EXECUTIVE SUMMARY AND OVERVIEW

CUNY Health for Academic Success & Engagement (CHASE)

Summary of Initiative and Report on March 7th University-wide Summit

CUNY THE CITY UNIVERSITY OF NEW YORK

Healthy CUNY promoting health for academic success

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CUNY students discussed health challenges and successes during the CHASE opening plenary session

CHASE INITIATIVE

BACKGROUND

CUNY Health for Academic Success & Engagement (CHASE) is a new university initiative that aims to strengthen and coordinate the university's health-related services and promote a "culture of caring" at CUNY, thereby helping CUNY students to overcome common health and social problems that interfere with academic success and college completion. Surveys of CUNY undergraduates have shown that half face one or more mental health, sexual or reproductive health, health care access, or food security problems. These conditions can contribute to increased absences, missed assignments, less focus on schoolwork, increased health care expenses, and higher rates of delayed graduation or drop out. By assisting students to prevent or manage these health issues before they disrupt academic success, CUNY can increase its retention and graduation rates and bring the academic, social, economic, and health benefits that a college degree confers to more New Yorkers.

In spring 2018, Interim Chancellor Vita Rabinowitz and Interim Vice Chancellor for Student Affairs Chris Rosa charged a CUNY Health for Academic Success & Engagement (CHASE) steering committee recruited from throughout the university with making recommendations for CHASE strategies, activities, implementation, and evaluation.

KEY STRATEGIES

CHASE promotes four key strategies:

- Strengthening the coordination and integration of services at the system and campus levels, including making strategic investments in increased staffing and training in CUNY's mental health counseling, wellness and food security programs to improve services and meet national standards for student-to-staff ratios
- Training a corps of faculty and staff who can provide students with information, support and referrals to campus and community health and social services, working to reduce the stigma of help-seeking by normalizing discussion of sometimes taboo health-related issues
- Training a corps of students who can provide their peers with information, support and referrals to campus and community health and social services, perhaps through new experiential learning or workforce development programs
- Establishing formal partnerships with key New York City health care and social service agencies that already serve CUNY students to improve access to care, monitoring, and coordination

DEMONSTRATION PROJECT

CUNY has a track record of creating comprehensive programs that address the complex and diverse needs of its students, and CHASE builds on this record. Over the next two years, CUNY will pursue a two-track strategy to implement a CHASE demonstration project: Plan A) seek public and private resources needed to implement and scale up CHASE university-wide and to formally evaluate it, and Plan B) field test and integrate key strategies on several campuses and evaluate the results. By pursuing both Plans A and B simultaneously, CHASE will build momentum for implementing new approaches to overcoming health problems that interfere with academic success throughout the university.

CHASE SUMMIT

OVERVIEW

The CHASE Summit, which took place on Thursday, March 7, 2019, at the CUNY Graduate Center, invited all colleges across the CUNY system to be a part of the conversation about this evolving initiative and its four key strategies. The event was sponsored by the CUNY Offices of Academic Affairs and Student Affairs and Healthy CUNY, a university-wide initiative to promote health for academic success. More than 165 people from all 25 CUNY campuses and the central office attended. The summit included presentations and workshops by faculty, students and staff and an opening call to action by CUNY Interim Chancellor Vita Rabinowitz.

The major goals of this summit were to:

- Bring together college colleagues with a range of campus-based perspectives to discuss how to more effectively integrate student wellbeing into the campus-wide discourse about academic momentum and success, and to share feedback and ideas about the key strategies proposed by CHASE
- Promote collaboration among college colleagues who may not regularly discuss health and wellness issues with one another, and enlist more CUNY faculty, staff, students, and administrators in designing and implementing the CHASE model
- Generate short- and long-term ideas about campus-based interventions that would address hunger and homelessness, mental health, sexual and reproductive health, and/or health care access for CUNY students
- Expand and speed the search for the resources needed to move the CHASE initiative forward

This report is based on three sources. First, each campus team at the Summit was asked to complete two worksheets to identify their views on the strengths and opportunities on their campus. Second, all participants were asked to complete an online survey in the days after the Summit – a total of 107 people from 25 CUNY campuses and the central office completed the post Summit survey. Finally, the planning committee met to assess the success and limitations of the Summit and consider next steps.

MAJOR TAKEAWAYS & CONCRETE NEXT STEPS

Major Takeaways

- Many CUNY staff, faculty, students, and administrators want to support and become engaged with finding new ways to promote health for academic success. CHASE should find ways to support and nurture these commitments, which constitute CUNYs most valuable resource for this initiative. Three-quarters of survey respondents identified a specific role they want to play in implementing CHASE.

