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Caring Campus Supports Southwestern College Culture Shift

Since her appointment as President/Superintendent of Southwestern College, Dr. Kindred Murillo has made creating a more equitable and inclusive campus among her highest priorities.



When Dr. Murillo learned about the opportunity to bring IEBC’s “Caring Campus” initiative to the college, she immediately recognized its relevance to their efforts. “If you think about and reflect on where we were and where we are, we are in the process of what I consider a culture shift,” explained Dr. Murillo. “We have been working with intent for two years now to really push the college into a more diverse more respectful, more accountable, and more inclusive college culture, where we focus on our students’ needs and make sure they have every opportunity to achieve what they set out to do.”

Dr. Murillo said Caring Campus supports both statewide and national efforts toward achieving student equity. “There is recognition for us – if we don’t create the culture, we cannot do what we should be doing for our students.”

Classified staff as a whole is actively involved with ambassadors for Southwestern College, but Dr. Murillo says many want more emphasis on their role. “A lot of our classified staff already owned it. (Caring Campus) gives them the opportunity to share their wisdom, and learn new things.”

For those new to the Caring Campus approach, Dr. Murillo says she sees instant response to the concepts. “For people who didn’t really recognize their important role, there have been “aha” moments – ‘oh, students are affected by the way I treat them at the counter’ or “If I’m working on the grounds, and stop to help them, it makes a difference.””

Dr. Murillo says the introduction of the Caring Campus directly benefits Southwestern College’s educational goals and objectives.

“It provides the tools to our classified staff to be able to really achieve the actionable behaviors we’re asking for. So often, we (as educators) say we have goals. This program actually provides the tools and the coaching to help employees be and do – and I do mean DO – what their intent is,” said Dr. Murillo.

The greatest challenge for any organization is putting concept into action. Dr. Murillo believes it starts with individual behavior changes. “People get stuck in their mode. When you stand back

and learn a new tool and behavior, and practice it repeatedly, it becomes habit. Then it becomes second nature. That's important."

Dr. Murillo reflected in more detail. "You think you're being caring. Sometimes you just need to have the coaching opportunity to develop a toolset, to realize how to really take that intent and make it into a real behavior. That's what happens with people.

"Sometimes you have to interrupt something we're doing, and bring in a new awareness. That's what Caring Campus has done for the employees here" at Southwestern College, added Dr. Murillo.

Dr. Murillo says it's vital to understand the nature of community colleges, and Caring Campus does so. "Community colleges are organic systems, it's a real challenge. I have pockets that are very customer and student focused. Other pockets don't quite get it. It takes that effort to get people's attention.

"We try not to spend money on projects or training that don't coincide with our mission and vision. I am really focused on this. This is what we want to do. We need to do everything focused on this direction. This is very much a part of creating a culture where students are the center," said Dr. Murillo.

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Dr. Kindred Murillo, President of Southwestern College, was interviewed by IEBC in June 2019. IEBC is a nationally-recognized nonprofit organization dedicated to helping education stakeholders—K-12 school systems, community colleges, universities, employers, and others—use data and collaboration to make informed decisions and craft solutions that improve practice and dramatically increase student success.

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