



July 2018

Guided Pathways as a Framework for Integrating Student Success Efforts:
A Case Study of Three California Community Colleges

Acknowledgments

The authors would like to thank the following individuals who shared their expertise for this brief: Jeff Archibald, Angélica Garcia, Audrey Green, Craig Hayward, Irene Malmgren, Barbara McNeice-Stallard, Aaron McVean, Daylene Meuschke, Regina Stanback-Stroud, and Cindy Stephens. We would also like to thank the team for the IEPI Integrated Planning Applied Solutions Kit, particularly Barbara McNeice-Stallard and Michael Howe, for initial conversations that helped create a concept for this brief. The work on this brief was supported by funding from the James Irvine Foundation.

Suggested Citation: Dadgar, M., Fischerhall, C., Collins, L., Schaefer, K. (2018) Guided Pathways as a Framework for Integrating Student Success Efforts: A Case Study of Three California Community Colleges. Oakland, CA: Career Ladders Project.

Introduction

In their 2015 book *Redesigning America's Community Colleges: A Clearer Path to Student Success*, Thomas Bailey, Shana Smith Jagers, and Davis Jenkins suggest that in order to systematically increase completion rates and reduce equity gaps in community colleges it is necessary to redesign community colleges to create a clearly organized structure that integrates programs of study and services to students. The book proposes a set of design principles that shape what are now known as the four pillars of Guided Pathways: 1) creating maps to show clear pathways for students to attain goals; 2) helping students choose and enter a program pathway; 3) keeping students on their path; and 4) ensuring that students are learning.

The book builds on two decades of research on student progression in community colleges as well as innovative work by colleges across the nation to address the systemic barriers to student success. These cumulative efforts contributed to increasing confidence in identifying the key practices and design principles that are essential to improving outcomes for students. These efforts have also revealed a growing understanding that any one of these practices by itself was not sufficient to accomplish wholesale change at scale for students.

In 2017, the California Community Colleges Board of Governors committed to using the Guided Pathways framework to achieve student completion and equity goals in the California community college system. The California Community Colleges (CCC) set forth strategies for achieving its ambitious goals in a set of commitments called Vision for Success, and state funds were awarded to support adoption of Guided Pathways across the colleges.¹ In fall 2017, the California Community Colleges Chancellor's Office (CCCCO) introduced the Guided Pathways self-assessment tool to help colleges examine their own readiness or progression on key elements necessary for adopting Guided Pathways.² The first three key elements of the self-assessment are 1) cross-functional inquiry, 2) integrated planning, and 3) shared metrics. These key elements arguably lay the foundation for Guided Pathways inquiry and design. The majority of the colleges indicated in their responses that they were at early stages in these three areas. In particular, colleges have questions about how to effectively integrate different planning processes and how Guided Pathways can be used to consolidate student support efforts that are currently being implemented separately at many of the colleges.

The purpose of this Brief is to explore how Guided Pathways can unify different initiatives by providing an overarching framework for cross-functional campus inquiry and integrated planning. It also addresses how having shared metrics can help the integrated planning process. This Brief reviews some of the early evidence on the effectiveness of Guided Pathways and argues that it provides an excellent framework for integrating existing California-based initiatives such as the Student Success and Support Program (SSSP), Student Equity (SE), the Basic Skills Initiative (BSI), the Basic Skills Student Outcomes and Transformation (BSSOT) Program, and the Strong Workforce Program (SWP).

This Brief includes findings from interviews with administrators and faculty at three California community colleges that are engaged in integrated planning and are using Guided Pathways. Also included are college perspectives on the essential elements of a successful and truly integrated college-wide planning effort. As the interview findings suggest, Guided Pathways represents an evolution of reform and institutional change long underway at the colleges—an evolution that has continued to progress beyond what is represented in this piece. This Brief provides a snapshot in time and explores the early stages of inquiry into Guided Pathways. The later stages of design and implementation will be examined in a subsequent Brief.

Integrated planning aligns goals, priorities, and resources across college initiatives and funding streams. When done well, it can ensure that solutions are not implemented in isolation and are scalable for all students. The authors of this Brief suggest that using Guided Pathways as a framework for integrated planning leads to campus-wide solutions that are evidence-based—with the potential to increase student completion rates and close student equity gaps.

Early Evidence on the Effectiveness of Guided Pathways

Four-year and two-year colleges across the country have engaged in Guided Pathway redesign efforts, implementing the key principles after adapting them to their specific circumstances and needs. Several of these colleges have seen impressive impacts on outcomes, especially for low-income students and students of color.

After adopting Guided Pathway design principles, both Georgia State University (GSU) and Arizona State University (ASU) demonstrated dramatic institution-wide improvement in student outcomes with respect to specific equity gaps.³ In addition, Guttman Community College, which was founded on the Guided Pathways design principles, has much higher persistence and completion rates than other colleges in the City University of New York system, which serve similar students.