- While participants are concerned about each of the four health conditions that undermine the academic success of CUNY students, mental health concerns attracted the highest level of interest and constitute a useful starting point for CHASE activities.

- A near majority of Summit participants rank each of the four proposed strategies as “very effective” for implementing CHASE. The highest ranked strategy was improved coordination of services and additional staffing and training for health staff, a reasonable priority for initial implementation.

- The strength of CHASE is its broad focus and its multiple goals and strategies – it matches the scope and scale of the problems CUNY students face. The implementation process should retain this wide perspective by working to achieve a few specific goals (e.g., increasing peer and faculty support for student help-seeking).

- Summit participants identified several prerequisites for successful implementation including strong and substantive support from the CUNY Chancellor's Office and campus leadership; a well-defined planning process; and clear two-way communications about the initiative throughout the process.

Concrete Next Steps

In spring 2019:

- CHASE committee members and event participants will receive the full report on the CHASE Summit; the report will also be published on the Healthy CUNY website.
- CHASE steering committee will work with the Chancellor's Office to share the executive summary of the report with the Chancellor's Cabinet, Presidents, and Deans. Report can possibly be shared at an upcoming council of presidents meeting as well.

In June / July / August 2019:

- Members of the CHASE steering committee will begin meeting with colleges that are especially interested in being a part of the CHASE demonstration project. Meetings will include members of the college team that participated in the CHASE Summit along with additional colleagues from cross-functional units throughout the college. Meeting participants will have a facilitated conversation about what was accomplished at the Summit and the college's desired next steps.
- CHASE will convene a small group of external stakeholders to seek guidance and suggestions for development of the initiative.

In fall 2019:

- CUNY, in partnership with Healthy CUNY, will offer practical half-day university-wide workshops focused on how to implement the CHASE strategies that were most highly ranked by Summit participants and during summer meetings with the colleges. Possible workshop topics include better coordination of services as well as faculty and student training with an emphasis on fighting stigma.

Ongoing:

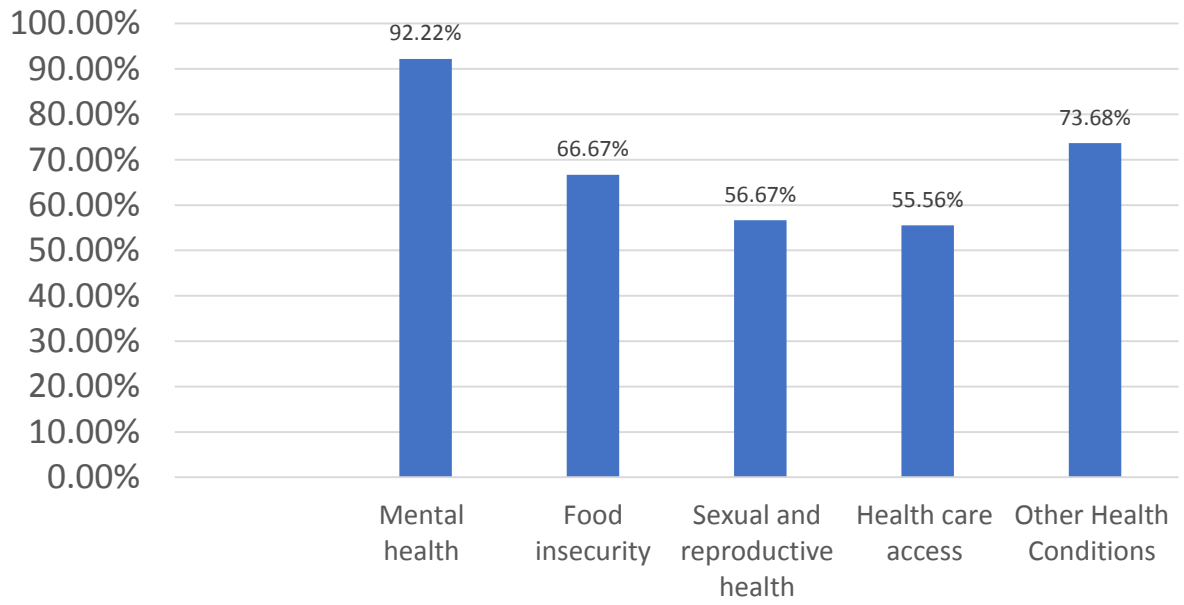
- CUNY / Healthy CUNY will continue pursuing funding for the CHASE demonstration project.
- CHASE will continue to pursue both Plan A, launching a centralized and coordinated evaluable intervention on several campuses and Plan B, supporting individual campuses to design and test smaller-scale, more de-centralized initiatives to achieve CHASE goals.

