COLLEGE EXCELLENCE PROGRAM aspen institute

FRONTIERSET

DESIGNING FOR TRANSFORMATION:

Insights from Frontier Set Institutions

Understanding the work of 12 high-performing, high-potential community colleges, supported and studied by the Aspen Institute

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Transformation is the realignment of an institution's structures, culture, and business model to create a student experience that results in dramatic and equitable increases in outcomes and educational value.

Institutions transform by integrating evidence-based practices that create inclusive and coherent learning environments, and by leveraging a student-centered mission, catalytic leadership, strategic data use, and strategic finance in a robust continuous improvement process.[1]

— TRANSFORMATION TEAM, BILL & MELINDA GATES FOUNDATION

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1 Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation definition of transformation, finalized in 2020; definition was developed in tandem with the growth of the Frontier Set initiative: https://www.frontierset.org/why-is-transformation-important/

Executive Summary

For more than a decade, the Aspen Prize for Community College Excellence (Aspen Prize) has identified and awarded top community colleges that achieve high, continuously improving, and equitable levels of student success. The Aspen Institute College Excellence Program (Aspen) has also conducted research on community colleges that attain exceptional and equitable outcomes in particular areas of student success, including dual enrollment, transfer, and workforce. Aspen uses insights from these top colleges to inform the field about how excellence is realized, and to train presidents and other leaders to be catalysts for institutional transformation on campuses across the country.[2]

As Aspen has studied how community colleges achieve excellence, it's clear that strong leadership matters for transformation. Strong leaders develop, share, and own a vision for the institution that propels higher, improving, and more equitable levels of student success. That vision relies on specific student success and equity strategies, as well as the institutional capacities needed to sustain and scale those strategies.

Over the past several years, Aspen engaged with and supported community colleges in their efforts to advance student success and equity as part of the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation's (Gates Foundation) Frontier Set initiative. Along the way, Aspen gained a deeper understanding of how colleges advance student success and equity strategies in real time.

What does it look like to implement reform over several years? What is the specific role of the president and senior team? How do different functions within the institution work together to drive high, improving, and equitable levels of student success?

This brief summarizes key learnings from Aspen's work as an intermediary organization to the Frontier Set, supporting and learning from 12 "high-performing, high-potential" institutions engaged in transformation work.

- Part 1 shares the **improvements in student outcomes** achieved by the Frontier Set community colleges before and during the investment.
- Part 2 summarizes the **institutional changes that colleges accomplished** as outcomes improved, categorized under three phases of transformation: *Initiation / Vision, Implementation / Iteration,* and *Institutionalization / Scaling.*
- Part 3 describes a **framework** detailing how **institutional capacities**—specifically, human capital, strategic finance, data capacity, and implementation structures and processes—support student success and equity strategies.
- Part 4 provides **insight on each institutional capacity**—using both Frontier Set and Aspen Prize research—as well as **tools leaders can use** to assess the readiness of their institutions in each of these capacities. This section also includes key **investments leaders can make** in these areas to advance the institutional transformation process.
- Finally, Part 5 describes how leaders have adapted a national model (in this case, **guided pathways**) to their institutional context in **case studies** of three Frontier Set community colleges. This section also illustrates how strategies and capacities influence the success of that process.

These insights have already informed Aspen's presidential fellowships and state partnerships, which provide professional development to presidents and other institutional leaders across the nation. They will continue to be crucial to Aspen's work with leaders, institutions, and systems moving forward as they are converted into actionable tools.

2 See research on Aspen Prize-winning community colleges: https://highered.aspeninstitute.org/aspen-prize/ and Aspen's Playbooks on Workforce, Transfer, and Dual Enrollment: https://highered.aspeninstitute.org/research

The Frontier Set Investment and Research

The Frontier Set engaged two state systems and 29 "high-performing, high-potential" colleges and universities—including 12 community colleges supported by Aspen. The community colleges were selected for the Frontier Set based on institutional measures of student success. Six of the 12 colleges were chosen using measures based on the Aspen Prize framework (including student learning; credential and degree attainment; transfer, and bachelor's attainment; workforce success; equity for students of color and students from low-income backgrounds; and leadership and institutional culture). The remaining six were chosen based on their participation in the Gates Foundation's Completion by Design (CBD) initiative.[3]

Over the course of the Frontier Set investment, institutions focused on advancing their transformation efforts and improving student outcomes. Each college received about $800,000 from the Gates Foundation over four years to invest in "solution areas"—or student success strategies, as Aspen defines them—and "operating capacities." The Gates Foundation defined the solution areas as developmental education, advising and student services, digital learning, and emergency aid. The definition of operating capacities included leadership and culture, strategic finance, institutional research, information technology, institutional policy, and state policy.

