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Student Empathy Mapping College and Career Counseling

What

Participation data from Making Waves Academy and exit and dismissal data from CAP show that there is a group of students who aren't being reached to the degree to which we would like. While Making Waves, as an institution, is designed to support Wave-Makers from fifth grade through first career, it relies on students opting-in and maintaining two-way communication to access its resources.

So what

Last year, College and Career Counseling began to explore *shame* as a root cause for Wave-Makers perceiving our programming as irrelevant or unsatisfactory, causing them to become non-communicative or disengaged as students or alumni of Making Waves Academy.

What causes students to opt-in or opt-out of what we have to offer?

Now what

In an effort to create a better experience for all students, but especially those who have become non-communicative or disengaged, an internal survey of Wave-Makers was conducted this year using two methods from design thinking: *persona mapping* and *empathy mapping*. The goal of using these human-centered design approaches was to test a new way for building empathy for our students through identifying and understanding their situations, thoughts, feelings, and behaviors.

Implications for further research:

- Does our program incorporate any practices that may be unintentionally frustrating or aggravating the experiences of different students?
- Using the empathy maps, are there patterns among students who opt-in or opt-out of College and Career Counseling events or programming?
- Using the empathy maps, are there patterns among students who are non-communicative as students or alumni, who “melt” after high school graduation, or who have “no plan”?

We will continue to collect feedback on the survey and, for as long as its findings seem relevant or effective, will use the empathy maps as a supplemental lens to differentiate our programming.



Supplemental Information

How we conducted the survey

The survey relied on interviews with students and advisors over two phases:

- In the first phase, students were asked a broad question: “As a high school student, what questions do you ask yourself or wish you could ask?” Advisors were also asked a similar question: “What do your advisees ask, or wish they could ask?” Responses were gathered and were grouped into themes, which provided the basis for three student personas: “underdogs and achievers,” “cautious self-observers,” and “pragmatists and survivors.”
- In the second phase, more students were interviewed and asked to build an empathy map for each persona. After describing the desired outcomes of the survey, students were shown each persona and asked to provide their responses to each of these questions: “What does this student persona see on campus? What do they hear? What do they think? How do they feel? What do they then do? What do they say?”

What is an empathy map?

An empathy map is a visualization tool used to articulate what a team knows about a user. This tool helps teams build a broader understanding of the “why” aspect behind user needs and wants. This tool forces teams to practice empathic design, which shifts the focus from the service they want to build to the people who will use the service. As a team identifies what they know about the user and places this information on a chart, they gain a more holistic view of the user’s world and their problems or opportunities.



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Table 1. Three personas of Wave-Makers.



Achievers and Underdogs ask questions like, “Can internships be done online?” or “How do I bring up my GPA?” They do their work on time, get out of their comfort zone, and weigh their options when making decisions. They see an abundance of people and opportunities to help them, which makes them feel powerful and overwhelmed. They hear things like, “You’re doing great” and “You’ve got this.” They tell themselves that “It will be worth it.”

Cautious Self-observers ask questions like, “How do I make friends?” or “How do I ask my teacher for help without bothering them?” They procrastinate, think about their dreams without acting on them, and compare themselves to others. They see how “easy” it is for other people to succeed and have friends, which makes them feel anxious, self-critical, and stuck. They hear things like, “Don’t be shy” and “You have to participate more.” They ask themselves, “Why am I like this?”

Pragmatists and Survivors ask questions like, “Am I going through depression?” or “What if I don’t have a safe family to go home to?” They are adverse to receiving help, they pick up hobbies (but drop them quickly), and avoid family conflict. They see time running out, no one to look up to, and emotional reactions from their parents, which makes them feel hopeless, unworthy, and angry. They hear things like, “Use your planner” and “Don’t be lazy.” Things they say to themselves include “I’m dumb,” “When will this end?” and “It doesn’t matter anyways.”



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Table 2. Empathy mapping for “pragmatists and survivors.”

“Pragmatists and Survivors”	
What they see and hear in their world	
Seeing	<p>Others achieving People succeeding The group of smart kids They see other people doing their work, but they feel lost More attention on people that don't have as much trouble Everything that they wish they could do Other people succeeding easily Time running out No one to look up to People helping others Parents' reactions No one these days</p>
Hearing	<p>“Use your planner.” “You just need to get work done.” “Just do it.” “Ask for help.” “You need to prioritize better.” “Just do it. It's not that hard.” “Why aren't you doing your work?” “What's going on at home?” “You should just do it later.” “You've got this” "Don't be lazy" "Just try, come on!" “You need to do it if you want good grades.” "If you put in more effort.."</p>
Thoughts	
Thinking	<p>“It's not that hard. Why am I struggling?” “Is there something wrong with me?” “I'm not good enough.” “Why can't I just be like so and so?” "Why can't I do better?" “Am I good enough?” “How can I get away?” “It doesn't matter anyways.” Negatively “What am I doing?” “What is my purpose?”</p>



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	<p>“When will this end?” “Why does it matter?” “How does this help?” “I’m dumb” Comparing themselves to others “I don’t see a way to change.” “I don’t care anymore.” “I can’t wait to get out of here.” “I’m so done.”</p>
Emotions	
Feeling	<p>Bad Stressed Hopeless Not good enough Hopelessness Unmotivated and disappointed Loneliness Not enough Lonely Alone Pointless Unworthy Worrying about other struggles instead of school Prioritizing things instead of school because they feel like school isn’t for them Stressed Hopelessness Stress Like they aren’t able to do it Overwhelmed Anxiousness Drained No motivation Tired Angry Disconnected Not seen Pressured Not understood Lost Anxious</p>
Behaviors	
Doing	<p>Procrastinating Avoiding familiar conflict</p>



