference for "traditional" involvement behaviours in which parents of post-secondary students are primarily defined as "sources of tuition revenue" (p. 368).

Furthermore, Kiyama and Harper highlighted that the term parent involvement in higher education often refers to a need for students to distance themselves from their parents' invasive, intrusive and overprotective involvement. To illustrate, they discussed the frequent and problematic implied association that parent involvement in higher education is helicopter parenting. Kiyama and Harper explained that parents who are involved in the lives of post-secondary students are regularly and negatively characterized "as hovering over and prepared to intervene on behalf of their adult children" (p. 368). However, such characterizations overlook that, in many circumstances of parent involvement, it is the post-secondary students themselves who request their parents' involvement because they value the social and emotional support that their families can provide. Hence, negative connotations associated with the term parent involvement can inhibit its use as a term to accurately and inclusively describe the wide range of diverse parenting behaviours and actions in support of post-secondary students.

In discussing how parent involvement has been defined in the context of higher education, considerable complexities and variations in the term's meaning have been uncovered. Throughout this position paper, I have used the term parent involvement to represent the involvement of parents and family members in the lives of prospective and enrolled post-secondary students. However, I acknowledge that I must be inclusive and reserve judgment when describing parent involvement in higher education. Thus, I define whom parent represents when the term parent involvement is used in the context of higher education as best determined by students. In my view, parent is a

figurative word defined by the student, depending on the relationships in their life. Parents are whomever the student identifies as playing a parental role in their lives. Hence, according to students, who their parent(s) is/are could be their biological or non-biological Mom(s) or Dad(s), legal guardian(s) or caregiver(s), extended family member(s) (grandparents, aunts, uncles, etc.), a trusted elder in their community or perhaps even a close friend, neighbor and/or confidant whom the student trusts and knows that they can rely on for support during their post-secondary studies.

In regards to the meaning of the word involvement in parent involvement in higher education, I acknowledge that the behaviours and actions of parents in support of students are explicit and implicit. I understand the word involvement to be an open and inclusive term that represents all visible and invisible behaviours and actions of parents in relation to students' higher education. When I refer to parent involvement, I am not referring to a prescribed or a narrow list of what is unacceptable involvement versus what is acceptable involvement in the lives of post-secondary students. Rather, I believe that it is up to post-secondary students to determine the validity of the parent involvement in their lives. I use the term parent involvement to describe any and all parental involvement, observable or otherwise. I understand the word involvement in parent involvement as representing all behaviours, actions and nuances of parents in their relationships with post-secondary students.

I also refer to parent involvement with an acknowledgement that it is not universal or static and that it can mean different things to different people in different contexts. Parent involvement is unique, diverse, complex and ever evolving, as are the individuals involved. Therefore, no definition of parent involvement I could ever present would accurately describe all the intricacies of the relationships between students and their parents in the context of higher education. The most accurate definition of parent involvement in higher education is how students and their parents define it for themselves.

Parent Involvement in Canadian Higher Education

Much of the academic literature describing parent involvement in post-secondary education is based on American higher education. Kiyama & Harper (2018) claimed that "over 90% of college campuses" in the U.S. offer parent or family programming in acknowledgement of parent involvement in the lives of post-secondary students (p. 375). In terms of the programming offered to parents/families of students, Savage and Petree's (2015) analysis of the National Survey of College and University Parent Programs (NSCUPP) revealed that the most common services offered by American higher education institutions were parent websites/social media, parent newsletters, email/phone numbers for parent questions, parent orientations and on-campus parent/family social events.

The results of the NSCUPP are helpful in understanding what American higher education institutions have done in response to parent involvement. Unfortunately, I have not found similar data describing parent involvement programs in Canadian higher education. However, an indication of parent involvement within Canadian higher education may be gathered from the work of Stelmach and von Wolff (2010). Stelmach and von Wolff conducted a document analysis of parent involvement related content (in print and online) published by eight universities located in western Canada. In their study, they described the involvement of parents in the lives of Canadian university students as common. Stelmach and von Wolff also described Canadian universities as organizing "parent orientation and other programs and services… to provide parents with information" (p. 61).