Institutions also implemented guided pathways,[4] an integrated framework for institutional transformation. In addition, institutions continued student success efforts that preceded their engagement with the Frontier Set, such as providing holistic student services, developing teaching and learning centers, and building partnerships with K-12, university, or community-based organizations.

Each Frontier Set institution was supported by an intermediary partner (Aspen was one of six[5]) and received support from other providers—including rpk GROUP, Achieving the Dream, Every Learner Everywhere, Strong Start to Finish, Sova, Jobs for the Future, and many others—to advance their work in solution areas and operating capacities. While equity was always part of the initiative, it became an increasing focus of the institutions, intermediaries, support partners, and the Gates Foundation over the course of the Frontier Set. This was driven by learnings from Frontier Set research, changes in the student success field, the COVID-19 pandemic, and the national racial reckoning that began with the 2020 murder of George Floyd.

Over the course of the initiative, three organizations studied the community college participants—American Institutes for Research (AIR), VentureWell, and Aspen—to learn more about institutional transformation and document themes for the field. Research included annual site visits, focus groups, interviews, annual distribution and review of the Institutional Transformation Assessment (ITA),[6] and analysis of student enrollment and outcomes data.

Aspen's research started with and focused on answering five key learning agenda questions posed by the Gates Foundation. The first three centered on the causes of transformation and how leaders can jump-start that process, and the last two examined models for transformation.

- *How should institutional readiness be defined?*
- *How can new leaders assess the readiness of their institutions?*
- *How do leaders determine where to make early investments to begin institutional transformation?*
- *How have leaders of colleges with comprehensive, coherent, and/or cohesive institutional strategies adapted or applied national models to their local institutional contexts?*
- *What does it mean to institutionalize organizational capacities?*

Though not organized around these questions, this brief used the questions as guideposts for inquiry and analysis.

3 Completion by Design: https://www.completionbydesign.org/s/

4 "What we know about guided pathways," Community College Research Center, 2015, https://ccrc.tc.columbia.edu/media/k2/attachments/What-We-Know-Guided-Pathways.pdf

5 Frontier Set intermediaries included the American Association of State Colleges and Universities (AASCU), the Aspen Institute, the Association of Public and Land-grant Universities (APLU), Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs), the University Innovation Alliance (UIA), and the State Higher Education Executive Officers Association (SHEEO).

6 Frontier Set institutions took the ITA several years in a row, and the data provided valuable insight for institutions when leaders reviewed it during discussions of transformation each year. However, Aspen did not use the ITA data in this brief because data were not comparable year-over-year within institutions (due to instrument and sampling choices) or across institutions (due to sampling choices).

While this research covers important topics, it has several limitations. First, Aspen's research focused on the questions defined in the Frontier Set learning agenda, which emphasized understanding causes of and models for transformation, with a particular emphasis on the solution areas and operating capacities defined by the Gates Foundation (noted above). There are other solution areas, or student success and equity strategies, that Aspen's research suggests are critical to institutional transformation—including advancing teaching and learning, improving transfer and bachelor's attainment,[7] and increasing post-graduation workforce outcomes[8]—that are beyond the scope of this report. Second, because there is ample literature regarding specific solution areas on which the Frontier Set focused, they are not addressed here. Instead, this report focuses on how institutions develop strong operating capacities during transformation efforts, making reference to solution areas but not diving deeply into them. Finally, because the Fronter Set focuses on internal transformation, the research process did not include substantial examination of external partnerships that often contribute to transformational student success reforms. Therefore this report does not reflect the way Frontier Set community colleges engaged with other organizations in their ecosystem—including K-12 schools, universities, and community-based organizations—to drive higher and more equitable student outcomes.