For more information on CHASE or to participate in future activities, contact Patti Lamberson at Patricia.Lamberson@sph.cuny.edu . To read Healthy CUNY four reports on its recent survey of CUNY undergraduates and its 2018 report *Promoting Health for Academic Success at CUNY*, visit here.

WHAT: ON WHICH HEALTH CONDITIONS SHOULD CHASE FOCUS?

As shown in Table 1, more than half those responding to the survey rated each of the four health conditions identified by the CHASE steering committee as important ("Big") contributors to academic problems. Mental health was almost universally identified as a big problem, followed by food insecurity, then sexual and reproductive health, and heath care access. This result suggests that strategies to reduce the burden of mental health problems might be a good starting point for CHASE interventions, a decision reinforced by the health evidence of close and reciprocal relationships between mental health conditions such as depression, anxiety and psychological distress and the other three conditions of interest: sexual and reproductive health, health care access and food security. A successful intervention to reduce the burden of mental illness could in itself contribute to reducing the burden of the other three conditions.

Table 1: Percent responding "Big" when asked to rate selected health conditions for adverse impact on academic success of students you serve (N=90)

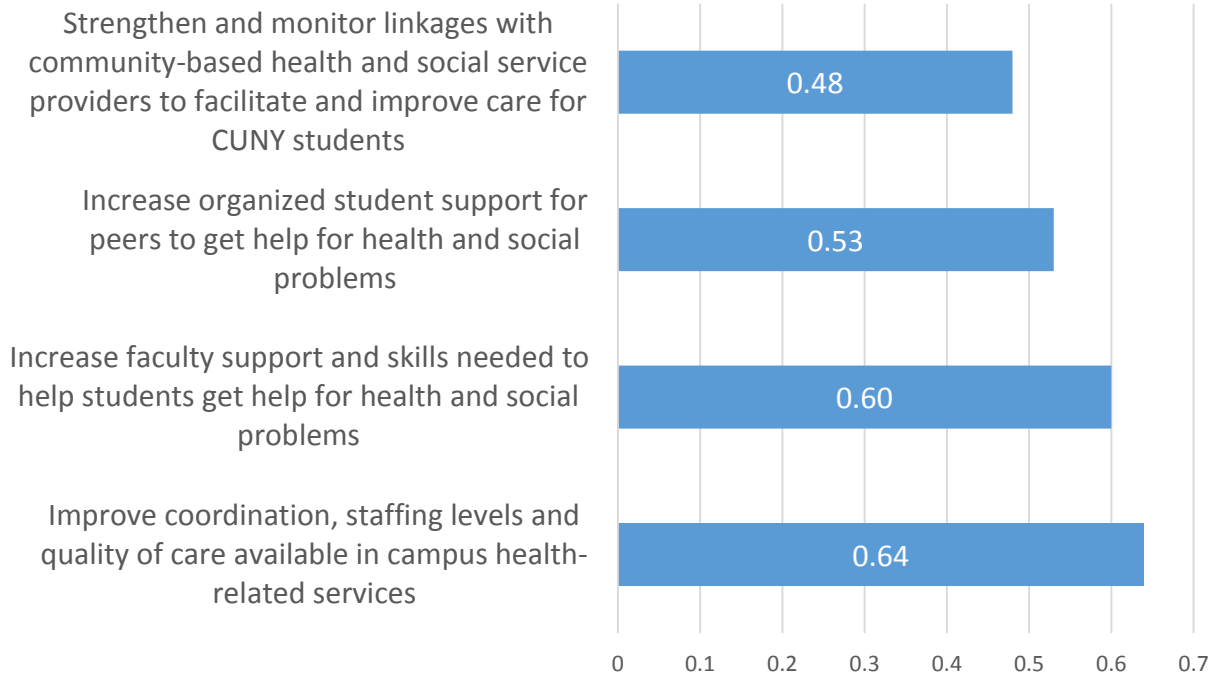


*Other conditions listed included housing instability, homelessness, poverty, financial stress, caring for the mental or physical health needs of family members, physical inactivity, chronic illnesses such as asthma and diabetes, issues related to child health and child care and disabilities and neurological conditions.

HOW: WHAT STRATEGIES SHOULD CHASE USE TO ACHIEVE ITS GOALS?