Anecdotal evidence suggests that many higher education institutions in Canada have taken steps to acknowledge the involvement of parents in the lives of students. A simple online search yields numerous examples of Canadian higher education institutions that offer information for parents of students. It appears that at many Canadian higher education institutions, it is common practice to welcome parents to join prospective students on campus tours and to offer online information to students and their supporters. For example, at the University of Toronto (UofT), parents of prospective students are generally welcomed during on-campus tours and at program information sessions. UofT's Enrollment Services also offers a guide for parents of prospective and enrolled students on student financial planning and support. When students are enrolled, the UofT Student Life Department's Parents and Family webpage offers information and resources that parents can use to support student success at university. In addition, the Student Life Department also welcomes parents of enrolled students to attend Family and Support Information Sessions. Thus, while scholarly evidence to describe parent involvement in the Canadian higher education context is limited, it is likely that some information and/or programming for parents/families of students is currently being offered at post-secondary institutions in Canada.

What is Student Persistence?

In order to discuss persistence and parent involvement, it is necessary to define student persistence in the context of Canadian higher education. I begin by clarifying that definitions of student persistence in the context of higher education vary. The academic literature offers several explanations of what exactly student persistence is. As well, Canadian higher education institutions often use different values when calculating their internal rates of student persistence. Further, it is likely that post-secondary students themselves differ in terms of how they define their own persistence in comparison to their peers.

Attending and completing post-secondary education involves a series of extraordinarily complex decisions (Mueller, 2008). For example, students through the course of their post-secondary education may choose to abandon their initial route of study in order to change programs or to study at a different institution (Finnie & Qiu, 2008). As Hagedorn (2012) explained, persistence is not always clear because, depending on a student's path, they may be considered a graduate at one institution and a dropout at another. Thus, establishing how to define student persistence is central to any discussion regarding parent involvement and student persistence in Canadian higher education.

In my work, research, and writing, I use Mortenson's (2012) and Mueller's (2008) definitions of student persistence in higher education. Mortenson (2012) explained persistence as "the many ways students move through the education pipeline" (p. 35). Mueller (2008) explained that persistence in higher education includes any activities in which students make progress towards graduation. Hence, I define student persistence in the context of Canadian higher education as the multiple ways in which enrolled post-secondary students progress towards the goal of graduating and earning a credential from a higher education institution.

Student Persistence in Canadian Higher Education

While much of the research conducted on the topic of student persistence in higher education is American based, Statistics Canada's Youth in Transition Survey Cohort B (YITS-B) dataset can be used to explore persistence in the Canadian context (Finnie & Qiu, 2008; Martinello, 2008; Mueller, 2008). The YITS-B tracked a sample of Canadian students from their point of entry into post-secondary education and through various higher education pathways in order to gather information on student persistence over a five-year period (Finnie & Qiu, 2008). This included tracking student behaviors such as switches across programs, withdrawals from and returns to post-secondary education.

According to the YITS-B dataset, the reasons Canadian post-secondary students shared about why they decided to withdraw from higher education included (a) in order to change schools or programs, (b) because I did not like it/not for me, and (c) to not enough money to continue (Finnie & Qiu, 2008; Martinello, 2008). In analyzing the dataset, Mueller (2008) found that Canadian students who withdrew were most likely to leave post-secondary education during their first two years of study. Mueller also found that many students who withdrew from their post-secondary studies eventually returned to and graduated from higher education later in life.

Finnie and Qiu (2008) in their analysis of the YITS-B dataset found that only 50 percent of Canadian college and university students graduated from their program of entry. Persistence rates for first year Canadian college students indicated that 25.8 percent withdrew from their initial program of study by the end of their first year, while 18 percent of Canadian university students withdrew from their initial program by the end of their first year. However, Finnie and Qiu also reported that, of the students who withdrew from their initial post-secondary program, more than half either switched to another program immediately or returned to higher education within a few years. Martinello (2008) reported that 10 percent of students who left their original program of entry did go on to graduate through enrollment in a second choice of program.

In addition, when Finnie and Qiu (2008) analyzed the YITS-B dataset to determine the percentage of Canadian students who had completed a post-secondary credential over the five-year period of the survey, and included those who left their initial program of study but graduated from a second program, student graduation rates rose from 56.5 percent to 73.1 percent for college students and from 52.1 percent to 69.4 percent for university. Further, when Finnie and Qiu calculated the total persistence of the Canadian post-secondary students tracked by the YITS-B and

included enrolled post-secondary students who were still working towards program completion, the results revealed that 82 percent of students who initially entered higher education via college and 89.9 percent of the students who initially entered via university, reported that they had either graduated or were still enrolled and persisting in their post-secondary studies.