Outcomes from Early Adopters of Guided Pathways

Georgia State University (GSU)

Ten years after implementing Guided Pathways principles, GSU has eliminated longstanding equity gaps between white, African American, and Hispanic/Latinx students.

In the same decade, GSU actively recruited a higher number of lower-income students—moving from serving 31% Pell eligible students in 2003 to 58% Pell eligible students in 2013.

Today, GSU boasts the highest graduation rate for black students in the nation.⁴ Before full implementation of these practices, 31.6% of white students, 25.6% of African American students, and 22% of Hispanic/Latinx students had successfully completed their degrees. By 2014, these numbers were 54% to 57% across the board.⁵

What is perhaps most compelling is that GSU made these improvements despite simultaneous budget cuts.⁶

Arizona State University (ASU)

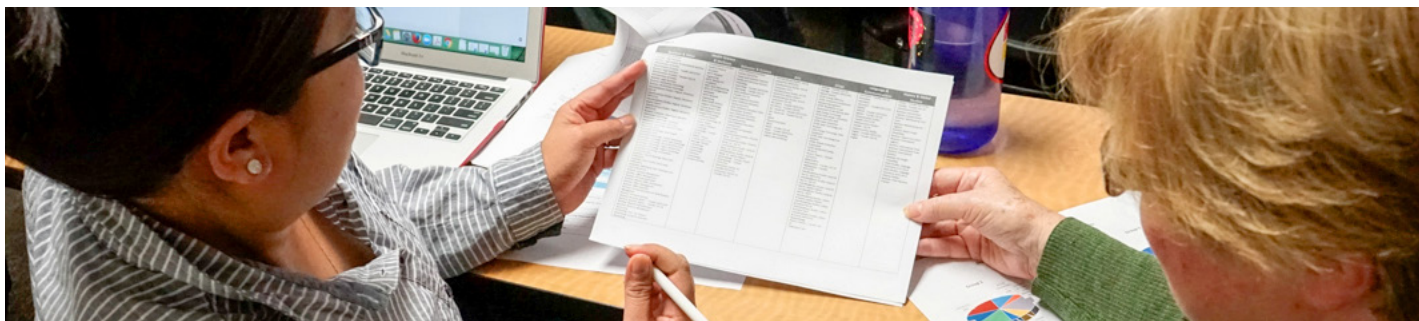
After implementing practices included in a Guided Pathways framework, the first-year student retention rate rose from 76% in the mid-2000s to 81% in 2009.⁷

ASU currently has one of the highest student retention rates in the nation at 86%.⁸

Guttman Community College in New York City

In 2012, in consultation with the Community College Research Center and its director, Thomas Bailey, President Scott Evenback designed the nascent institution around the Guided Pathways design principles, which were gaining increased attention and traction in community colleges.

In 2017, three-year graduation rates were at 46%, which is triple the national average (16%) of students graduating in three years at two-year urban colleges.⁹



The Importance of Integrated System Redesign

Many reform efforts to date have attempted to improve rates of student completion by designing and implementing multiple separate initiatives. In contrast, the Guided Pathways approach entails a systemic redesign of the student experience that changes program structure, student intake, instruction, and support services. Marshalling the human and financial resources necessary for such wholesale innovation requires building on existing innovation, integrating current initiatives and different functions of the college, infusing evidence-based practices, and scaling innovation.

The California Community Colleges (CCC) system and the California state legislature have invested millions of dollars in various initiatives over the past decade to increase credential attainment in the colleges. Based on the best evidence emerging at the time, each of these initiatives introduced clear and structured changes in specific areas of education, such as reforms to developmental education, integration of support services, and strengthening career technical education and workforce delivery.

Despite these resources, credential attainment and transfer rates at the CCC have remained relatively flat since 2010.¹⁰ At present, several main California initiatives—Student Success and Support Program (SSSP), Student Equity (SE), the Basic Skills Initiative (BSI), the Basic Skills Student Outcomes and Transformation (BSSOT) Program, and the Strong Workforce Program (SWP)—are focused on increasing the number of students who earn a certificate or degree, transfer, and access family-supporting careers. Each of these initiatives seeks to transform specific aspects of the student experience in order to close equity gaps and staunch well documented “loss points,” those key moments where students fall off the track in their educational journey. Although there have been many successes, collectively these initiatives have not significantly improved overall completion rates. The reason may be that they are typically operated as distinct projects and have not led to institution-wide inquiry and redesign.

The challenge now facing the field is how to integrate these multiple initiatives into a comprehensive framework for institutional change. Any one of these initiatives alone cannot be fully realized or be effective unless it is integrated with the other initiatives. In addition, scaling student success requires college constituents to work together across their current areas. For example, a college can help a student avoid unnecessary remedial courses and transition immediately into college-level work (i.e., through BSSOT and AB 705), but that does not help students choose a program of study or guarantee college success and completion.¹¹ Reforms that expedite entry into college-level courses are an important step and have a potentially large impact but on their own are not enough to increase credential attainment. Similarly, proactive

student supports cannot be scaled if they are seen as the sole responsibility of support services staff and if instructional faculty are unaware of how to refer students to services or how to coordinate classroom instruction with academic supports. To serve students most effectively, change initiatives need to be integrated.

