

Insights from the Guided Pathways 2.0 Institute:
“Developing a Structure to Provide Holistic Student Supports”
 September 21–23, 2022

INSTITUTE OBJECTIVES:

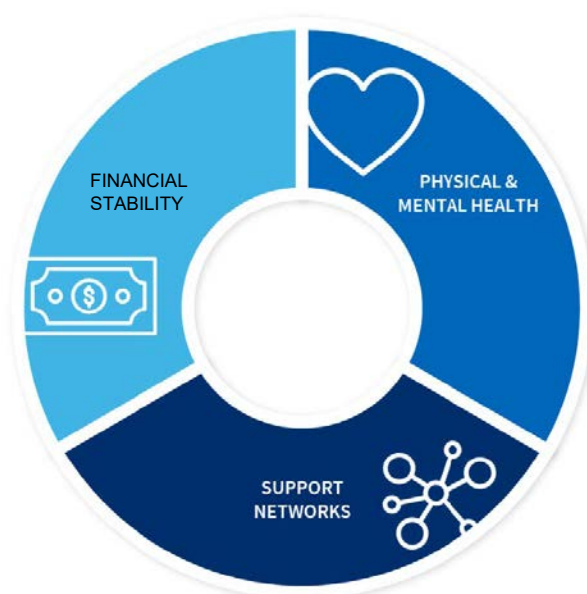
- Examine the role of different stakeholders, including those outside of student-facing roles, to meet students’ needs.
- Identify the types of supports included in a holistic support ecosystem and who can deliver them.
- Learn about specific approaches colleges have used to build a student-centered ecosystem of support.

Keywords: basic needs, belonging, career mobility, empowered learners, equity, financial stability, Guided Pathways, holistic student support, physical and mental well-being, Pillar III, SSIPP, support networks



Developing a Holistic and Student-Centered Support Ecosystem

Students’ life circumstances, such as their financial stability, physical and mental well-being, and support networks, have an outsized impact on their ability to successfully reach their goals. The California Community Colleges system is focused on shifting away from students the burden of addressing those three core social determinants of educational success. Historically, students have had to navigate higher education institutions and self-select into support services, which requires knowing what services exist and applying to each program. We can shift the burden off students by creating simplified ecosystems of support to help them stay on the path to their education and career goals. Designing an ecosystem that does that for students by default will enable colleges to leverage their existing programs and shift structures to help many more students with existing resources. This brief highlights ways that college professionals are moving away from siloed structures toward an integrated, student-centered ecosystem. That involves everyone on campus considering and working to serve the whole range of student needs.



At the Guided Pathways Institute, [Phase Two Advisory](#) highlighted supports that are sustained, strategic, integrated, proactive and personalized – known as the [SSIPP framework](#)¹ – which has been shown to positively impact student success. From an institutional perspective, colleges would offer a variety of resources that are equity-centered and integrated in a system.

From a student perspective, this ecosystem would be easy to navigate and access timely and personally relevant support for their learning and development, regardless of their background, college knowledge and network of support. Critically, students do not need to understand the behind-the-scenes operations of this kind of system; colleges can shift structures to provide support more proactively when students need it.

The strategies and activities presented in this brief are grounded in three overarching principles that will help achieve our goals of serving students more holistically:

- ♦ **Address both root causes and immediate needs.** We recognize and holistically support students' academic and nonacademic needs. A core focus of colleges is about removing barriers that today's students face, particularly students of color, first-generation students, students of low income and working adults. To reduce barriers, colleges should focus on a combination of immediate student needs and working on root causes and friction points in a student's journey to prevent problems before they happen. Feedback loops between those focused on high-touch individual student support and those focused on systemic changes will help continue to transform the system and improve student outcomes.
- ♦ **Every professional has a role to play.** This approach of seeking to address needs at both the systemic and individual levels will be most successful when it is a shared responsibility across all college professionals from administrators to faculty to counselors. Creating a cross-functional ecosystem in which every college professional centers students will make everyone's job easier and improve the student experience.
- ♦ **An essential lever for this work is clear external and internal communications.** Externally, colleges need to convey that they will support students, speak to their values and wants, and make the case that education can strengthen economic mobility. Michael Baston, president of Cuyahoga Community College in Ohio, describes today's students as values-driven and outcomes-oriented. As more students consider the value of education in a changing economy, college professionals have to communicate how offerings can work for students, whether that is through holistic support or through flexible options like compressed programs or alternative credentials. Internally, breaking down silos and centering student needs will require greater communications across departments and divisions.