Thus, for many Canadian post-secondary students, their path of persistence is not a direct one. Finnie and Qiu's (2008), Martinello's (2008) and Mueller's (2008) findings suggest that student persistence is a challenge. However, enrollment in a second choice of program provides an important pathway for student persistence in Canadian higher education. Therefore, tackling the challenge of student persistence in Canadian higher education may lie in helping students to persist through alternative credential completion pathways: plan Bs, in which students persist by switching programs, changing institutions or even taking a leave of absence or withdrawing but eventually returning to school, and ultimately graduating from higher education.

The Importance of Student Persistence and Parent Involvement in Higher Education

Regardless of why students choose to withdraw, persisting in post-secondary education is important for student success in the present and for the future. For many students, not persisting to graduation will have negative and lifelong consequences. Students who do not graduate may forgo the social and financial benefits often associated with having a post-secondary credential. As well, not graduating can leave an unintended generational legacy, since children of post-secondary graduates are more likely to graduate from higher education themselves (Hagedorn, 2012).

Additionally, student persistence is also important to discuss because it impacts higher education institutions. Chronic or widespread internal persistence problems can look bad on an institution's reputation and potentially deter enrolment. In higher education, student persistence has been described as a system-wide challenge (Mortenson, 2012). Mortenson claimed that even the most selective institutions struggle with student persistence. This is likely one of the reasons why there is a substantial body of literature examining students' progress through higher education (Martinello, 2008; Morrison & Silverman, 2012).

However, declines in student persistence are not always associated with a particular individual or institutional challenge. In recent history, institutions have seen waves of persistence and withdrawal in association with social, economic and political trends. For example, the 1960s and 1970s saw increases in temporary student withdrawal due to the counterculture, drop out and drop in, movement (Tinto, 1993). Further, the economic climate of the 1980's recession prompted many students to stay in school in the face of high unemployment (Tinto, 1993). Recent declines in government funding for post-secondary education in many regions throughout Canada and associated increases in higher education tuition fees may be preventing some students from persisting today (Mueller, 2008).

Nonetheless, when students do not graduate, society as a whole can feel the negative repercussions associated with a lack of persistence. Fewer graduates may result in a labour market challenged to find the skilled workers needed to meet the demands of the knowledge-based economy (Hagedorn, 2012). Hence, how to help students persist through Canadian higher education is an important area of concern; one which warrants further discussion and study. Fortunately, parent involvement has the potential to promote student persistence**.**

The academic literature suggests that student persistence in Canadian higher education may be improved by promoting strong connections between students and their parents. This thought may seem counterintuitive, since higher education in Canada and the United States is often associated with transition and separation between students and their parents. Tinto (1993) described students as breaking away from their parents and past communities as they enter into higher education. Tinto claimed that breaking away is necessary in order for post-secondary students to successfully transition and fully embrace life on-campus. However, my review of the literature has suggested that Tinto's prescription does not reflect what is optimal for all students nor does it reflect the reality of parent involvement in higher education today. I argue that by partnering with parents of students, Canadian higher education institutions can promote greater student persistence and success. To elaborate, below I have recommended how institutions can partner with parents in order to promote student persistence in Canadian higher education.

Recommendation

Below I describe why Canadian higher education institutions should partner with parents to support student persistence. I argue that Canadian higher education institutions can support student persistence by educating students and their parents about alternative credential completion pathways, which may include persistence via program switches, school transfers, leaves of absence, withdrawal and re-enrollment. I refer to students who persist via alternative credential completion pathways as embarking upon a plan B.

Plan Bs are important ways in which many Canadian students persist. I argue that a key element in improving student persistence in Canada may lie in providing students with additional resources they can use to persist via a plan B. Thus, in addition to highlighting the most direct pathways of credential completion, Canadian higher education institutions should also share information with students and their parents about persistence via plan Bs. Specifically, I recommend that Canadian higher education institutions share information with both students and their parents about the realities of student persistence via plan Bs, during program information sessions, in school publications, and on institutional websites for parents.