In addition to these categorically funded CCC initiatives, colleges and districts are required by accrediting bodies as well as state regulation to enact ongoing plans such as district strategic plans, college educational master plans, and facility plans. Colleges with competitive grants from public or private funding sources may also have other targeted reforms underway. In recent years, a number of state and federal grant programs and philanthropic initiatives have made major investments in community college pathways and institutional transformation efforts.¹² It is important that colleges build synergy among these initiatives in order to enact large-scale change. Guided Pathways can inform district plans and provide an overarching framework for various college change efforts.

“Integrated planning is about having a leadership team that agrees on the priorities and therefore looks to dedicate resources. That is a different model than developing initiatives based on the funding that is coming in.”

- Aaron McVean, Vice President of Instruction, Skyline College



Lessons Learned from the Field

In order to explore how colleges are using Guided Pathways to integrate various initiatives into more comprehensive institutional reform, the Career Ladders Project (CLP) selected three California community colleges for interviews. These colleges are using Guided Pathways design principles as a framework for integrated planning, but in different ways. For example, one college was in the first cohort of the American Association of Community Colleges (AACC) national Pathways Project and also drew on the Association of American Colleges and Universities (AAC&U) planning framework. Another began its work earlier but was recently selected to be part of the California Guided Pathways Project modeled on the AACC effort, and one college has come to Guided Pathways on its own, outside of any particular or external initiative.

CLP conducted in-depth interviews with 10 individuals from College of the Canyons, Mt. San Antonio College, and Skyline College. They represent a range of college roles that include president of the college, vice president of instruction, vice president of student services, institutional research manager, as well as faculty. The colleges exemplify a range of approaches in using the Guided Pathways design principles as a framework for integrated planning. They use different means for integrating and co-leveraging initiatives, but all have worked on ensuring that research evidence and inclusive campus dialogue drive their integrated plans. The interviewees at each college have had extensive involvement in integrated planning and in the progress of their campus on Guided Pathways implementation. The information used for this report draws from the review of relevant college documents and artifacts and interviews with the following individuals:

Jeff Archibald, Communications Faculty, Vice President of the Academic Senate, Mt. San Antonio College

Angélica Garcia, Vice President of Student Services, Skyline College

Audrey Green, Associate Vice President of Academic Affairs, College of the Canyons

Craig Hayward, Researcher, Research and Planning Group

Irene Malmgren, Vice President of Instruction, Mt. San Antonio College

Barbara McNeice-Stallard, Director of Research and Institutional Effectiveness, Mt. San Antonio College

Aaron McVean, Vice President of Instruction, Skyline College

Daylene Meuschke, Dean of Institutional Research, Planning and Institutional Effectiveness, College of the Canyons

Regina Stanback-Stroud, President of Skyline College

Cindy Stephens, Early Childhood Education Faculty, College of the Canyons



Lesson ONE:

Guided Pathways allow for cross-functional campus-wide inquiry and ownership when viewed as a set of design principles rather than a rigid model.

The Guided Pathways design principles provide an excellent framework that can inform the development of key practices and innovations. At the same time, it is necessary to have a campus-wide inquiry process that empowers campus constituents to align goals and build consensus. This requires finding the right balance between being faithful to an evidence-based framework while building on existing work, fostering ownership for reforms, and allowing for innovation. When seen as a broad set of design principles that allows for this balance, Guided Pathways can unify different initiatives and constituents around a shared vocabulary and clear purpose.

Interviewees agreed that explicitly communicating the alignment of goals was the first step in bringing together initiatives under a common framework. According to the interviewees, it was generally easy to communicate that the goals of the different campus initiatives were aligned. For example, SSSP, SE, BSI, SWP, and the goals stated in the colleges' master plans and strategic plans are all aligned around improving access, completion, labor market success, and closing equity gaps.

However, the interviewees felt that it was insufficient to have clearly aligned goals without the full commitment of college constituents to the overarching strategies for achieving those goals.

“Our vision is to have all the efforts for student success to be under the same umbrella. We need to move from our broad strategic goals to what are the three to five things that we are going to accomplish in the next three to five years.”

