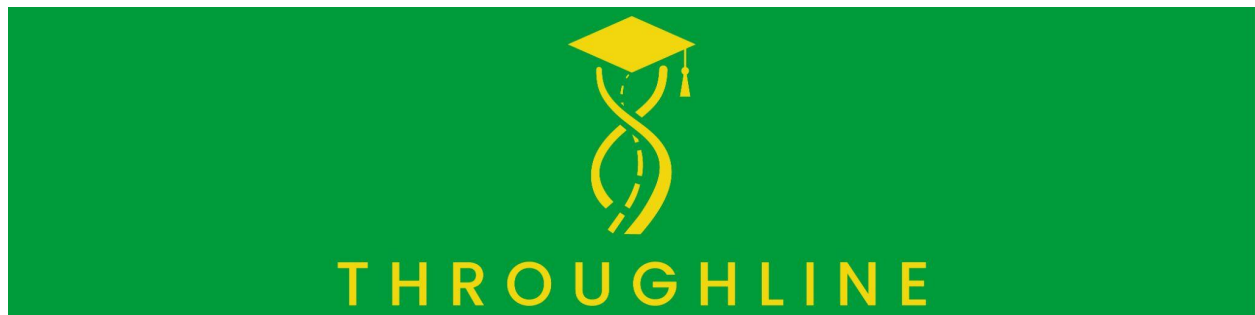


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Why we exist

Why Throughline Exists

Throughline begins with a simple belief: ***The future of Birmingham is inseparable from the future of its young people.***

Every student who persists through college strengthens the workforce, civic life, economy, and social fabric of our community. Every student who leaves college without the support they need represents not only an individual loss, but a missed opportunity for Birmingham as a whole. Too often, we treat educational success as someone else's responsibility—parents, schools, colleges, nonprofits, or students themselves. Throughline rejects that idea.

College represents one of the most significant transitions in a young person's life. While admission opens a door, persistence determines whether that opportunity becomes long-term economic mobility, expanded opportunity, and community leadership.

We believe that every young person deserves a network of adults who are invested in their success because their success is connected to our collective future. This is not charity. It is not rescue work, but rather a shared responsibility.

Our mentors are not asked to solve every problem or have every answer. They are asked to build consistent relationships, ask thoughtful questions, connect students to resources, and remind them that they do not have to navigate college alone.

We also believe mentoring transforms mentors. By building authentic relationships across neighborhoods, campuses, professions, and lived experiences, mentors gain a deeper understanding of Birmingham and their place within it. They begin to see that today's college students are not simply recipients of support—they are tomorrow's colleagues, leaders, neighbors, business owners, educators, and public servants. Throughline exists to strengthen both students and the relationships that strengthen Birmingham.

We do not mentor students because they need us. We mentor students because Birmingham needs all of us. Our goal is not simply to help students graduate. Our goal is to cultivate the next generation of Birmingham's teachers, engineers, entrepreneurs, healthcare workers, artists, civic leaders, and neighbors—people who will one day invest in someone else's future just as someone invested in theirs.

Our beliefs

Our Beliefs

1. We believe our futures are connected.

The future of Birmingham is inseparable from the future of its young people. Their success shapes our workforce, our neighborhoods, our civic life, and our shared prosperity. Investing in students is an investment in all of us.

2. We believe responsibility should be shared.

No single family, school, nonprofit, employer, or college can ensure student success alone. Lasting change happens when communities choose to share responsibility for helping young people thrive.

3. We believe relationships are the engine of persistence.

Students are more likely to persist when they know someone notices, cares, asks difficult questions, celebrates progress, and consistently shows up. Information matters. Relationships make information actionable.

4. We believe mentoring develops both people.

Students grow through guidance, encouragement, and opportunity. Mentors grow through deeper understanding, expanded perspective, and a stronger connection to their community. The relationship changes both.

5. We believe belonging comes before achievement.

Students who believe they belong are more likely to ask for help, recover from setbacks, take healthy risks, and remain engaged. Academic success is strengthened when students feel connected to people and place.