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	<p>Distracting themselves Keeping parents appeased Putting things to the side Doing bare-minimum work Procrastinating Giving up hope Putting others before themselves and not worrying about school Avoiding Self-soothing Taking up hobbies and dropping them quickly Ignore Alone Aversion to help</p>
<p>Saying</p>	<p>“Am I going through depression?” “I’m completely turned off by college and school.” “How do I deal with frustrating people at home?” “What if I have to take care of my parents?” “I need to get out of my house so people get off my back.” “I want to work.” “I just need to graduate.” “How am I supposed to think about the future if I’m just trying to survive each week?” “How can I recover credits?” “What if I am struggling with homelessness?” “What if I don’t have a safe family to go to?”</p>



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Table 3. Empathy mapping for “cautious self-observers.”

“Cautious Self-observers”	
What they see and hear in their world	
Seeing	<p>Other people succeeding Too many possibilities How "easy" it is for others People who know what they want in life and have a plan Other people's talent Others having friends Seeing others passing tests Other people doing what they want to do People succeeding People with set goals People with more of a sense of where they're going</p>
Hearing	<p>“What interests you?” “Follow your dreams.” “Make a plan.” “Don't worry about the money.” “You just need to put yourself out there.” “You have to participate more” “It's not that hard.” “Don't be shy.” “Just speak.” "Don't worry you'll be fine." “You'll get it done.” Everyone else's plans. "Don't worry about it." “You'll be happy anywhere you end up.”</p>
Thoughts	
Thinking	<p>“Why am I like this?” “Why is it easy for others?” “Am I missing something?” Thinking a lot about the past and worrying about the future Constant self-reflection Think about how they're stuck here “Time is moving too fast.” “Why can't I just speak?” “I'm going to fall behind.” “What if..” "What the heck am I doing?"</p>



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	Aaaack "What is my purpose in this life?"
Emotions	
Feeling	Anxious Overwhelmed Unsure Confused Enough, but they could do better Stuck Stressed Depressed Pressured Hard on themselves Confused Tired Self critical Sometimes excited, but hard to control that feeling
Behaviors	
Doing	Doubting themselves Hesitating Thinking about their dream, but not starting Just enough to get through things Compare self to others Doing homework, but don't know why Meeting deadlines Internet rabbit holes of exploration Following expectations Not going the extra mile Try to do what they think is their best Satisfied with the bare minimum Wanting to do something but opting out of doing it Procrastinate Doing what needs to be done
Saying	"Why are the good kids always praised?" "I'm alone all the time." "How do I reach out to my teacher without bothering them?" "How will my parents understand that I am not like them?" "How do I make friends?" "I only want to go to SF State or East Bay." "I go to clubs based on my friends' interests, not my interests." "How should I act in college?"



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Table 4. Empathy mapping for “underdogs and achievers.”

“Underdogs and Achievers”	
What they see and hear in their world	
Seeing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Opportunities to be used Opportunities Resources People to help them Collaboration Too many opportunities A challenging “wall” of applications Opportunities Resources People being there to help People reaching out to them Availability More work to do Outreach Competing even more Thoughts of what school used to be like
Hearing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> “You’re doing great.” “Keep going.” “Good job.” “Don’t burn out.” “Try new things.” “Just a little bit more.” “You got this.” “It’s ok to be tired.” “What do you want to do in the future?” “You are a star student.” “Great job.” “Wow, I wish I can be like you.” “You’re set.” “Nice job, again! So predictable, wow!”
Thoughts	
Thinking	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> “I have to finish.” “Just a little bit more.” “I’m almost done.” “A bit more, then I’ll be free.” “I’m so tired.” “I have to do everything.” “It will be worth it.”



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	<p>"I am doing it for a reason." "It's for the future." Afraid to disappoint others "If I don't get an 'A,' I'm a failure." "What do I want to do when I'm older?" "I can't let them down." "What if I don't pass?" "What if I don't make enough money?" "What if others are better at my own job?" "I need to do this to help my future" "I have to do this, if not..." "Am I doing this right?" "What if...?" "This is for the future."</p>
Emotions	
Feeling	<p>Overwhelmed by options Powerful Seen and heard If f they stop, they fall They are able to self-initiate Overwhelmed Stressed If they know nothing about the real world Tired Pressured Excited but unsure of the future Pressured Overworked Burnt out</p>
Behaviors	
Doing	<p>They are doing their work Weighing their options They try They get tunnel vision in what they're doing Going outside their comfort zone Their work on time Do all their work Dedicate themselves to school Help others Base their value on (test) scores Overworking The most Completing their work on time</p>



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	Effort into everything Get underchallenged
Saying	“What can I do to build up my resume in the next few months?” “Can internships be done virtually?” “When will SAT and ACT prep begin?” “How do I bring up my GPA?” “I have less than a 2.0 GPA. Can I still go to a four-year college?” “Am I in the right classes?” “How do I make sure that the clubs I’m in look impressive on paper?”