- Daylene Meuschke, Dean of Institutional Research, Planning and Institutional Effectiveness, College of the Canyons

To set the stage for inquiry to create a shared vision and overall strategy, the College of the Canyons tasked various campus constituents to review publications such as the AAC&U “Committing to Equity and Inclusive Excellence: A Campus Guide for Self-Study and Planning”¹³ as well as the Completion by Design and Guided Pathways frameworks and to identify elements that applied to their campus. Mt. San Antonio College is using a formalized five-step process to ensure that its integrated planning is rooted in evidence-based practices, is pragmatic, and includes built-in opportunities to gauge progress and measure outcomes. The Guided Pathways framework is part of the evidence that was brought into the planning framework and has established a foundation for shared vocabulary at Mt. San Antonio. Skyline College’s ongoing inquiry process includes examining and communicating “the brutal truths” about student outcomes, communicating the results of student focus groups, site visits to colleges nationwide that have implemented Guided Pathways, as well as ongoing inquiry into the research and practice behind Guided Pathways.

“By collectively asking hard questions that may be uncomfortable to answer, the campus can begin to create a foundation for moving forward.”

- Audrey Green, Associate Vice President of Academic Affairs, College of the Canyons

Interviewees also said their campus constituents were motivated when campus inquiry revealed Guided Pathways to be a flexible framework that could honor previous student success inquiry and design work at the college. For this to succeed, it was helpful for campus leaders to discuss the research evidence behind the Guided Pathways framework and allow campus constituents to see themselves as innovators who used the evidence-based framework to build on previous accomplishments. This sentiment was true at all three campuses but especially at Skyline College, where constituents emphasized that the Guided Pathways framework was a natural extension of the college’s decade-long work in creating “Comprehensive Diversity Framework for Realizing Equity and its Excellence.”¹⁴

Skyline College: Using Guided Pathways to Build on Existing Campus-Wide Strategies

Skyline College's shared vision for student success and completion—developed in collaboration with faculty, staff, and administrators and grounded in the Comprehensive Diversity Framework—formed the basis for an overarching completion effort called the Skyline College Promise of “Get in, Get through, and Graduate on time.” This effort, which was developed prior to the college's focus on Guided Pathways, provided three clear goals—Get in: improve students' initial experience and access; Get through: provide greater guided exploration and embedded support to foster success in students' chosen programs or educational journey; and Graduate on time: successfully support students to complete their educational goals in a timely manner.

The Get in, Get through, and Graduate on time framework was collaboratively generated and owned by Skyline College, and yet it is flexible enough to include emerging research from the field and, most recently, the Guided Pathways design principles. For example, prior to learning more about the research behind Guided Pathways, the college had already worked to remove financial barriers to full-time enrollment through the Promise Scholars Program. This program provided scholarships to students in need of financial support and offered a comprehensive student support program modeled after the CUNY Accelerated Study in Associate Programs. The college also addressed placement reform to reduce remediation rates by using multiple measures and guided self-placement. Skyline College's commitment to addressing equity and examining disaggregated data led the college to explore the Guided Pathways movement and include it within a unifying framework that could pull college-wide reforms together. This focus on completion and equity was the driving force behind its pursuit of Guided Pathways. Skyline College began its inquiry into Guided Pathways by examining the “brutal truths” of local data and student voice, reviewing Guided Pathways literature and research, conducting site visits to colleges and universities outside of California that had implemented Guided Pathways, and bringing in speakers and facilitators to the college campus. The campus community decided to create a design team and work groups that focused on the comprehensive redesign of the college, starting with three signature elements: Guided Pathways and meta majors; the Promise Scholars Program; and the Center for Transformative Teaching and Learning. The evolving college culture of a redesign mindset underlaid all these efforts. The successful design and implementation of meta majors and program maps is a direct result of the institutional commitment and work of the campus community through the design team structure.

“Our vision at Skyline College is crystal clear. It has been collaboratively developed and informed by faculty, administrators, students, staff, and the community.... Because of this clarity of vision, we can ask the campus constituents to innovate and dream out loud, but ensure that all their efforts are supporting the collective vision of students getting in, through, and graduating on time.”

- Regina Stanback Stroud, President of Skyline College

“An institution can't take on a major redesign effort and at the same time create trust. You have to first create trust of the leadership; that will allow the difficult conversations (for example, around Guided Pathways) to happen.”

- Angélica García, Vice President of Student Services, Skyline College

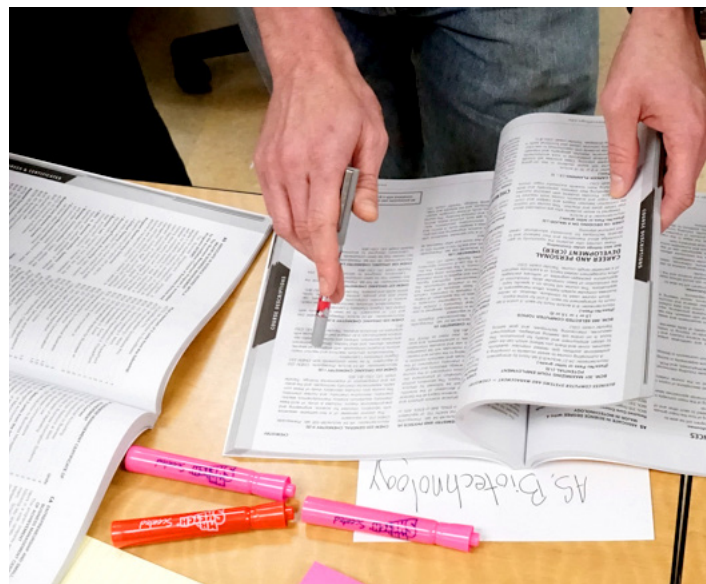
Lesson TWO:

To bring different initiatives together under a framework, it is important to use existing structures and processes and/or create new ones that can support ongoing inquiry, development of practices, and communication.