7 Higher Ed. "Aspen Institute College Excellence Program/Community College Transfer." Accessed 2021. https://highered.aspeninstitute.org/community-college-transfer

8 Higher Ed. "Aspen Institute College Excellence Program/Workforce Education." Accessed 2021. https://highered.aspeninstitute.org/workforce-education

PART 1

Cohort Graduation Rates at Frontier Set Community Colleges

Nearly all the 12 participating community colleges improved degree attainment for their students, according to data from the National Student Clearinghouse (NSC) Postsecondary Data Partnership (PDP). Eleven increased the overall three-year cohort graduation rate[9] for first-time college students (part- and full-time) between the cohort that started in the 2011-2012 academic year, five years before the start of the Frontier Set,[10] and the cohort that started in 2017-2018, two years after the start of the Frontier Set (Figures 1 & 2).

Of the 12 schools, four had three-year cohort graduation rate increases of more than 10 percentage points (William Rainey Harper College, Davidson-Davie Community College, Lorain County Community College, Sinclair Community College); five had increases of between 5 and 10 percentage points (Indian River State College, Northeast Wisconsin Technical College, San Jacinto College District, Santa Fe College, Miami Dade College); one had a small decrease (Columbia Basin College; see Table 1 in Appendix A for more details); and two had missing data but showed small increases (Wake Technical Community College and Guilford Technical Community College).

On average, the 12 Frontier Set community colleges increased their overall three-year graduation rate by 6 percentage points: they started with an average three-year cohort graduation rate of 19 percent and grew to 25 percent over time. Three schools started at or near the 25 percent graduation rate (where the average of the group arrived in 2017-2018) and grew to almost or above 30 percent. These increases are notable given that the rates include part-time students.

Figure 1. Changes in Three-year Associate Degree Seeking Cohort Graduation Rate Between Cohort 2011-2012 and Cohort 2017-2018 (Non-CBD Institutions)

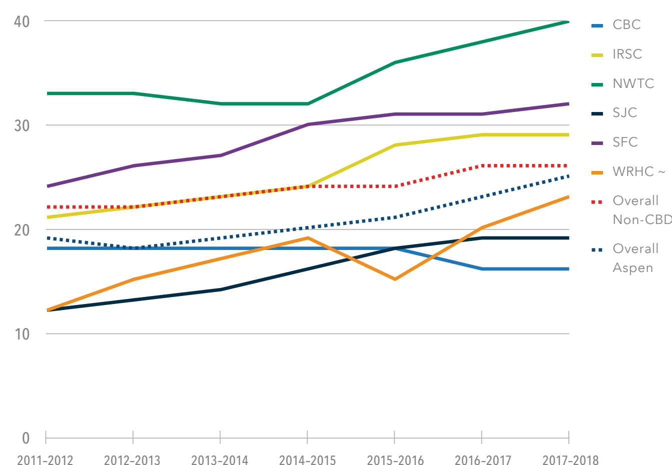
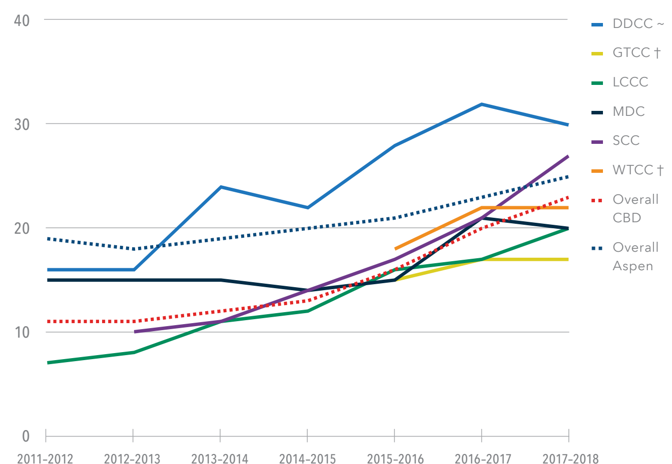


Figure 2. Changes in Three-year Associate Degree Seeking Cohort Graduation Rate Between Cohort 2011-2012 and Cohort 2017-2018 (CBD Institutions)



† = Reporting incomplete; ~ = Use data with caution

9 Data from the National Student Clearinghouse Postsecondary Data Partnership (PDP) include first-time, degree, or certificate-seeking students, in each year-long cohort (students start in spring or fall; three-year graduation rates are calculated as the percentage of students who attained their degree within three years of their start date, in spring or fall).

