

Insights from the Guided Pathways 2.5 Institute:
 “Creating Sustainability and Charting the Path Forward”
 March 20–22, 2024

INSTITUTE OBJECTIVES:

- ◆ Address sustainability and ways to institutionalize Guided Pathways work on campuses.
- ◆ Reflect, share and celebrate accomplishments made under Guided Pathways.
- ◆ Identify key next challenges to address in the student experience that will further ensure the improvement of equitable student outcomes.

Keywords: Equity, Guided Pathways, Vision 2030, sustainability, scale



Creating Sustainability and Charting the Path Forward

Guided Pathways is the framework through which California community colleges are driving student-centered and equity-focused change. With the support of the California Guided Pathways implementation project, colleges have made significant progress toward improving the student experience and advancing equitable outcomes. Through [Vision 2030: A Roadmap for California Community Colleges](#), all colleges have an opportunity to expand and deepen Guided Pathways principles to create lasting change for all learners, with an intentional focus on veterans, people with low incomes, working adults, K-12 dual-enrollment students, foster youth, and students who are justice-involved and impacted by the justice system.

As our student population and workforce needs continue to change, California community colleges are redesigning the student experience. Strong redesign begins with the “end” in mind: postgraduation success. By developing pathways that lead to in-demand careers, the system is positioned to become the main driver of economic and social mobility in California.

In this brief, we share strategies and resources from the Guided Pathways Institute on sustaining Guided Pathways work and mapping out next steps to continue equitably serving diverse students and creating pathways with family-sustaining wages.

“ For far too long we’ve accepted that it is okay for many in our communities to remain underserved. There are some outcomes that we have accepted as okay. The conversation right now is to disrupt those outcomes, and that can only happen if you think of the end in mind as you're designing the future of your Guided Pathways work. We need to uphold student aspirations and hope we will change their lives.

— Pascale Charlot

Managing Director, The Aspen Institute College Excellence Program

What Colleges Can Do

1. Adopt proven strategies to institutionalize Guided Pathways.



When implementing Guided Pathways campuswide, it is important to institutionalize strategies that advance the work, such as [engaging the entire institution](#), including classified professionals, administrators and faculty. Shared ownership of Guided Pathways work and collaboration across divisions and classifications is crucial to student success. Having full staff involvement opens doors for students’ success and brings valuable insight and institutional knowledge to the table.

ACTIONS COLLEGES CAN TAKE

- ◆ **Ensure that classified professionals are partners in contributing to student success.** Engaging classified professionals, many of whom mirror the diversity of the student body, is essential for achieving equitable student success. As frontline staff supporting students throughout their journey, classified professionals have unique insights into how institutional policies and practices create barriers to success. However, their perspectives are often overlooked due to lack of committee representation, discouragement from participating in change efforts, and inadequate time or resources. To engage the entire institution, Riverside Community College provided equity-minded FLEX, professional development time for all faculty and classified professionals to further support Guided Pathways institutional change. The region’s California Classified Professionals Alliance, Region 9 recommends identifying opportunities for classified professionals to gather and problem solve, seek and share stories of how classified professionals impact students, and regularly acknowledge their contributions.
- ◆ **Institutionalize Guided Pathways work in relevant committees.** Some colleges such as College of the Canyons have integrated Guided Pathways Work Plan goals with the Student Equity Achievement Program (SEAP) to carry this work forward, collaborate effectively and avoid duplicating efforts. At College of the Canyons, Guided Pathways is under the umbrella of the existing Institutional Effectiveness and Inclusive Excellence (IE)2 committee, a subcommittee of the College Planning Team. The (IE)2 committee, comprised of students, staff, faculty and administrators, expands and contracts as needed to accommodate efforts aligned with Guided Pathways, such as the [Racial Equity for Adult Credentials in Higher Education](#) (REACH) collaborative. The committee reviews the SEA Plan metrics, plus local goals that are aligned with the Vision 2030 goals, and obtains additional input from the College Planning Team, Academic Senate, Classified Senate and Associated Student Government — all of which contribute to action plans with departments and programs to implement Guided Pathways efforts.

