Rowan-Cabarrus is a comprehensive, community-focused institution of higher learning, serving the residents of Rowan and Cabarrus counties at multiple campus locations and through online programs. The two-year institution provides more than 2,000 course offerings, serving a yearly overall enrollment of more than 25,000 students. Just over a year ago, Rowan-Cabarrus Community College embarked on a journey to helping students differently in light of the COVID-19 pandemic all while keeping them and our faculty and staff safe. Quickly, we transitioned our classes to an online format, but knew that we could not stop there. We would like to share with you best practices we implemented to establish a safe and healthy environment and create a strong support network for our students.

**Safe & Healthy Environment**

The safety of our students, faculty and staff was our top priority. We quickly assembled a COVID Response Team to develop a notification process for students who were exposed or had tested positive. We developed an online form by which our faculty could report. Once the team is notified, we contact the student to determine their status for campus return and identify any resources they may need. As part of this effort, Rowan-Cabarrus developed a dashboard (attached screenshot) to provide College leadership with a holistic view of our College’s real-time COVID-19 impact. This high-tech dashboard was built internally by our Information Services team and incorporated data from the local health departments, as well as our on-campus COVID-19 exposures. This interactive tool served as one of the critical components that the President’s Cabinet used to strategically make data-informed decisions regarding the College’s operations and support structures.

During the pandemic, the College implemented several protocols to ensure the safety of the campus community. The College followed the CDC and our local health departments’ guidance to put in place the most comprehensive safety measures. The college promptly mobilized a team of full-time employees, as well as paid current students and part-time staff to fill approximately 100 two-hour shifts per week. We prioritized only utilizing current faculty, staff, and students to minimize the exposure of our campus community to outsiders. This effort required a grassroots process development for employee training, as well as implementation of a new scheduling software system. Below are a few quick bullet points that made this possible.

- Researched and procured a software system to assist us in scheduling and training 200 employees.
- Created safety signage specific to our College and deployed them to each campus.
- Strategically selected key staff to oversee the operations of screening.
- Limited access to each campus to ensure everyone coming on campus was screened.
- Developed a daily sticker plan to verify everyone went through screening.

At each health screening checkpoint, screeners asked guests the CDC recommended questions, ensured they were wearing a mask and took their temperature. *We screened over 100,000 individuals between April 2020 and March 2021, with the assistance of 3,396 volunteer hours by full-time employees and 3,885 hours by current students and part-time staff.* Not only did this give our campus community assurance that the institution cared about their health, it also provided an opportunity for those who came to campus to be greeted by a positive College representative who could answer any questions they had about their visit, which was particularly helpful during an enrollment decline. We faced many challenges during the COVID-19 pandemic and are hopeful that our best practices kept students, faculty, staff, and visitors safe.

**Support Network for Students**

In addition to focusing on student health and safety, we knew students needed help with challenges they were facing in their personal lives. Our students quickly began asking for help and we needed a way to efficiently track their needs and ensure they received the support they required to continue in their courses. We partnered with our internal Information Services team to develop an online student assistance form that allowed students to identify their needs, including but not limited to food insecurity, technology needs (laptops and wifi), funding to support housing and childcare and mental health assistance. Once the student completed the form, it was routed to the appropriate College staff in order to quickly support the student’s need. Our Student Wellness Center assisted 374 students in 2020 that needed support services to help them persist towards completion. In addition to the support for personal and academic struggles, the Student Wellness Center connected students to the necessary community resources as well as gave them access to our on-campus Food and Resource Pantry. The Rowan-Cabarrus Food and Resource Pantry distributed over 410 pounds of food our students in 2020. The attached scorecard that was created that has more great information on how Rowan-Cabarrus assisted our students. Many of our students told us that they were not prepared for the transition to online learning due to their lack of access to technology. As a result, our Information Services team established our first-ever laptop loaner program that supported 271 students with their technology needs in addition to providing hotspots that could be checked out through the College’s library.

Rowan-Cabarrus Community College is very proud of the efforts that we made to assist our students, faculty, and staff. This journey has changed the way that Rowan-Cabarrus assists students and many of the virtual services and enhanced student support that the College created to support students will last well beyond the pandemic. The pandemic was an unexpected catalyst for change at our College and helped us identify and implement strategies that may have otherwise taken many years to come to fruition.