Developing shared practices across different initiatives requires an inclusive process of inquiry and dialogue that is built on trust. Mt. San Antonio College, College of the Canyons, and Skyline College have each built strategies to mobilize cross-functional teams and solicit leadership from staff, faculty, students, and administrators. The explicit structure these strategies take appears less essential than the following shared elements:

1. **An ongoing inquiry process that includes different campus stakeholders** and encourages examination of research, local data, and student voice to create consensus around the current barriers to student success and prepare the campus to develop shared strategies for moving forward. Guided Pathways is an excellent framework that can help inform the development of campus-wide change efforts.
2. **An ongoing process for creating and communicating to college stakeholders an inventory of all the initiatives, funding sources, and innovative work at the college and evaluating how they fit together and where gaps exist.** Several colleges, the CCCCO, and other organizations have developed tools for mapping out the goals and activities of different initiatives, some with an eye to using Guided Pathways as a framework. It is important to note that although tools are helpful in organizing the process and communicating an inventory of initiatives, having an inclusive, honest, and iterative process for bringing together campus constituents to inventory existing work and identify gaps in meeting student needs is paramount.
3. Building on existing **communication channels** and creating new ones to ensure inclusivity.

In addition to creating new structures, interviewees also reported that leveraging existing structures and resources was key. Many campus stakeholders who may not initially be included in integrated planning or in early discussions on Guided Pathways are involved in program reviews, serve in the Academic Senate and Classified Senate in various capacities, or participate in joint division or departmental meetings. These stakeholders are already engaged in college-wide discussions and are natural allies for integrated planning and Guided Pathway reforms.



Cross-functional teams consisting of diverse groups of people who have expertise and responsibility in different institutional areas are at the heart of successful Guided Pathway design. It is useful, however, to distinguish between cross-functional teams and more formal, constituent-based shared governance. A cross-functional team can be formed to design a specific aspect of Guided Pathways—for example, intake or course sequencing. Cross-functional in this context means mobilizing the expertise of a range of specific individuals who possess the critical knowledge to plan and implement redesign efforts. Colleges will need to bring together personnel who carry out key functions such as marketing, catalogue development, information technology, tutoring, financial aid, and counseling along with instructional faculty to grapple with college redesign questions and implementation. This effort requires wider inclusion and more detailed discussions than are typically involved in governance work. Colleges can, in turn, engage governance bodies to inform development of processes or policies, validate recommendations, and communicate work that is underway.

“The tension is the struggle to get out-comes, not money, to drive decision points and to integrate that approach into the priorities of the college.”

— Barbara McNeice-Stallard, Director of Research and Institutional Effectiveness, Mt. San Antonio College

College of the Canyons: Institutional Effectiveness and Inclusive Excellence (IE Squared)

College of the Canyons initially combined its SE and BSI task forces in an effort to institutionalize joint decision-making. IE Squared, a College of the Canyons structure that brought together key stakeholders working on different initiatives, began with an honest inventory of all institution-wide activities and engaged in collaborative inquiry. The benefits of this were threefold. First, it ensured that the strategies were aligned and subject to internal checks and balances across these three initiatives from the beginning stages of planning. Second, it provided a template for further integration of SE, BSI, SSSP, SWP, and Career Pathways. And, third, it established a structure for multistage collaboration to prepare the campus for inquiry about Guided Pathways.

Everyone on campus is invited to attend IE Squared meetings. Currently, the meetings draw about 30 regular attendees from faculty, support staff, student government representatives, Classified and Academic Senate representatives, business services and accounting managers and staff, and administrators from across the institution. Individuals attending IE Squared meetings work in small cross-functional teams to develop plans with clearly defined activities and outcomes. The meetings are facilitated to ensure that everyone's voice is heard.

The group has included Guided Pathways in its inquiry process, which had originally used other evidence-based frameworks such as Loss and Momentum from Completion by Design as well as the college's own local data. They identified areas they would like to work on across the campus. Today, IE Squared communicates its overall goals, plans, and progress to the college planning team, the Academic Senate, and the Board of Trustees. Interviewees reported that a big reason this committee structure has been successful is that it has eliminated redundancy across program-level and initiative-level outcomes; it has also allowed stakeholders across the institution to activate and fund key practices for student equity and success that touch multiple aspects of the student experience. In addition, College of the Canyons heavily utilizes program review to communicate and inform Guided Pathways development. In fact, Guided Pathways is the top priority under its teaching and learning objectives. Three-year plans are then tracked for progress.