As shown in Table 2 below, between about half and two thirds of respondents rated the four strategies proposed by the Steering Committee as "very effective" in reducing the burden of health-related conditions for students on their campus. The most highly ranked strategy was to improve coordination, staffing and quality of care and the lowest ranked was establishing partnerships with external organizations. Fewer than 10% of respondents (not shown on Table) designated any of the four strategies as "not effective or "minimally effective". From this result, we conclude that from the perspective of Summit participants all four strategies remain viable options for implementing CHASE. Moreover, we note considerable support for the key tasks of coordinating and improving existing services.

Table 2: On your campus or for the students you serve, which of the following strategies would be very effective to reduce the burden of health-related conditions that undermine academic success? (N=96)



In their worksheet responses, many college teams emphasized the importance of combatting stigma, which prevents students, staff, and faculty from seeking help. The discouraging power of stigma could be a major content focus of peer, faculty, and staff training programs.

INSIGHTS: WHAT WAS MOST VALUABLE INSIGHT YOU GAINED FROM THE CHASE SUMMIT?

In their responses to the survey, participants noted several key insights they gained from the Summit. Our review of the 96 open-ended responses to this question identified eight key themes, each illustrated below by a few quotes.

1. **Appreciation of CUNY 's focus on these issues and a call for more CUNY wide communication and resource sharing (28 comments with this theme)**

> *I was comforted by CUNY's awareness of the significant and varied issues that each of the Colleges face.*
>
> *I was very glad to hear that CUNY is not only taking a position but has a plan A and plan B as we move ahead.*
>
> *That many people throughout CUNY are looking for a change in CUNY's approach to health and social services.*

2. **Availability of services for students – participants gained awareness of existing services and pointed out need for more services and better communication of those services. (24 comments)**

> *There are resources available to students that I didn't know about, which also shows how much work needs to be done on improving communication across campuses.*
>
> *The lack of resources across CUNY for these key services for students.*
>
> *The importance of communication and service coordination in reaching out to students and helping them access care.*

3. **The value of networking, collaboration and learning from colleagues (24 comments)**

> *Hearing and learning from other mental health professionals about how to best serve students in crisis.*
>
> *It was gratifying to learn about the Summit project, and to be in integrated spaces where students, staff, and faculty were able to talk about health and social challenges, response projects, and think about how to go forward collectively. Being able to prioritize these issues and start talking about them in constructive, consensus building ways was also empowering.*
>
> *The importance of learning what other CUNYs are doing to help improve our services to students. Helping us get out of our "box" and maybe consider something new.*

4. **Greater awareness of health issues and their impact on academic success (16 comments)**

> *I learned more about the links between CUNY students' mental and physical health and their ability to persist in college, illuminating why CUNY should care about students' physical well-being over and above "just" wanting to support students in general.*
>
> *The need to aggressively increase avenues (especially via faculty) that inform students on health services and how it relates to their success. Increase and normalize the conversations on health services to reduce related stigmas.*

5. **The data presented on mental health, food insecurity, health care access and sexual health issues facing CUNY students (12 comments)**

> *Statistics of how many CUNY students are at a disadvantage when it comes to health and the lack of information and cooperation among offices to address these issues.*

6. **Extent of understaffing of programs and need for more staff to help students (10 comments)**

The national recommended ratio of mental health counselors to students is one counselor for every 1,500 students but at CUNY there is on average one for every 1,800 students and some campuses have only 1 counselor for every 3,000 or 4,000 students.

The programs we already have on campus are a great start and very valuable, but they are under staffed which minimizes effectiveness.

7. **Role of faculty in helping students with health-related problems (8 comments)**

It was good hear that student trust faculty and seek their help. Faculty need to be trained more and awareness has to be raised about the hardships our students deal with while they are pursuing their degrees.

8. **Stigma as a barrier to seeking services (7 comments)**

The program really focused on undergraduate concerns and that while commendable, graduate students (law and medicine, particularly) may have some of these issues and suffer higher barriers in asking for help due to the fact a professional career is at risk.

Peer mentoring kept coming up in every conversation and panel. There needs to be development of programs where peers help peers. This helps remove stigma around issues like getting help for mental health.

CHALLENGES: IN YOUR OPINION WHAT ARE THE 2 BIGGEST CHALLENGES CHASE WILL FACE IN MOVING FROM AN IDEA TO A FULLY IMPLEMENTED PROGRAM ON YOUR CAMPUS AND AT CUNY?