6. We believe curiosity is more powerful than assumptions.

Every student's story is unique. Great mentors seek to understand before they seek to advise. They ask thoughtful questions, listen carefully, and remain open to experiences different from their own.

7. We believe our role is to build agency, not dependence.

Mentors are not rescuers. They do not solve every problem. They help students develop the confidence, judgment, relationships, and skills to navigate future challenges independently.

8. We believe consistency matters more than perfection.

Students rarely need a perfect mentor. They need a dependable one. Showing up consistently, following through, and remaining present often have greater impact than having all the answers.

9. We believe today's mentees are tomorrow's peers.

We do not mentor students because they are permanently in need of our help. We mentor them because they are future colleagues, neighbors, leaders, innovators, educators, entrepreneurs, and citizens. The goal is not to create lifelong mentees—it is to help cultivate future peers who will, in turn, strengthen Birmingham for the next generation.

10. We believe mentoring is built through coaching, not rescuing.

Great mentors do not exist to provide all the answers. They ask thoughtful questions, encourage reflection, share perspective when appropriate, and help students develop the confidence to make informed decisions themselves.

Theory of change

Throughline Theory of Change

If students have:

consistent relationships,



trusted guidance,



timely access to resources,



help navigating college systems,



opportunities to reflect,



encouragement to solve problems independently,



then students become more confident, more connected, more resourceful, and more resilient.

Mentors reminders

Mentor Definition

A Throughline Mentor is a consistent adult who builds a trusting relationship with a first-year college student, helping them navigate challenges, celebrate successes, connect to resources, and develop the confidence and skills to persist through college.

Throughline mentors are not expected to have every answer or solve every problem. Instead, they listen well, ask thoughtful questions, share perspective when appropriate, connect students to resources, and remain a dependable presence throughout the student's first year of college.

Throughline mentors recognize that today's students are tomorrow's peers, colleagues, leaders, and neighbors. By investing in one student's success, they help strengthen the future of Birmingham.

Mentor Commitments

As a Throughline Mentor, I commit to:

1. Show up consistently, even when life gets busy.
2. Listen before offering advice.
3. Build trust before trying to solve problems.
4. Encourage growth rather than dependence.
5. Celebrate progress as much as achievement.
6. Respect each student's story and lived experience.
7. Connect students to resources when challenges exceed my role.
8. Remain curious and continue learning alongside my mentee.
9. Remember that today's mentees are tomorrow's peers.
10. Help strengthen Birmingham by investing in the people who will shape its future.

What Great Mentors Remember

Relationship before advice.

Students don't care how much you know until they know you care.

Progress before perfection.

Help students keep moving.

Ask before telling.

Curiosity builds trust.

Coach before solving.

Develop confidence, not dependence.

Connect before carrying.

Use the people and resources already around the student.

Consistency beats intensity.

One dependable conversation each month is more powerful than one extraordinary conversation every semester.

Mentor competencies

Mentor Competencies

1. Build Trust

Develop authentic, consistent relationships where students feel seen, heard, and supported.

2. Lead with Curiosity

Seek to understand before offering advice. Ask thoughtful questions and avoid assumptions.

3. Encourage Growth

Help students develop confidence, resilience, and problem-solving skills rather than solving problems for them.

4. Navigate Resources

Know when and how to connect students with campus and Throughline resources.

5. Honor Difference

Recognize that every student's experience—including differences across race, socioeconomic background, first-generation status, and campus culture—is unique. Approach each conversation with humility and openness.

6. Show Up Consistently

Be reliable, follow through on commitments, and maintain regular communication. Consistency builds trust more than perfection.

Roles, Boundaries & Escalation

Mentor Roles, Boundaries, & Escalation

A Throughline mentor's role

As a Throughline Mentor, your role is to:

- Build a consistent, trusting relationship.
 - Listen with curiosity and empathy.
 - Encourage reflection and independent problem-solving.
 - Celebrate progress and persistence.
 - Share perspective, not prescriptions.
 - Connect students with campus and Throughline resources.
 - Recognize when additional support is needed.
-

Your role is not to...