As previously discussed, for approximately 50 percent of Canadian college and university students the path of persistence is not a direct one (Finnie & Qiu, 2008). Martinello (2008) estimated that half of Canadian university and college students do not graduate from their first program of entry. However, Martinello also estimated that 10 percent of students do graduate through enrolment in a second choice of program. The importance of plan Bs to student persistence in Canada is also illustrated by the YITS-B dataset which reported that the second most common response from students as to why they left higher education was that they wanted "to change schools or programs" (Finnie & Qiu, 2008, p. 193). Hence, the reality is that many Canadian students do not persist in their original course of study, but do in fact graduate by following a plan B.

Fortunately, my review of the literature on parent involvement has suggested that institutions can partner with parents to assist students in navigating the various paths of persistence in higher education. Sharing information about plan Bs with students, as well as parents, is essential because the frequency of persistence via alternative pathways may surprise those who have only heard about, considered and/or experienced credential completion via one post-secondary pathway. For example, when Bers and Galowich (2002) surveyed parents of students it was found that many parents had incomplete or inaccurate information about post-secondary education. Bers and Galowich concluded that when higher education institutions communicate with prospective post-secondary students it is essential that they seek to inform parents of students as well.

Having additional knowledge of the intricacies of persistence can help students tremendously, especially in parts of Canada where navigating credential completion pathways between higher education institutions can be complex. For example, student transfers between post-secondary institutions are more common and easily navigated in some provincial/territorial jurisdictions than in others. For instance, the practice of students transferring from a two-year to a four-year post-secondary institution is common in British Columbia, and transfers into university after graduating from a Collège d'enseignement général et professionnel is considered the norm in Quebec (Martinello, 2008). Conversely, in provinces like Ontario, Canada's most populous province, student transfers between post-secondary institutions are less common. In general, Ontario students who wish to persist through an institutional transfer most often do so through a program specific pathway and/or through an articulation agreement between individual institutions.

Consequently, there is a need for Canadian higher education institutions to share information about the ambiguities of persistence with both students and their parents. Especially, in jurisdictions where there is no precedence of system-wide higher education articulation; such as is the case in the province of Ontario. In Ontario, it has been my experience that student transfer requests are often assessed on a case-by-case basis, according to specific institutional policies and/or articulation agreements. Hence, students who would like to switch higher education institutions may find this alternative pathway to persistence difficult to navigate. Nevertheless, educating both students and their parents about the various paths of persistence could provide Canadian students with the additional support they require to successfully graduate from higher education.

The literature on parent involvement also suggests that parents can support student persistence through the information they share with students. According to Wartman and Savage (2008) parents can be valuable partners in conveying institutional messages to students. Wartman and Savage claimed that parents of students can reinforce institutional messages in ways that institutions cannot. This claim was also supported by Allen et al. (2009) who, through survey research, revealed that the more institutions of higher education communicated with parents about academic programs, the more information parents retained and shared with students. Hence, the information that parents are exposed to and gather about higher education may directly inform and influence students' persistence decisions.

Further, interviews with first-year students conducted by Awang, Kutty, and Ahmad (2014) indicated that when parents are involved, "students have more positive attitudes and behaviours, stronger motivation and greater participation in university life" (p. 266). Awang et al. stated that some of the students interviewed described their parent(s) as an "academic assistant", especially if their parent(s) had completed a post-secondary education qualification themselves (p. 265). Awang et al. concluded that their study "revealed the powerful influence of parents" on first-year students (p. 266). Consequently, it is not just the information that parents gather that can influence student persistence; parents' own post-secondary education experiences can also be helpful in guiding students as well. In fact, parental guidance may be one reason why students whose parents have attended post-secondary education are more likely to persist.

Moreover, Martinello (2008) deduced from the findings of the YITS-B dataset that the more educated students' parents were, the more likely that the student would attempt a second higher education program if they were unable to persist through their first. Martinello claimed that Canadian students, whose parents had attended higher education, were better able to adjust to adversity and surprises within post-secondary education and as a result these students experienced greater persistence. Wartman and Savage (2008) also reasoned, that "parents who have been to college themselves and know the system" can share their knowledge with students (p. 92). Morrison and Silverman (2012) explained that students whose parents have attended post-secondary education are more likely to persist because parents can help students navigate academic bureaucracy and provide advice when students are faced with challenges during their studies.