“In program review, if you don’t have specific prompts, you could have anything under the sun. It helps to be prescriptive in program review and have prompts so that we can gather how the activities are accomplishing our main objectives.”

- Daylene Meuschke, Dean of Institutional Research, Planning and Institutional Effectiveness, College of the Canyons

“The advantage of a cross-functional team is that people bring different perspectives about what is going well, what needs improvement, and where there are information gaps.... For example, while orientation is traditionally considered a counselor's role, we have cross-functional teams with instructional faculty that discuss orientation.... Counseling faculty are still in the lead, but there is the cross-functional team to support them and there is an open dialogue.”

- Audrey Green, Associate Vice President of Academic Affairs, College of the Canyons

Lesson THREE:

It is important to have system-level supports for integrated planning, including shared short-term and long-term metrics.

Interviewees reflected that current planning efforts on a state level are systemically segregated, which can hinder constructive integrated planning efforts at individual campuses. Although the Guided Pathways movement provides colleges with the incentive to integrate plans, it does not provide a California-specific road map for how to do so. For example, SSSP is prescriptive (requiring the provision and quantification of matriculation services equitably across the student population). In contrast, SE plans are not prescriptive of the specific provision of services in the same way but rather are driven by outcomes. Specifically, SE plans prompt a local study of the equity gaps that exist in retention and persistence across underserved student populations and that require a customized strategy to address them. Having shared metrics can help the college develop overarching strategies to achieve the goals of SSSP and SE alike.

Interviewees highlighted a need to better align funding mechanisms and metrics for measuring change across initiatives at the systems level. For example, using common allowable expenditures would help colleges to align initiatives. It is difficult to integrate initiatives when there are so many limits on restricted funds. Likewise, it would be helpful to use common reporting systems across initiatives and common performance indicators where relevant. One of the challenges of current categorically funded initiatives is that they use somewhat different outcome measures and reporting mechanisms, making unification of initiatives difficult. Having a set of metrics that support the CCCCO's Vision for Success will help colleges focus on implementing large-scale changes that support those goals rather than focusing on individual initiatives. The CCCCO is already moving in this direction. As a starting point, it has begun to integrate planning, expenditure, and reporting processes for three of the major system initiatives, the BSI, SE, and SSSP.¹⁵ Similarly, in response to concerns from the field, the CCCCO is currently engaged in developing a set of integrated, simplified metrics. The metrics will be focused on students' educational journeys from recruitment to completion rather than on functional divisions, grants, or funding sources.

When discussing metrics, interviewees also noted that it is important to use both short- and long-term measures. Sometimes performance indicators are based on long-term outcomes only, which makes it impossible for the college to regularly measure progress. Using milestones such as one-year and two-year pass rates of transfer-level courses or progress towards program completion—and disaggregating

the data for different groups—can be helpful. According to Craig Hayward with the Research and Planning Group, it is important that all students who enter the college are included in these milestones, not just those who have successfully completed a specific number of credits. Including all students in key metrics sends the message to colleges that it is important to pay attention to the success of every student from the start.

At the college level, attention to data and evaluation, using both milestones and outcome data over time, should be a regular, ongoing feature of implementing Guided Pathways. Even though this Brief focuses on the early stages of inquiry into Guided Pathways, colleges can create a structure for and commitment to ongoing inquiry and assessment as part of a planning process from the outset.

“Simplicity and coherence should be the starting point for reporting so that colleges can spend more time on coordination and integration of initiatives.... The layers of complexity in reporting diverts time and resources away from the on-the-ground work of planning.”

- Aaron McVean, Vice President of Instruction, Skyline College



Mt. San Antonio College's Early Wins: Leveraging Shared Governance and a Built-In Continuous Improvement Process

“Integrated planning needs to be defined well. Without a working framework and a clear vision, sustainability, technology, and other pieces are excluded by design. This is what creates issues.”

– Irene Malmgren, Vice President of Instruction, Mt. San Antonio College

Campuses across the state are working to create agile cross-functional teams that can engage in design while leveraging shared governance structures to ensure inclusion and oversight. The Mt. San Antonio College community had some important early wins balancing agile cross-functional design with stakeholder inclusion, communication, and vetting by empowering existing shared governance structures. This was accomplished by establishing institutional support in the form of structured public forums to support the convergence of Guided Pathways conversations happening among the Academic Senate, administrators, and those faculty, staff, directors, and deans involved in the many planning efforts across campus. Because faculty were presented with opportunities for active involvement and leadership early in the process, they were able to invest their time and energy in the Guided Pathways effort, creating momentum for further movement. Mt. San Antonio College has also had early wins in including student perspectives in some of the Guided Pathways design processes. For example, in creating meta majors, faculty were asked to sort the 253 degrees and certificates into related clusters. After they reached consensus, it became clear that the student voice was missing. As a result, over 300 students who were new to the college completed the same sorting exercise and named the areas of study. With little change, the college adopted the meta majors created by students.