- Be a therapist.
 - Be a parent.
 - Be available 24/7.
 - Complete work or make decisions for students.
 - Contact professors, financial aid offices, or university staff on a student's behalf (unless coordinated with Throughline).
 - Promise financial assistance.
 - Keep safety concerns or situations involving harm confidential.
-

When to contact Throughline immediately

Notify the Throughline team if a student:

- Indicates they may withdraw from college.
- Expresses thoughts of self-harm or harming others.

- Experiences a mental health crisis.
 - Loses housing or food security.
 - Experiences a financial emergency that threatens enrollment.
 - Reports discrimination, harassment, or safety concerns.
 - Stops responding for an extended period despite multiple outreach attempts.
-

When to coach instead of escalate

A mentor should generally coach—not immediately escalate—when a student is:

- Struggling with time management.
 - Homesick.
 - Unsure about a major.
 - Nervous about grades.
 - Having roommate conflicts.
 - Feeling overwhelmed but functioning.
 - Exploring career options.
 - Working through everyday college decisions.
-

One rule to remember: When in doubt, reach out.

Mentors are never expected to navigate difficult situations alone.

Monthly check in escalation

In response to the check in question: *Based on today's conversation, how likely do you think your student is to successfully navigate the next month without additional support?*

Response	Color	Staff Action
Very likely	 Green	No follow-up needed. Continue normal monthly support.
Likely	 Blue	No follow-up needed. Student appears on track.
Unsure	 Yellow	Review within one week. Look for patterns or trends. No immediate outreach unless other concerns are present.
Unlikely	 Orange	Staff follow-up within 2–3 business days. Consider contacting mentor and/or student.
Very unlikely	 Red	Immediate staff review (within 24 hours). Determine whether intervention is needed.

Very likely

- No action
 - Celebrate successes
 - Continue monthly cadence
-

Likely

- No action
 - Monitor normally
-

Unsure

- Is this the first yellow?
 - Is there a clear challenge?
 - Has confidence or belonging declined?
 - Are there multiple yellow responses across months?
-

Unlikely

Automatically:

- Flag for staff review.
 - Mentor receives follow-up.
 - Determine whether student outreach is appropriate.
 - Connect to resources if needed.
-

Very unlikely

Immediately:

- Staff review within 24 hours.
- Contact mentor.
- Assess urgency.
- Determine appropriate intervention.
- Activate emergency or campus resources if warranted.

Student journey map

Student Journey Map

Phase	Development goal	Identity question	High level view	Students are experiencing...	Key college milestones	Common risk factors	Protective factors	Mentor priorities	Potential mentor questions
1 <i>Launch</i> Aug - Sept	I belong here.	Do I belong here?	Students are transitioning from high school to college. Academics matter, but belonging is the priority. Students who establish early relationships and routines are much more likely to persist.	• Move-in • Homesickness • Excitement • Fear • Identity shifts • Meeting roommates • Meeting professors • First time of true independence • Managing unstructured time • Learning campus culture • AI expectations in coursework • Navigating campus systems	• Move-in • Orientation • Add/Drop • First assignments • Financial aid verification • Buying books • Student organizations fair • Office hours • Campus employment	• Isolation • Homesickness • Financial confusion • Missing class • Not asking for help • Social withdrawal • Technology overwhelm • Transportation • Food insecurity	• Making one close friend • Connecting with one trusted campus adult • Joining one organization	Build trust. 1. Build trust before offering advice. 2. Help students feel seen, known, and supported. 3. Reassure students that uncertainty is a normal part of the college transition. 4. Help students identify people and places where they belong. 5. Celebrate early wins to build confidence. 6. Encourage students to use campus resources before they need them. 7. Encourage students to introduce themselves to faculty and other trusted campus adults.	• What has surprised you most about your campus culture? • In what ways do you feel like you fit in? In what ways do you still feel like an outsider? • What has been easier than expected? Harder? • What spaces on campus already feel comfortable? • Have you introduced yourself to any professors? • What AI tools are your professors encouraging or discouraging you to use? • What is one thing you need before our next conversation?

