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However formal or informal, mentoring is a vital part of social-emotional development. Most of us are fortunate to know when to reach out and to whom, whether it be a trusted friend, colleague, teacher or family member. But even the simple act of reaching out when you need support is a learned skill. How do we teach young people about the importance of having a mentor to rely on—one who helps direct, inspire, and motivate? And more importantly, what can the practice of mentoring teach us about successful postsecondary student outcomes?

As a nonprofit based in education equity, College Success Foundation (CSF) provides a unique system of supports and scholarships to inspire undeserved, low-income students to finish high school, graduate from college and succeed in life. Part of college preparedness is academic, but of equal importance are the social and interpersonal skills necessary to persist and thrive.

Mentoring serves a vital part in the development of resilience, operating as a gateway for developing *social capital*—a concept defined by Search Institute as “ … people’s access to, and ability to mobilize, human connections that might help them further their potential and their goals, especially as those goals emerge and inevitably shift over time.” Together, mentoring and social capital unlock the door to critical relationships, information, advice, and support to increase a students’ postsecondary success.

Recognizing the profound impact mentoring has on our youth—particularly on low-income students whom research suggests lack access to the social capital necessary to persist through high school and beyond—we have structured our CSF student support pathway to emphasize the practice of Youth Initiated Mentoring (YIM) in order to more effectively prepare our scholars for college success.

YIM is a model of support which empowers youth to identify, initiate, and maintain over time strong mentor relationships with non-parental, supportive adults. YIM builds on Search Institute’s concept of *developmental relationships*, which are close connections through which young people learn to express care, provide support, share power and expand possibilities. Our goal is to equip our students with the skills necessary to initiate, establish and rally relationships with supportive adults and peers, so they may develop social capital to flourish through the challenges life inevitably presents.

In mobilizing their social capital, students gain a greater sense of autonomy, connectedness and competence. CSF program manager, Lorena Bobadilla, reflects on the importance of community-centered mentoring, noting that for her students YIM “teaches self-advocacy. In order to help our students grow, it’s important that we provide them with the right tools so that no matter where they are at, they can build a supportive network.”

YIM facilitates much more than fruitful developmental relationships with non-parental support figures. YIM fosters a culture of community building, shared support and collective resilience. As students begin to mobilize their social capital through YIM, they ultimately adopt a mindset of growth and adaptability. These skills serve as the foundation for self-advocacy, self-determination, and ultimately underpin improved, powerful student outcomes.