10 Data are drawn from five years prior to the start of the Frontier Set, given that these institutions were deemed "high-performing, high-potential" and because half the institutions participated in the BMGF-funded CBD grant during that time. At the start of the Frontier Set, institutions were already enacting transformational change.

For full-time students in Frontier Set community colleges, the three-year cohort graduation rate increased an average of 9 percentage points between cohorts starting in 2011-2012 and 2017-2018 (from 21 percent to 30 percent; see Table 2 in Appendix A), more swiftly than the national average: Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS) data show that nationally, three-year cohort graduation rates of first-time, full-time community college students grew 7 percentage points between 2011 and 2015[11] (22 percent to 29 percent).[12]

A focus on historically underserved students

Data show that cohort graduation rates at the vast majority of the Frontier Set community colleges rose across all demographic groups, including Black and Hispanic/Latinx students. At the same time, at most institutions success gaps remained unchanged between historically underserved groups and their majority peers (such as Black and Hispanic/Latinx students compared to white students, Pell-eligible compared to Pell-ineligible students; data available on request).[13] In other words, gaps did not narrow or close between historically underserved groups and their peers. Taken together, these trends show that transformation efforts at Frontier Set institutions were broadly effective in increasing student success for students from all backgrounds, but generally not effective in reducing gaps between groups of students.

These trends echo other research on institutional transformation. For instance, Community College Research Center (CCRC) researchers who studied the Tennessee Guided Pathways implementation[14] found that equity gaps remained consistent despite system-wide efforts that led to higher student success outcomes for all groups of students. A key learning from these findings: Existing system-wide reform efforts are often not enough to close race-based equity gaps, and additional solutions that are systemic and/or tailored to specific student populations may be needed. As noted earlier, leaders at Frontier Set colleges are aware of these gaps and are continuing to evolve their vision, strategy, and capacity for equity.

A note about leading indicators of student success

Data were also available in the PDP (Postsecondary Data Partnership) related to enrollment and several leading indicators of long-term student outcomes. Most schools had cohort enrollment declines between 2011-2012 and 2019-2020, which mirrors national trends at community colleges. For this group of 12 community colleges, data submission and quality issues made it difficult to draw conclusions about changes in leading indicators (including credit accumulation rate, gateway completion rate, and retention and persistence). Only four had high-quality data; two of those showed significant increases in leading indicators and their three-year cohort graduation rate.

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11 2015 is the most recent data available in IPEDS; from: Jolanta Juszkiewicz, "Trends in Community College Enrollment and Completion Data, Issue 6," American Association of Community Colleges, July 2020, https://www.aacc.nche.edu/wp-content/uploads/2020/08/Final_CC-Enrollment-2020_730_1.pdf

12 These comparisons are not exact. In PDP data, full-time students could include students who transferred in or had dual enrollment experience; these students are not all considered "first-time" students in IPEDS.

13 Data for each school available upon request; data were disaggregated (by NSC and AIR) by demographic groups within schools, so averages across Frontier Set colleges were not available.

14 David Jenkins, et al., "Building Guided Pathways to Community College Student Success: Promising Practices and Early Evidence from Tennessee," Columbia University Community College Research Center, accessed 2021. https://ccrc.tc.columbia.edu/publications/building-guided-pathways-community-college-student-success.html

PART 2

Phases of Transformation at Frontier Set Community Colleges

Research into the Frontier Set colleges offered critical insights into what happens during the process of transformation, helping uncover the story behind the quantitative data and answering the question: *What does institutional transformation look like during a period of improved student outcomes?* Through check-ins, visits, convenings, and workshops, as well as in-depth interviews, Aspen researched how leaders and institutions made changes to structures and processes that were associated with better student outcomes.

These efforts can be categorized into three phases of transformation that institutions cycle through: **Initiation / Vision**, **Implementation / Iteration**, and **Institutionalization / Scaling**.[15] These phases are not linear or as simple as a stage theory; transformation is complex. Some Frontier Set colleges stayed in one phase for an extended period while others moved among and between phases.