Phase	Development goal	Identity question	High level view	Students are experiencing...	Key college milestones	Common risk factors	Protective factors	Mentor priorities	Potential mentor questions
2 <i>Momentum</i> Oct	I can succeed here.	Can I succeed here?	Students begin receiving feedback about their academic performance. Confidence rises and falls. This is often where imposter syndrome appears.	• First disappointing grades • Midterms and academic feedback • Imposter syndrome • Trying to balance academics and social life • Learning how professors teach • Time management challenges • Deciding whether to ask for help • Comparing themselves to classmates	• Midterms • Tutoring • Advising • Study groups • Academic feedback	• Failing exams • Time management • Academic avoidance • Perfectionism • Burnout • Isolation despite appearing socially active • Avoiding difficult conversations	• Using tutoring • Attending office hours • Building a study routine	Build confidence. 1. Reinforce students' growing confidence. 2. Help students learn from mistakes rather than fear them. 3. Normalize setbacks as part of learning. 4. Guide students to reflect instead of striving for perfection. 5. Encourage students to attend office hours and ask questions early.	• How did your first exams go? • What's one win you're celebrating? • What are you proud of? • What isn't working? • Have you visited office hours? • Do you know where tutoring is? • Are you finding a rhythm? • What organization, activity, or space has helped you feel most connected this month? • What is one thing you need before our next conversation?

Phase	Development goal	Identity question	High level view	Students are experiencing...	Key college milestones	Common risk factors	Protective factors	Mentor priorities	Potential mentor questions
3 <i>Resilience</i> Nov	I can recover from setbacks.	What happens when I fail?	Almost everyone experiences disappointment. This isn't avoiding setbacks but learning how to recover.	• Burnout before Thanksgiving • Missing home or feeling disconnected • Worrying about grades • Deciding whether they still belong • Financial stress before the holidays • Registration confusion • Increased pressure from family	• Registration • Thanksgiving • Spring advising • Financial holds • Understanding Satisfactory Academic Progress (SAP)	• Considering withdrawal • Financial stress • Family expectations • Giving up after poor grades	• Seeking help early • Recovering from setbacks • Developing self-advocacy	Build problem-solving. 1. Help students reframe setbacks as opportunities for growth. 2. Coach students through problems instead of solving them. 3. Help students identify and use their support systems. 4. Encourage students to advocate for themselves. 5. Encourage students to seek help from faculty before small problems become larger ones.	• What's been your biggest challenge lately? • What's one win you're celebrating? • What have you learned about yourself? • What support have you used? • What's your plan moving forward? • What organization, activity, or space has helped you feel most connected this month? • What is one thing you need before our next conversation?

Phase	Development goal	Identity question	High level view	Students are experiencing...	Key college milestones	Common risk factors	Protective factors	Mentor priorities	Potential mentor questions
4 <i>Reflection</i> Dec	I have grown.	What have I learned about myself?	Students begin recognizing how much they've changed. Reflection builds confidence.	• Final exams • Relief and exhaustion • Looking back on their first semester • Comparing expectations with reality • Pride and disappointment simultaneously • Questions about next semester	• Finals • Grades • Winter break • Spring schedules • Scholarships • Aid adjustments • Appeals	• Discouragement • Academic probation • Financial concerns • Shame after grades • Returning home feeling disconnected	• Recognizing growth • Celebrating progress • Setting goals	Build perspective. 1. Celebrate how far students have come. 2. Help students reflect on both successes and challenges. 3. Guide students in setting meaningful goals for the spring semester. 4. Help students recognize growth they may not yet see in themselves.	• What challenged you most? • What's one win you're celebrating? • What are you most proud of? • What would you do differently? • What's one goal for spring? • What organization, activity, or space has helped you feel most connected this month? • What is one thing you need before our next conversation?

