
WCCS Faculty and Staff Strengthen Professional Life Skills to Support Student Success



Wallace Community College Selma faculty and staff focused on strengthening the everyday skills that shape student experiences during a professional development workshop held October 20, 2026.

Led by Andrea Heard, senior consultant with K. Allen Consulting, the Professional Life Skills workshop brought instructors and student services employees together for discussion, team activities, and live practice. The session emphasized how communication, professionalism, and coaching can help employees support students while encouraging them to become more independent.

“We are never supposed to stop learning and it only strengthens our expertise,” Heard said.

Putting Professional Life Skills into Practice

Heard believes professional development gives employees at every stage of their careers opportunities to learn from one another, practice new approaches, and strengthen the skills they bring to their roles.

The workshop materials distinguished among three ways to support a learner: directing, which clarifies requirements and next steps; advising, which presents options and recommendations; and coaching, which uses questions and reflection to help students determine their own next steps.



During the Coaching Conversation Laboratory, participants worked through scenarios involving a student balancing school, work, and family responsibilities; a student struggling to accept feedback; and a student hesitant to initiate professional communication about an internship.

The exercises asked participants to consider when a student needs clear instructions, when additional information or resources would help, and when thoughtful questions can encourage problem-solving and ownership.

Heard connected that work to helping students develop the professional life skills, often called soft skills, they need to become independent adults. Building those skills into daily interactions, she said, allows employees across campus to support that growth.

Respect and Growth at Every Career Stage



Rachel Gordon, who said she has worked in student services at WCCS for 34 years, described the workshop as an opportunity to strengthen how employees carry out their responsibilities and represent the college.

The session ran from 9 a.m. to noon and reinforced the importance of treating students, colleagues, and visitors with respect. For Gordon, that responsibility applies to every interaction, regardless of a person's role.

"Everybody matters when it comes to the community college," Gordon said.

She said students come to WCCS looking for a pathway to success, and professional development helps employees recognize areas where they can improve the support they provide.



Gordon also identified personal well-being as a lesson she planned to carry forward. Taking care of herself mentally, physically, and spiritually, she said, helps her be prepared to serve students and work alongside colleagues.

Turning Reflection into Action

The workshop materials also included employees' professional life skills commitments and practical next steps. Areas of focus included active listening, clear communication, teamwork, time management, digital fluency, self-advocacy, and responding constructively to feedback.

Commitments described ways to put those skills into practice, from setting priorities and following through on responsibilities to encouraging students to ask questions, communicate their needs, and take ownership of routine tasks.



For Gordon, continued growth remains important even after decades of service.

"There's always room for improvement," she said. "That's my attitude."

By connecting reflection with practical exercises, the workshop gave WCCS faculty and staff approaches they can use in daily conversations to help students navigate challenges and build confidence in their own abilities.