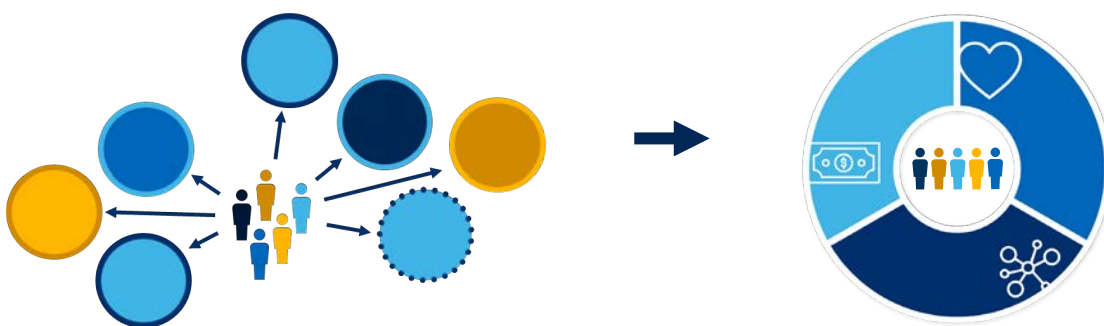
¹ To learn more about Phase Two Advisory's approach to holistic student support, log into the Vision Resource Center and view the brief "[Designing Student Success Teams to Provide a Student-Centered Ecosystem.](#)"

“ Students must know they’ll be supported to succeed. Students must feel that sense of belonging at the institution which is so critical for their persistence. Students need to feel socially connected because that is critical for their ongoing mental health. Students don’t care how much you know until they know how much you care.

— Michael Baston

President, Cuyahoga Community College

Campuswide collaboration toward an integrated support ecosystem



This transformative approach to shifting the burden away from students and toward an ecosystem that is prepared to support them requires action on multiple levels. Cross-functional collaboration is key between administrators, faculty, counselors and classified staff. **Administrators** play a critical role in evaluating and shifting existing structures that impede students’ progress and fostering ways to integrate holistic student support within students’ educational journeys. In addition, administrators are well-positioned to help college personnel understand their role in a support ecosystem and ensure they have the training and knowledge they need to give students a warm handoff to support. **Faculty, counselors and classified staff** who work directly with students play a critical role in evaluating how students are experiencing services or programs, and they collaborate to continuously improve. For examples, see the strategies in practice below in this brief.

The Chancellor’s Office has been shifting structures and regulations to support this kind of responsive work. Collaboration throughout the system is key. In her presentation, Executive Vice Chancellor Lizette Navarette invited colleges to communicate with the Chancellor’s Office about policy and budget matters to better support students.

Counselors can consider peer-identified action items to advance holistic student supports.

Counselors’ work is central to designing with students and student equity in mind. At the Institute, Career Ladders Project facilitated sessions for counseling faculty to reflect together on holistic student supports and key issues they face in making positive change. Counselors identified key action areas they could lead and work together on to find a way forward, including recognizing and creatively meeting structural and capacity challenges, addressing programmatic sticking points, activating leadership from counselors and administrators, and humanizing the work with and for students. To learn more, log into the Vision Resource Center and view [related resources](#).

Actions all college professionals can take

I. **Champion a unifying vision to mobilize people to get involved and support consistent communications and continuity.**

Using shared overarching language helps overcome initiative fatigue and creates an organizing principle for a range of college professionals to drive an ecosystem of holistic student supports. Initiatives should support that vision. Executives can help set the vision, and professionals leading from the middle can be champions of the vision and translate it into manageable steps for staff. At SUNY Westchester Community College, its vision is that everyone at the college is a practitioner of love with whom students feel safe. One way the college actualizes that is through professional development that equips every faculty member with knowledge about the financial aid process and who to contact if a student needs support.

II. **Shift the cultural norm toward a campuswide responsibility for holistic student support.**

Modeling cross-functional collaboration is a powerful way to show that everyone is involved. Modesto Junior College, one of the first colleges involved with Guided Pathways, practiced distributive leadership by having a counseling faculty and instructional faculty co-leading this work. This collaboration helped socialize Guided Pathways' work across the campus because the co-leads helped empower staff from a variety of roles to collaborate and support students.