Furthermore, it is not only the persistence of first-year post-secondary students that can benefit from parents' involvement. According to interviews with non-freshman transfer students conducted by Flowers, Luzynski and Zamani-Gallaher's (2014), students described their parents as a source of support in the transition from one university into another. Thus, parent involvement is suggested to influence student persistence in higher education even beyond the first year of post-secondary studies.

In addition, parental involvement may be particularly helpful to students who leave higher education and persist via re-enrollment. Students who have withdrawn from their original path of study, although applying for a second time, may nevertheless face barriers as they re-apply. Applying from the outside in, students seeking re-enrollment may not have access to the institutional supports available to those who have chosen to persist via an internal switch of programs or by transferring directly from one institution to another. Parents can serve as important sources of information and support for students who seek to persist via re-enrolment. For example, parents may help former students obtain the information they need to make decisions about re-enrolment. As well, emotional support and encouragement from parents may make the re-enrolment process less stressful for students. Hence, higher education institutions should share information on alternative pathways of student persistence (plan Bs) with students and their parents, since parents can serve as important sources of information and support to students seeking to persist via re-enrolment.

In summation, the academic literature reviewed suggests that for approximately half of Canadian post-secondary students, their path of persistence is not a direct one. Fortunately, the academic literature also suggests that parent involvement can assist students who wish to persist by embarking upon a plan B. Bearing in mind the regularity of student persistence via program switches, school transfers, leaves of absence, withdrawal and re-enrollment, Canadian higher education institutions should provide both students and their parents with information on how students can persist via alternative credential completion pathways (plan Bs).

Parents may be key to improving student persistence in Canadian higher education. Canadian higher education institutions should consider students' parents important partners for promoting student persistence. The information parents are exposed to and gather about higher education can directly inform and influence students' persistence decisions. As well, the social, emotional and financial support of parents can also assist post-secondary students throughout their educational journeys. Therefore, I recommend that during program information sessions, in school publications, and on institutional websites for parents, Canadian higher education institutions should share information with both students and their parents about the realities of student persistence via plan Bs.

Conclusion

In this position paper, I have defined and described both parent involvement and student persistence in Canadian higher education. In particular, I have described the term, parent(s), as best defined by students and have included any actions and/or behaviours in which parent(s) seek to support students as examples of parent involvement. I have also defined student persistence as the multiple ways in which enrolled post-secondary students progress towards the goal of graduating and earning a credential from a higher education institution. Further, in discussing the context of parent involvement and student persistence in post-secondary education, I have outlined how both are significant in Canadian higher education today. Lastly, I have recommended that Canadian higher education institutions support persistence by educating students and their parents about the realities of student persistence via alternative credential completion pathways, Plan Bs, which may include program switches, school transfers, leaves of absence, withdrawal and re-enrollment.

In arguing that parents can be a significant source of support for post-secondary students, I also acknowledge that not all students have parents, nor is it guaranteed that students who do have parents will seek their advice or involvement when persisting in Canadian higher education. I also do not assume that all parental involvement is helpful, nor do I assume that all families are supportive of student aspirations. As noted by Savage (2003), higher education institutions never assume that "every family is loving and caring, because, unfortunately some are not" (p. 52). That said, I do believe that most parents want to support student success in post-secondary education.

Seeking partnerships with parents can remove barriers and help parents who wish to assist students (and are welcomed by students to do so) to offer their support. However, in recommending partnerships with parents of students, I am not suggesting that parent involvement supersede students' autonomy, rights or privacy in Canadian higher education. Instead, I believe there is a middle ground where students' needs for privacy and rights as independent adults can be upheld and respected, and where institutions can harness the potential for parents to serve as an important source of support for students. I believe this middle ground can be found through welcoming interactions with parents of students, sharing information with students and parents, accepting their feedback, and being inclusive to students who wish to reach out to parents for support during their post-secondary education experience. This middle ground is something Canadian higher education institutions should pursue in the name of student success and persistence.

In conclusion, Canadian higher education institutions should not overlook parents of students. Parents as supporters of students are important post-secondary stakeholders and valuable partners in promoting student persistence in Canadian higher education. Higher education institutions should actively seek out ways to partner with parents of students in order to encourage student persistence in Canada. Creating a middle ground where students' needs and rights are respected while, at the same time, parental involvement and support is welcomed, may present a challenge for Canadian higher education institutions. Nevertheless, I believe that the potential for improved student persistence in Canadian higher education is well worth the effort.

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