Phase 1: Initiation / Vision

Phase 1 centers on setting a vision and defining strategic goals, rooted in an examination of student success data and institutional context. In developing this vision, leaders integrate the expertise of others on their senior team and beyond—for example, from industry, their community, or universities. Once a unified vision is developed, leaders begin sharing it through multiple communications channels, incorporating data and stories along the way. Presidents communicate in a way that aims to align everyone in the college, beginning with the senior team, to a common purpose and build cultural practices that strengthen the institution's capacity to achieve its goals. They then turn to strategizing for transformation, working collaboratively to identify a focused set of student success strategies and initiatives that have high leverage. During this assessment, visioning, and culture-building phase, students often begin to see positive changes, but colleges may not see high gains in student success outcomes right away. In addition, leaders often begin to see areas where institutional capacities must be increased to implement these priority strategies.

When are institutions "ready" for transformation? When they've completed a full round of the Phase 1 work of understanding, assessing, and visioning.

Wake Technical Community College (Wake Tech) engaged in the Phase 1 visioning and strategizing during their presidential transition and strategic planning processes. The president and senior leaders examined student data to set goals and listened to staff and faculty about their experiences at the college as they engaged in strategic planning. The result: a set of strategic priorities that provided the outline of transformation work to be done in the coming years, which leaders believe will boost student success long-term.

When they assume their positions, new presidents often engage in Phase 1 change: They create a vision, communicate it, and work with the college to design strategies based on the facts on the ground. Phase 1 also often encompasses actions leaders take during strategic planning processes. Some colleges in Phase 2 or Phase 3 move back into this initial phase, especially in response to substantial disruptions such as massive enrollment drops, major crises (such as a global pandemic or large statewide disinvestment), or large shifts in student demographics.

Phase 2: Implementation / Iteration

In Phase 2, colleges put their vision and plan into action through large-scale student success initiatives aimed at boosting student outcomes.[16] Strong presidents and senior teams communicate a clear vision of core strategies and goals, and work to ensure institutional teams design, implement, and iterate on innovative student success strategies. The communication process is important through Phase 2.

15 These are similar to the phases of transformation that have been discussed by BMGF and VW/AIR as a result of research conducted during the Frontier Set; publications forthcoming.

16 The Gates Foundation calls these "solutions," whereas Aspen calls these "strategies."

Leaders consistently communicate the why and what of reform, ensuring all those charged with designing and implementing the how of reform are aligning their work to the overall mission.

During this phase, effective schools regularly monitor and adjust the strategies in place, continually improving their efforts based on defined goals and a culture of reviewing data on progress.

Lorain County Community College (Lorain), in Phase 2 for much of their student success work, put guided pathways reforms in place, including developing clear program maps, reforming advisement, and redesigning their English and math developmental education models. At the same time, they built the data capacity to track student outcomes and boost data-driven decision-making in these and other areas. The result of their efforts: Three-year cohort graduation rates more than doubled between 2011 and 2017.

Most schools spend many years in the implementation and iteration phase, especially as they begin, monitor, and adjust their initiatives, refining their vision and strategy for student success and equity along the way. Even colleges in Phase 3 for some elements of their transformation efforts are often in Phase 2 for others. And, as Lorain shows through their data capacity work, many in Phase 2 are also developing the muscle to institutionalize and scale reforms as part of Phase 3 work.

Phase 3: Institutionalization / Scaling

Colleges in Phase 3 scale and systematize their student success and equity work. Many have innovative, targeted initiatives in place and are widening these efforts or exploring other strategies that could boost student outcomes further and faster.

This phase also involves solidifying a strong institutional foundation so these efforts can thrive across the college. Frontier Set colleges in Phase 3 found that when they began institutionalizing their efforts, limitations in some college capacities—including human capital, strategic finance, data capacity, or implementation structures—hindered the work. They concluded that efforts to strengthen those behind-the-scenes capacities across the college were critical to ensure transformation efforts would thrive in all contexts, rather than succeed in some and wither in others.

Many Frontier Set institutions that engaged in Phase 3 efforts started the initiative with higher three-year cohort graduation rates than other Frontier Set community colleges, yet saw more modest increases over the 2011-2017 period. As they turned to institutionalizing reforms, some felt a tension between further advancing student success outcomes and building out internal capacity across the college to maintain existing gains in student success; this sometimes looked like a plateau in student success improvement, but may well benefit students in the long term.