“How do we cultivate working conversations? Support individual plans to feed up effectively into comprehensive plans. Create ways of trickling up, trickling down, and opportunities to experiment and try new things.”

– Irene Malmgren, Vice President of Instruction, Mt. San Antonio College

Another early win was creating a cyclical process to enable the development of shared metrics. The cyclical process ensured that integrated plans were reflexive, with continuous evaluation and improvement included as a key part of the process. At the beginning of its integrated planning effort, Mt. San Antonio College took an inventory of all the plans in progress across its campus, including SSSP, SE, and SWP. This inventory work highlighted a need for aligned goals and benchmarks across plans. It also revealed a need for a shared vision to synthesize goals and benchmarks across initiatives. As one of the colleges participating in the institutes offered by the AACC, Mt. San Antonio College was required to track specific student milestones, such as the number of units earned for those with an associate degree. The college used the AACC milestones to create shared indicators across different efforts. The team typically asked “Is this what we want our future students to experience?” The AACC framework enabled Mt. San Antonio administrators, staff, and faculty to develop clearer local benchmarks that could apply to SSSP and SE alike, among other plans. This stronger alignment of goals enabled the campus community to explore opportunities for greater alignment of funding. As the college began to leverage resources more effectively across plans, the campus community grew excited about Guided Pathways and leaders at all levels were motivated to continue to explore institution-wide Guided Pathways design principles. Interviewees at Mt. San Antonio College credited several important contributors to their success: faculty leadership, including counseling faculty; solid relationships between faculty and administration; and strong college leadership, vision, and resource allocation. A sense of exploration and shared understanding that “it is okay to fail” also contributed to the college’s early successes.

Conclusion

Guided Pathways provides a unifying framework for developing shared strategies that are collectively owned and implemented by the community colleges. It is important that Guided Pathway design principles are viewed as flexible and allow for campus inquiry, ownership, and innovation. Likewise, it is important to use existing processes and structures and/or create new ones that facilitate cross-functional inquiry and communication and inclusive decision-making and design. The Guided Pathways framework is an effective reform approach precisely because it is flexible in design while rooted in two decades of research on student completion and closing student equity gaps. Guided Pathways is not another reform movement that colleges must find a way to implement amidst competing priorities; rather, it is a way to connect high impact practices into a more coherent framework for institutional change centered on student experience.

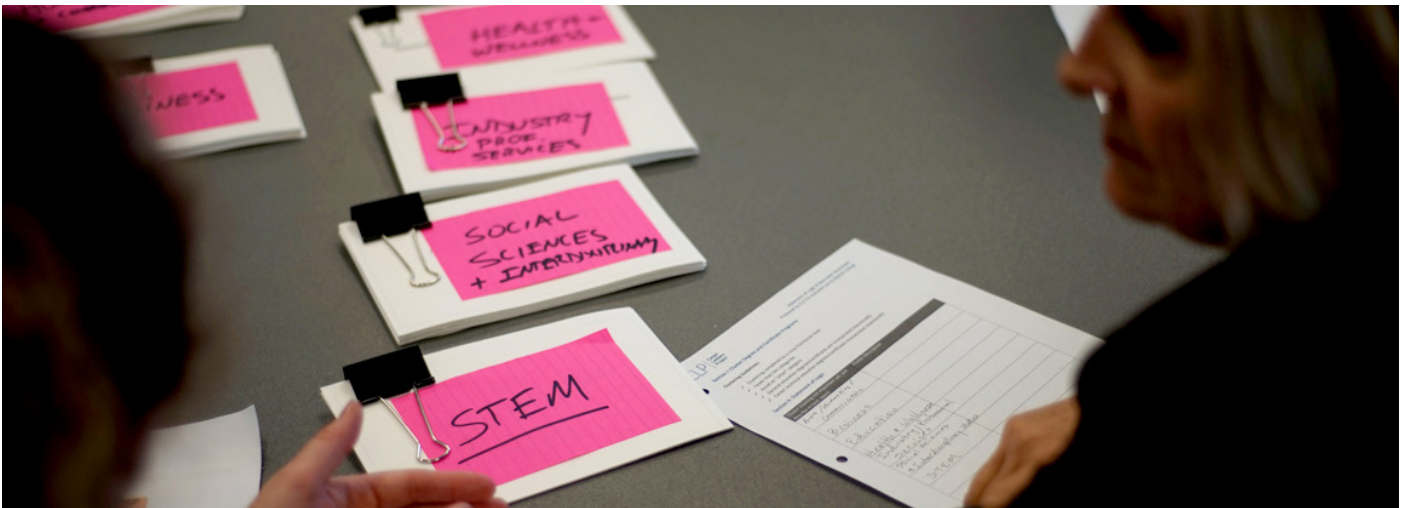
In interviews with the colleges, the authors learned that it can be challenging to move from reviewing research evidence and creating an inventory of campus initiatives to truly bringing campus constituents together to explore, implement, and scale overarching practices that touch different aspects of the student experience. True integrated planning takes time and requires trust among campus constituents. An effective

inquiry process can help build that trust. An iterative inquiry process that engages the campus community across functions and allows for the regular exchange of information and ideas can help create ownership of reform efforts.