1. **Lack of resources** (37 comments) including funding, staffing, space and investment from administration, City and State

> *Identifying someone on campus with the authority, time and vision to coordinate efforts, prioritize responses, identify resources, sustain focus and meaningfully assess to support a multi-year roll out.*
>
> *Funding is shrinking, yet we are trying to improve services with less resources.*
>
> *Funding. Some resources can be redeployed, but we also need more funds - and a meaningful way to measure impact so that funding can be sustained.*

2. Need for buy-in and support from campus and central administration (17 comments) including a need for clear communication and direction from CUNY to campus administration, less bureaucracy and policies that provide a unified framework, training and information

> *Continuing the momentum of what has already begun will be hard as so many narratives occupy the university. It is very positive that this Summit be a yearly event!*
>
> *We will have to see if the CHASE programs will replace, complement or advocate for the programs we already have on our campus. CHASE will have to get central administration to insist that campus administration prioritize this effort.*

3. Need for buy- in from staff and faculty including adjuncts (14 comments)

> *Staffing issues will be a primary barrier as will helping college build and sustain teams across campus to work on projects jointly, especially regarding strong and continuous participation of faculty.*
>
> *Adjuncts are a majority of teaching faculty and they know very little about services CUNY.*

4. **Lack of coordination and collaboration across CUNY and across campuses** (10 comments) including lack of time, staff and organization to build and maintain teams across departments and campuses; difficulty in addressing issues across CUNY while meeting unique needs of campuses (different demographics, online/commuter students, unequal distribution of funds)

> *Time commitment needed for organizing such a large and diverse group of people from all campuses.*
>
> *The diversity of the demographics, culture and needs of the students in each college vary. Therefore, identifying and meeting those needs will be challenging.*

Summit Participants discussed health and social challenges faced by their students, and specific strategies for helping students succeed.

PARTICIPANTS' ROLES: WHAT ROLE DO YOU PERSONALLY WANT TO PLAY IN MOVING CHASE FORWARD?

1. Program planning, design and implementation team (17 comments) including taking a leadership role in developing policies and designing solutions and presenting to administration, participating in a team or committee to implement CHASE centrally and on campus.

> *I would love to play a part in planning and implementing. I particularly enjoy thinking about clinical operations and good applied clinical workflows. Likewise, I like communicating with others about health initiatives--crafting language that can motivate and has emotional impact--and I could imagine doing something like this in order to help with the process of consensus-building/buy-in needed for successful program implementation.*
>
> *I'd be happy to be part of the planning and implementation of CHASE. I'd love to dive into how we can build partnerships between the schools of nursing, medicine and social work to develop student experiences that are mutually beneficial to students and the needs of campuses.*
>
> *I would like to be an active participant. Search out new ideas/initiatives and be part of the implementation and evaluation process.*

2. Provide information to students, faculty and staff (12 comments) including providing information to students through curriculum, raising awareness of issues and services, and facilitating wellness workshops

> *I'd like to work directly with students, engaging them every step of the way.*
>
> *Advocating the need of the students on our campus in terms of housing insecurity.*
>
> *Be part of the communication link and provide students information regarding services.*

3. Collaboration and Coordination of work on campus (11 comments) including helping coordinate individuals, teams and departments; raising awareness among departments, establishing a team or committee, and continuing the conversation on campus

> *I would like to help coordinate the necessary operators and offices to collaborate on initiatives.*
>
> *I will be active on my campus in a leadership and coordinating role, particularly in working with faculty.*

4. Help increase faculty and peer development (10 comments) including advocating for and promoting professional development and peer development, advising students to become peer educators/advocates, coordinating faculty and peers.

> *I would like to help develop an integrated program to serve student wellness needs and find ways to integrate it into the students' experience on the college campus.*
>
> *I would like to contribute to educating faculty and staff about the role of mental health difficulties in academic achievement and train them on ways to recognize students struggling with mental illness and stress and refer them for appropriate services.*

5. Research (7 comments) including serving on research committees, research design and collaboration with other faculty to help raise awareness of issues.

> *It would be gratifying work to serve on collaborative (students, staff and faculty) research projects on health questions, issues, current outcomes, and alternative approaches and outcomes. I see CUNY as its own state comprised of important communities grappling with serious structural inequity and criminalization, and health disparities. I would be highly motivated to work on projects that bridge the academic, community and health spheres that our students occupy and could usefully connect in research.*
>
> *I would like to support CHASE with my own research work on food insecurity - especially on using narratives and other qualitative research methodologies to review students' perceptions of and subjective experiences with their campus in light of food support programs -- or a glaring lack thereof.*