San Jacinto College District (San Jacinto) entered the Frontier Set with higher-than-average three-year cohort graduation rates. Having already achieved this higher level, they turned to aligning, centralizing, and boosting capacities—such as finance, human capital, and communication—across the district. Leaders also actively strategized how to strengthen communication, collaboration, and data use throughout the college. Those reforms largely focused on serving students consistently across the college district, which in turn provided a strong foundation to all campuses, divisions, and departments toward additional student success and equity work. An example of the reforms this promoted: In one situation the same course was taught at different San Jacinto campuses using different syllabi, leading to differences in student learning and uneven preparation for the next course. By reforming and standardizing the process of creating syllabi, the college ensured that students from all campuses are moving to the next course with similar skills. Additionally, program course sequences were standardized across campuses so students taking courses in different or multiple locations are gaining the same knowledge and skills. These efficiencies will continue to boost student outcomes within degree programs, and will also set a stronger foundation from which the college can change course content in its efforts to align course learning outcomes with students' post-graduation success in transfer and employment.

Research into these three phases of reform led to six insights:

1. Student success-oriented transformation has a life cycle.

Often, leaders start with aligning the college under a central vision. Then they put critical strategies in place that result in substantial gains in student outcomes. Finally they turn their efforts to scaling, often pausing to realign strategies to new goals while building capacity. This leads to steady increases in student outcomes for a time, followed by what looks like a plateau but may in fact reflect improvements in operating capacities that are necessary to sustain and further improve outcomes.[17]

2. Capacities matter.

To sustain student success and equity strategies over time, leaders make certain the college builds capacity for both today's and tomorrow's reforms. Often, strengthening capacities is not at the forefront of leaders' vision and strategy for the college during Phases 1 and 2. It may be possible that transformation, and thus student outcomes, could be advanced further and faster if leaders prioritize developing capacity in specific domains—such as data use and human capital—in tandem with student success and equity strategies. By focusing on such capacities earlier, leaders may enable future efforts to improve student success to be more effective and efficient, from Phase 1 through Phase 3.

3. Vision and strategy refinement is constant.

As institutions make changes, they monitor and adjust their student success strategies and capacities with an eye toward long-term success. This suggests that a key capacity necessary for success in any phase is the will and skill needed for continuous improvement.

4. Effective colleges choose what to focus on when.

Leaders cannot reform everything. Particularly in the early stages of reform, strategic leaders choose the areas of student success they believe are most important to their institutional mission—completion, learning, transfer, workforce—and the student populations they most want to focus on in advancing equity. Similarly, effective leaders choose to advance capacities that seem most attainable, laying the groundwork and building the muscle for the next phase of reform.

5. Transformational efforts to boost student success vary depending on where institutions start.

McKinsey research[18] on K-12 reform found the work that transforms a school from "poor" to "fair" is not the same as what transforms a school from "fair" to "good" or "good" to "great." At each level, systems need different efforts to produce substantial gains, sometimes more prescriptive and "top down" and at other times more generative and "bottom up." While the plateauing of student success increases and institutionalization efforts referenced earlier suggests the same may be true in the Frontier Set, our research on this issue is inconclusive. Future research should focus on understanding the best ways to continue improving in each phase, based on where colleges are starting their transformation journey.

6. Presidential succession is highly consequential.

Turnover at the highest levels affects transformation. During the five years of the Frontier Set, nine of 12 presidents left their institutions. Presidential turnover can catalyze institutions into further transformation, or it can stall reforms. Aspen has found that the entity responsible for hiring the president—usually a board of trustees—is more likely to make a choice aligned to continuing transformation if the board was actively engaged with the president in the college's transformation work prior to the transition, including monitoring student success and equity outcomes and understanding the big-picture reform strategies underway.[19]

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17 Everett Rogers, Diffusion of Innovations, 5th Edition, (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2003), ISBN 978-0-7432-5823-4.

18 McKinsey & Co. "How the world's most improved school systems keep getting better." Nov. 1, 2020. Accessed 2021. https://www.mckinsey.com/industries/public-and-social-sector/our-insights/how-the-worlds-most-improved-school-systems-keep-getting-better.