STRATEGY IN PRACTICE:

Realizing that classified professionals were too often absent from college transformation efforts like Guided Pathways, a group of colleagues from around the Inland Empire/Desert Region came together to create a community dedicated to elevating the voice and power of classified professionals. Spearheaded by [Guided Pathways Regional Coordinators](#) Angelica Ibarra and Leslie Valmonte, alongside dedicated classified professionals from Chaffey College, Riverside City College and Norco College, the California Classified Professionals Alliance, Region 9, was born. The alliance's mission: to create a vibrant, inclusive and equitable learning and working environment for both students and the campus community. Its approach: engaging, informative convenings where classified professionals can connect, laugh, dream and plan with other classified leaders to contribute to transformational change. The alliance holds regular gatherings with participation from all 12 regional colleges to spark innovation and commitment. The alliance's [ethnographic study](#) of classified professionals — which consists of stories of profound impact on student access, persistence and success — promises to spotlight the vital contributions of classified professionals, enhancing both research and practice. For more information, please reach out to Professional Development Coordinator Dr. Natalie Halsell at <mailto:Natalie.Halsell@rcc.edu>.

2. Reflect, share stories and celebrate accomplishments.

Guided Pathways provides an ongoing framework for colleges to continually reflect, assess and transform the student experience. It is crucial for colleges to celebrate achievements and tell stories to highlight how this work aligns with broader efforts to advance social and economic mobility. By doing so, colleges can continue the momentum, garner support and future investments, and develop partnerships to sustain this transformative work of improving equitable outcomes for all students.

ACTIONS COLLEGES CAN TAKE

- ◆ **Share your college's progress around campus and communicate all campus personnel's role in Guided Pathways transformation.** Everyone on campus may not be aware of the significant progress made in improving the student experience. It is important to uplift these accomplishments and the people who worked to achieve them. When campus personnel understand the significance of this transformational work and the role they play in it, they are more willing and motivated to get involved and bring their expertise to continue it.
- ◆ **Share stories with external partners about how your college serves students and positively impacts your communities.** There is a need to tell the story of how California community colleges are engines for economic and social mobility across the state. For example, Cabrillo College President Dr. Matthew Wetstein shared how an investment of \$2 million in [Strong Workforce Programs](#) can lead to a high return on investment over time in student wage gains that circulates in our economy. Telling stories of impact can inspire fellow college practitioners to focus on equity-centered student success; influence funding decisions by foundations and government leaders; influence state, system and college policies; engage employers for the benefit of academic programs and student employment; and many other benefits.



STRATEGY IN PRACTICE:

The California Guided Pathways Implementation Project supported 41 California community colleges implementing Guided Pathways efforts in three phases, from 2016 to 2024. At the final institute, each college had an opportunity to share its top accomplishments from this experience, how its institutional changes contributed to improving the student experience, key epiphanies it has learned, and barriers and areas for future inquiry. The colleges had the opportunity to share their presentation with other institutions, praise each other, and gather peer feedback on how they can improve their practices or further their Guided Pathways implementation efforts. Many colleges shared that they are focusing on creating a culture of inquiry and self-reflection, finding ways to create shared ownership of Guided Pathways work, and trying to institutionalize their changes to sustain moving forward.



3. Plan for what's next.

As colleges focus on Guided Pathways under the guidance of Vision 2030, the “end in mind” should be equity in access, support and success — for each student to enter a high-opportunity pathway aligned to strong transfer and workforce outcomes leading to a family-sustaining wage. Colleges have an opportunity to build on their Guided Pathways work to achieve the goals of Vision 2030.

ACTIONS COLLEGES CAN TAKE

- ◆ **Carry on and expand Guided Pathways efforts through Vision 2030 and scale up promising student-centered practices.** [Redesigning and scaling up practices that center the student experience](#) will lead to more equitable outcomes and success. Vision 2030 invites colleges to expand and deepen their Guided Pathways work to optimize pathways for all learners regardless of age, race, socioeconomic status and previous educational attainment. This may include continuing pathways development but also embedding campus support services to ensure students can move through the pathway successfully; integrating on- and off-ramps for working learners; engaging employers to ensure that the pathways build job-relevant skills; including earn-and-learn opportunities; and offering courses through flexible modalities. In particular, colleges have made substantial progress in the following opportunity areas for scale: dual enrollment, on-ramps for students to go from noncredit to credit pathways, Credit for Prior Learning and work-based learning opportunities.
- ◆ **Design and align pathways toward family-sustaining careers.** Critically review labor market data and honestly assess whether programs align with the local labor market and community needs. It is important that colleges identify and define gaps in programs and the scale of those offerings. Is there too much, too little or none at all? To identify whether programs are not serving student needs or leading to equitable outcomes, review inequities in program enrollment and completion by program. Creating these transparent connections to labor market outcomes and partnering with employers, associations, county services and community-based organizations will help ensure that students have access to family-sustaining careers once they complete their programs.