MiraCosta College is providing Basic Needs Advocate Training through its [CARE](#) program to a wide array of campus professionals including administrators, faculty and classified staff. The training contributes to the college's "culture of care" for students by providing college personnel with baseline knowledge about trauma-informed practices, existing holistic support services and populations who are disproportionately impacted, equipping personnel to direct students to resources.



III. **Use technology tools and clarify roles to proactively provide holistic support to students.**

Key technology tools can help shift the burden from students having to navigate a complicated array of resources and programs with varying applications and requirements. Mohawk Valley Community College uses Starfish as an early alert system to connect students to support. Academic and student affairs faculty work hand in hand, particularly on student intake, and counselors drive robust communication plans about what, when and how to communicate with students in response to data cues from faculty. Clear communication and roles across functions bolsters student-centered collaboration.

“ If a student comes in the ‘wrong door,’ how do you make it feel like it's still the right door? Because the person in that door knows enough about the system to connect that student in a personalized kind of way.

— Melinda Karp

Founder, Phase Two Advisory

IV. Integrate resources and collaborate to cultivate more wins for students.

Consider how to shift to a more integrated system of academic, social and personal supports based on clearly identified equity-minded student needs. The complexity and interplay of a student's various life circumstances call for building on existing support and coordinating comprehensive sets of resources and services. At SUNY Westchester Community College, each school within the college has a success team that includes a dean, staff member, counselor, faculty, curriculum chair and success navigator who works across silos to support students. The success navigators collaborate with campus opportunity programs like TRIO, Extended Opportunity Programs and Services and athletic programs to complement their work. Success navigators boost the programs' capacity to achieve their goals and give students multiple opportunities for support. That cross-functional collaboration is a win-win-win for programs, success teams and students..

V. Take action and continuously improve.

Focus on getting started and ensuring strategies are action-oriented. After executing, assess efforts and create a system that spots areas for improvement to keep exploring how to equitably support students. At Lassen Community College, college professionals follow the mantra of “don't let perfect be the enemy of good.” One college described its first strategy as “the first pancake” – it isn't always pretty, but it's digestible. With continuous improvement, you can make it better and better.

Strategies in practice

Throughout the Institute, community college professionals shared their approaches and insights to support the whole student. Below are four examples of how to create a student-centered ecosystem.

American River College's success teams support targeted student populations

Keywords: Belonging, metamajors, onboarding, student-centered support ecosystem, student success teams

To support students equitably from the start, college administrators at American River College made a substantial structural shift in how they onboard students on an academic path by integrating holistic support for students along their educational journey. Every student now has a [HomeBase](#), a welcoming on-campus and online space with a success team of counselors, peer mentors, staff and faculty liaisons.

HomeBases are based on the college's six metamajors. Underpinning that is a culture change to help students continue to persist by embedding financial stability, physical and mental well-being, and support networks along their educational path. HomeBase success teams support students by directing them to food, housing resources, and peer and staff support. In addition, HomeBases foster a sense of community between students on similar academic paths. The college also takes a proactive identification strategy to get undecided students in a path by providing additional career services support to make an informed decision. Through these structural changes, college professionals support each student's progress along their pathway and success beyond their time at American River College. [Learn more.](#)

Please log into the [Vision Resource Center](#) before clicking links.

Colleges embed diversity, equity, inclusion and accessibility (DEIA) in employee evaluations and tenure review to support culture change

Keywords: Continuous improvement, DEIA, policy, whole-college commitment

At one college, a student walked into a classroom asking for a disability accommodation and was met with the response: "What's wrong with you?" Faculty and staff there missed an important opportunity to make that student feel like they belong. To help guide college professionals to support inclusion and belonging of students and each other, the California Community Colleges Board of Governors has approved [a new regulatory structure](#) to incorporate a DEIA component into faculty tenure reviews and employee evaluations. Many colleges have already begun this important work.

At Lassen Community College, they have created a unifying vision: DEIA starts with what we tell people their job is – not just being an instructor, dean, etc., but to facilitate the success, inclusion and meaningful participation of people around you. The college made a conscious decision to involve all college employees, including instructional faculty and counselors, to support DEIA efforts. Employees learned their role in DEIA, how hiring policies and standards can perpetuate disparities, and the need to eliminate barriers. Existing and new employees will help change the culture of the institution such that new employees will also meet those DEIA standards and contribute to that culture. As college professionals campuswide learn DEIA competencies, they can create a sense of unconditional belonging for students and point students to the right resources. To learn more about DEIA and its important connection to the Vision for Success, visit the [Chancellor's Office DEIA website](#).