19 Aspen Institute, et al. "How Boards and Trustees Can Advance Student Success and Equity." Accessed 2021. https://successcenter.cccco.edu/Portals/0/Documents/aspen-report-2021.pdf

PART 3

A Model of the Transformational Change Process

Based on insights from Frontier Set colleges, Aspen developed a model of transformation that reflects how change might move forward at community colleges (Figure 3). This model goes deeper than the phases framework by including institutional and student outcomes. It illustrates how developing strategies and capacities broadly influences the student experience in college, and student outcomes after college.

In this model, presidents and senior leaders first come together to create a vision and overarching strategy for the institution. They review data on student outcomes and the student experience, disaggregated by race, income status, gender, and other factors, and then they inventory the current state and evidence of success for all student success strategies in place. In this ideal process, leaders also inventory essential institutional capacities at the college, identifying areas of strength and weakness.

Discussing this information leads to developing a shared vision and overarching strategy for advancing student success and equity, as well as priority areas for capacity improvements.

Leaders then communicate that shared vision and strategy across the college. After developing and sharing this vision, institutions make choices about where to target resources to support student success strategies and institutional capacities, based on their priority goals for student success and equity. These choices lead to institutional changes, which result in improved outcomes.

These strategies and capacities may look different for different kinds of institutions. For example, strategies to advance completion that leads to strong employment outcomes may look different in rural versus urban areas. Human capital strategies may require a different approach in unionized and non-unionized institutions. And data capacity may look very different in large multicampus colleges compared to smaller institutions. The scope and pace of transformation depend on these and other factors.

In the model, the way capacities and strategies fit together looks linear but in reality, it's complex. For instance, having a robust data capacity could catalyze improvements in advising or instruction, and vice versa. Similarly, engaging in teaching and learning reform can catalyze improvements in core human capital capacities at an institution, or vice versa. Strategies and capacities work together much like gears in a machine. The gear of one function is affected by movement in the gears of others. Ideally, the gears are connected and turning in complementary ways that move the institution's student success and equity work forward.

Of course, this model has limitations. For one, the model is very high-level and cannot account for the choices each college will make in their transformation process. Based on many contextual factors, leaders will make different decisions about which strategies to enact and which capacities to develop; this in turn will affect which student outcomes improve. This model is also presented as a linear process, whereas transformation is not: Institutions may cycle back and forth within the model, depending on which of the three phases of work they're in for different parts of their reform efforts.