- ◆ **Plan your next steps.** Map out next steps to carry this work forward and ensure every student has a high-opportunity pathway. At the institute, colleges identified focus areas and next steps, including:
 - 1. Improve the student experience, student messaging and marketing materials.** For example, strengthen the first semester experience, cultivate community around pathways and update the website to be student-friendly from a pathways lens.
 - 2. Review data, programs and professional development.** Some colleges plan to use data to understand the student experience at the program level, identify areas to make equity gains and monitor student progression.
 - 3. Teaching and Learning.** Colleges shared next steps to embed a culturally responsive pedagogy, identify “light the fire” courses and improve success rates, and connect learning inside and outside the classroom.
 - 4. Enhancing career exploration through community and industry partnerships.** For example, align K-16 and beyond with high school and college, connect with employers and offer hands-on experience.

STRATEGY IN PRACTICE:

MiraCosta College is committed to a future-focused strategy, anticipating and adapting to its community’s evolving demographic and workforce needs. Recognizing the shift toward adult learners seeking to upgrade their skills or master new technologies, MiraCosta is proactive in its approach. Through collaboration with the Strong Workforce Program, regional consortia and local partners, the college spearheads inclusive economic growth initiatives across the San Diego region. Approximately 90% of MiraCosta students plan to stay in the community after finishing college. However, President Sunita Cooke highlighted that because the region is an expensive place to live, people will have difficulty thriving in this community with an associate degree or certificate.

MiraCosta envisions family-sustaining careers for its students so they can live and work in the region. To facilitate this, MiraCosta is developing pathways for students that lead to a degree, certificate and a longer high-opportunity pathway (e.g., life science, biotechnology, health care, information technology) so that once a student graduates, they can access well-paying jobs in the community. The goal is to serve students so they can become contributors to the local economy and uplift their community. For example, MiraCosta has partnered with Genentech, which has significantly contributed to the advancement of regional economic prosperity and workforce competitiveness in North San Diego County. Through this college-corporate partnership, MiraCosta was able to launch its biotechnology program, creating a comprehensive associate and bachelor’s degree and deepening students’ expertise through providing industry-relevant knowledge and equipment, events, scholarships and internships. MiraCosta and Genentech’s collaboration has broadened the scope and prestige of the college’s offerings in ways that meet local student, college and industry needs.



Conclusion

Guided Pathways has been a vehicle for transformative progress in improving the student experience and advancing equitable outcomes at California community colleges. To create lasting change, colleges must continue institutionalizing effective practices, celebrating accomplishments and intentionally planning future efforts with postsecondary success in mind. By building upon Guided Pathways through Vision 2030, California Community Colleges will ensure every student has equitable, high-opportunity pathways with family-sustaining wages.

“ Guided Pathways, in one word to me, is empathy. Empathy is taking another person’s perspective, trying to understand their experience and feelings, and maybe even responding to their experience. We need to look at the perspective of our students. Also, it is important to see Guided Pathways work from the perspective of all our colleagues. This work is very interpersonal and relationship-focused to make systemic institutional-wide transformational change work across the campus.

— Leslie Valmonte

Regional Coordinator of the Inland Empire

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RELATED PRESENTATIONS TO VIEW:

- ◆ [“Guided Pathways: A Framework to Meet the Needs of Today’s Students, Our Communities, and Our Planet”](#)
- ◆ [“Reflections on the Journey and the Path Forward”](#)
- ◆ [“Charting the Course: Classified Professionals’ Crucial Role in Guided Pathways”](#)
- ◆ [“Learning From Leaders Who’ve Been There: Sustaining Equitable Guided Pathways Efforts Over Time”](#)
- ◆ [“Reflections on CAGP Phase Two and the Path Forward”](#)

The Success Center at the Foundation for California Community Colleges independently prepared this overview based on the presentation; the overview may not fully represent the presenters’ viewpoints.



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