Phase	Development goal	Identity question	High level view	Students are experiencing...	Key college milestones	Common risk factors	Protective factors	Mentor priorities	Potential mentor questions
5 <i>Reset</i> Jan	I can apply what I've learned.	Who do I want to be this semester?	Students begin the semester with experience rather than uncertainty.	• A fresh start • Returning after being home • Renewed motivation • New classes and professors • Rebuilding routines • Setting goals differently than the fall	• New semester • Financial aid adjustments • New classes	•	• Re-establishing routines • Clarifying goals • Using campus resources early	Build habits. 1. Help students set intentional goals for the new semester. 2. Support students in rebuilding healthy routines and habits. 3. Reinforce confidence by reminding students of what they've already accomplished. 4. Encourage students to reconnect with campus resources early in the semester.	• What's different this semester? • What's one win you're celebrating? • What habit are you changing? • What's one goal by spring break? • What organization, activity, or space has helped you feel most connected this month? • What is one thing you need before our next conversation?

Phase	Development goal	Identity question	High level view	Students are experiencing...	Key college milestones	Common risk factors	Protective factors	Mentor priorities	Potential mentor questions
6 <i>Ownership</i> Feb	I'm building my future.	What kind of future am I building?	Students begin connecting college with career.	• Greater confidence navigating campus • Thinking beyond surviving college • Considering majors and careers • Exploring leadership • Looking for internships • Building professional identity	• Internship applications • Career fairs • Student leadership opportunities	• Lack of direction • Low motivation • Limited engagement • Lack of purpose • Changing majors • Career uncertainty	• Faculty mentor • Internship • Leadership • Professional identity	Build purpose. 1. Encourage students to explore careers, majors, and future opportunities. 2. Help students expand their professional network. 3. Encourage students to pursue leadership and meaningful involvement. 4. Connect students' daily choices to their long-term goals. 5. Encourage students to build relationships with faculty who can support their future.	• Have you visited Career Services? • What's one win you're celebrating? • What experiences are helping you figure out what you want to do? • What are you curious to explore? • Who on campus has influenced your thinking? • Have you figured out how AI helps you learn without replacing your learning? • What organization, activity, or space has helped you feel most connected this month? • What is one thing you need before our next conversation?

Phase	Development goal	Identity question	High level view	Students are experiencing...	Key college milestones	Common risk factors	Protective factors	Mentor priorities	Potential mentor questions
7 <i>Persistence</i> Mar	I'm staying the course.	What keeps me going when motivation fades?	Energy often drops. Spring fatigue is real. Students need to be encouraged more than pressured.	• Spring fatigue • Motivation dips • Balancing multiple commitments • Financial aid renewal • Thinking about summer • Stress before finals	• Midterms • FAFSA renewal • Verification • Housing deposits • Summer planning	• Burnout • Financial stress • Attendance • Isolation	• Healthy routines • Strong peer relationships • Purpose • Managing stress well	Build endurance. 1. Help students maintain momentum during a demanding season. 2. Encourage healthy routines that support academic success and well-being. 3. Celebrate consistency, not just achievement. 4. Help students create a plan to finish the semester strong.	• What's keeping you motivated? • What's one win you're celebrating? • What's draining you? • How are you taking care of yourself? • What support do you need before finals? • What organization, activity, or space has helped you feel most connected this month? • What is one thing you need before our next conversation?

Phase	Development goal	Identity question	High level view	Students are experiencing...	Key college milestones	Common risk factors	Protective factors	Mentor priorities	Potential mentor questions
8 <i>Transition</i> Apr - May	I'm becoming who I came here to be.	Who am I becoming ?	Students finish their first year with evidence that they belong in college. The focus shifts from surviving Year One to preparing for Year Two.	- Confidence they didn't have in August - Finals - Housing decisions - Summer employment planning - Reflection - Realizing how much they've grown - Preparing for Year Two	- Finals - Housing - Summer employment - Registration - Year Two planning	- Summer melt - Not returning - Housing uncertainty	- Year Two plan - Housing secured - Summer plans - Confidence	Build identity. - Celebrate students' accomplishments throughout their first year. - Help students reflect on who they have become. - Guide students in preparing intentionally for Year Two. - Reinforce the confidence they've earned through persistence.	- What advice would you give yourself from last August? - What's one win you're celebrating? - What are you most proud of? - What are you excited about next year? - How has your definition of success changed? - What organization, activity, or space has helped you feel most connected this month?