Ultimately, full-scale institutional reform is the point of all this work. It must be noted that integrating initiatives is not the end goal—it is a necessary step towards more fundamental institutional redesign and reform. A growing body of evidence suggests that dramatic increases in community college completion and transfer rates will require fundamentally altering students' college experience. As colleges work to knit initiatives together, they may refashion programs and practices, identify gaps, reveal unexpected issues, explore college redesign questions, and make difficult decisions about priorities. The resulting work will extend well beyond the integration of funding streams and initiatives, yet transformation can only happen by marshaling resources to the benefit of all students and building on the good work over time as we move toward more comprehensive institutional reform. The Guided Pathways framework brings new clarity of purpose and coherence to these efforts.

“There is not a prescriptive way to do pathways, because it is a framework. Guided Pathways looks different at every college. It encourages an institution to look at data and the key design principles and figure out what the institution can do in response. Guided Pathways is not an initiative. It is institutional transformation and none of the other initiatives have actually done that.”

- Jeff Archibald, Communications Faculty, Vice President of the Academic Senate, Mt. San Antonio College





Endnotes

¹ Foundation for California Community Colleges. “Vision for Success: Strengthening the California Community Colleges to Meet California’s Needs.” Retrieved from <https://vision.foundationccc.org/>

² Career Ladders Project, the Research and Planning Group, the Academic Senate for California Community Colleges, and the California Community Colleges Chancellor’s Office. See http://cccgp.cccco.edu/Portals/0/Self-AssessmentTool_CCCGuidedPathways_Fall-2017.pdf

³ Both Georgia State University and Arizona State University began institutional change work before Guided Pathways came into parlance. The use of Guided Pathways design principles further focused and deepened this work, resulting in significant outcomes for students.

⁴ Chiles, N. “At Georgia State, more black students graduate each year than at any U.S. college.” Retrieved from <http://hechingerreport.org/at-georgia-state-black-students-find-comfort-and-academic-success/>

⁵ Kurzweil, M. and Wu, D. D. (2015). “Building a Pathway to Student Success at Georgia State University.” Retrieved from http://www.sr.ithaka.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/08/SR_Case_Study_Building_Pathway_Student_Success_042315_0.pdf

⁶ For more information, see <https://www.ewa.org/blog-higher-ed-beat/how-georgia-state-dramatically-changed-its-graduation-rate-and-how-other>

⁷ For more information, see <https://asunow.asu.edu/content/fall-2010-enrollment-shows-record-high-retention-quality-diversity>

⁸ For more information, see <https://www.collegefactual.com/colleges/arizona-state-university/academic-life/graduation-and-retention/#secRetention>

⁹ For more information, see <https://guttman.cuny.edu/2017/09/08/college-continues-to-graduate-high-percentage-of-students-as-it-marks-fifth-year-anniversary/>

¹⁰ For more information, see <https://edsources.org/2017/california-student-success-initiative-slow-to-increase-community-college-completion-rates/578257>

¹¹ AB 705 is a bill signed by the California Governor in 2017 that took effect on January 1, 2018. The bill requires community colleges to maximize the probability that a student will enter and complete transfer-level coursework in English and math within a one-year time frame and use one or more of the following to place students into English and math courses: high school coursework, high school grades, and high school grade point average. See <https://assessment.cccco.edu/ab-705-implementation/>

¹² Examples include state sources of funding such as the California Career Pathways Trust and SB 1070 Career Technical Education Pathways program, federal sources such as the Institute of Education Science and the U.S. Department of Labor’s Trade Adjustment Assistance Community College and Career Training program, and philanthropic sources such as the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation’s Completion by Design initiative.

¹³ See <https://www.aacu.org/sites/default/files/CommittingtoEquityInclusiveExcellence.pdf>

¹⁴ See https://skylinecollege.edu/seed/assets/diversity_framework/framework.pdf

¹⁵ For more information, see <http://extranet.cccco.edu/Divisions/IntegratedPlanning.aspx>

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The Career Ladders Project works with community colleges and their K12, university, community, workforce and employer partners to improve educational and career outcomes. We foster these improvements through research, policy change and strategic assistance to colleges and their partners.

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