Reedley College implements early alert system through a cross-functional team

Keywords: Counseling, cross-functional collaboration, holistic support, student-centered support ecosystem

At Reedley College, a collaboration among counseling faculty, instructional faculty and classified staff created a new business process to clarify roles for the school's Starfish tool for early alerts, referrals, appointment scheduling and student education planning. Creating a seamless experience for students required hard work on the back end, time, resources and cross-functional collaboration. Through it all, they came up with ways to serve students across the campus more effectively, establishing triage processes and clear workflows that they update based on changing student needs.

As a result of this strategic cross-collaboration and new tool, Reedley College is seeing increased student retention rates. Starfish is helping college personnel direct students to the right support at the right time, taking out the guesswork of seeking support for students. It now has a student-facing and staff-facing website to share knowledge and training about the tool. Learn more about Reedley College's [Starfish](#).



Santa Barbara City College improves student onboarding with equity intentionality

Keywords: Burden shifting, classified staff, onboarding, whole-college responsibility

Santa Barbara City College is engaging with a wide network of classified professionals, students and faculty to provide students with personalized outreach and support throughout their first year in the SBCC Guides program and addressing application barriers via MyPath website, which students use to apply and gain program, career and transfer information. Through this program, guides receive baseline knowledge of holistic student support and training on how to be active listeners and culturally responsive mentors. The goal is to support a cohort of priority first-year students, identified using equity gaps data, in building connections on campus to support their educational journey. The college is seeing that relationships between college professionals as well as relationships between college professionals and students are becoming stronger. The guides continue to collaborate with students in the design and implementation process to improve the program. As a result, that feedback has reshaped the MyPath website to make registration easier and more user-friendly. To learn more, view the [SBCC Career Center Services](#) and an [example of a guide's experience supporting the whole student](#).

Conclusion

Community colleges are an essential vehicle for students' lifelong learning, from getting on the path to success all the way through completion and returning to upskill. We have an opportunity to further ease the burden of social factors that may impede students' progress by creating proactive, simplified and personalized ecosystems of support. Shifting to a student-centered ecosystem campus-wide will provide more support for college personnel and wider safety nets for students. Together, we can close equity gaps and support every student to succeed.

RESOURCES:

- Ada Center: [Advising Technology Procurement & Planning: A Practical Playbook for Higher Education Leaders](#)
- Ada Center: [Celebrating Exemplary Student Support Leaders: Stories from Stories and Practical Advice from California Community College Faculty and Staff](#)
- California Community College Chancellor's Office Technology Center: [How to adopt Technology Center solutions](#)
- Center for Community College Student Engagement: [Building Momentum: Using Guided Pathways to Center the Student Experience](#)
- Phase Two Advisory: [Student Success Teams – An Implementation Guide for Community Colleges](#)
- Career Ladders Project: [Design Guide for Integrating Student Support](#)
- Career Ladders Project: [Skyline College Promise Scholars: A CUNY ASAP Replication](#)
- Career Ladders Project: [From Voice to Action: Putting Students at the Center of College Redesign](#)
- Career Ladders Project: [Student Success Teams at Santa Ana Colleges](#)
- Career Ladders Project: [CLP in Practice: Design Thinking](#)
- California Community Colleges Chancellor's Office: Webinar on [Universal Design, Accessibility & More: A Student-Centered Support Ecosystem for Students with Disabilities](#)

Please log into the [Vision Resource Center](#) before clicking presentation links.

RELATED PRESENTATIONS TO VIEW:

- [Holistic Student Supports – A State and Local Partnership](#)
- [Holistic Student Supports – A Whole College Responsibility](#)
- [Holistic Student Supports – Where We've Been, Where We're Going](#)
- [Social Determinants Framework – Integration with the Institution's Holistic Student Supports Implementation](#)
- [The Challenges of Leading from the Middle – What Commitments are Needed to Support Middle Leaders in Transformation Efforts Leading From the Middle](#)
- [Vision, Implementation and Accountability](#)

The resources listed in this document are a combination of those introduced by plenary session speakers, concurrent session speakers and concurrent session participants. They are provided for exploration and learning and are not specifically endorsed by the authors.



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