Figure 3. Institutional Transformation Model

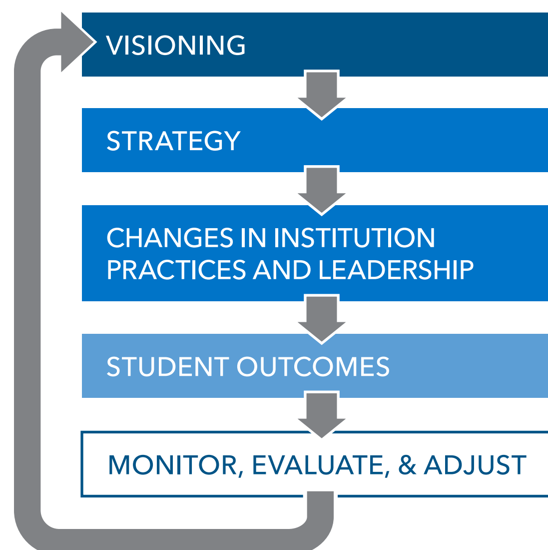
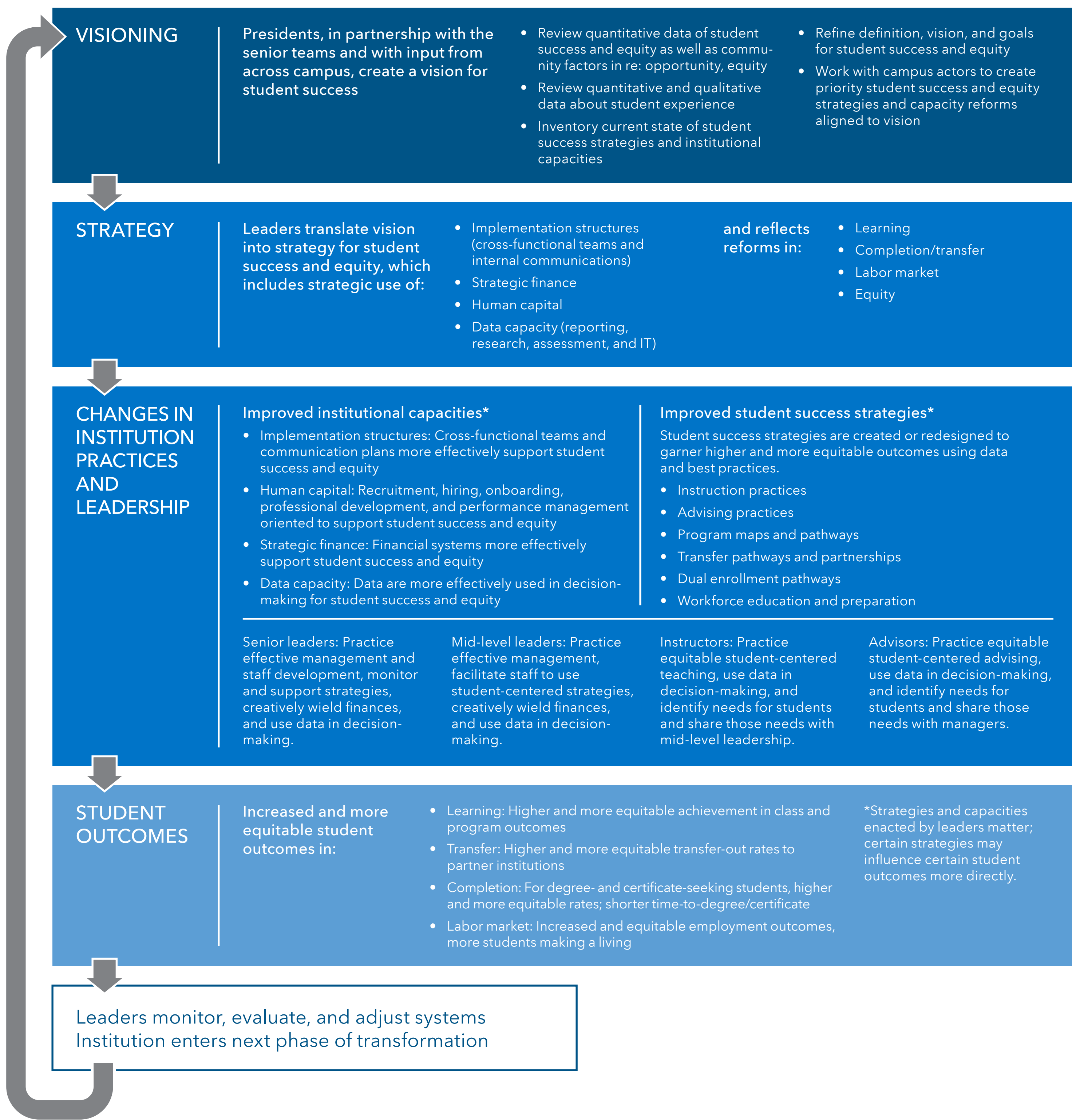


Figure 4. Institutional Transformation Model (Expanded)



PART 4

Transformational Capacities

Little research has focused on organizational capacities, which sit alongside the student success strategies that are studied much more often. Yet without transformational college-wide capacities, it's difficult for a college to institutionalize reforms and continue to increase student outcomes. Aspen's research on Frontier Set community colleges, the Aspen Prize, and other projects has revealed five main institutional capacities as key to effective, sustained efforts to improve student outcomes and equity: strategic finance, human capital, implementation systems (including cross-functional teams), strategic internal communications, and data use.

Our observations suggest that these five capacities have several things in common when they contribute to student success and equity outcomes at scale:

- **They are seen as college-wide capacities.** To advance student success and equity, all parts of an institution must change. Accordingly, core capacities must be built for the entire institution, not just one or a few departments. When built this way, capacities show up in structures and processes across the college—even though they may look different across departments or divisions, or be more important in some departments and divisions than in others.
- **They are part of the senior leaders' vision.** Senior leaders play important roles in setting strategic priorities for capacity-building, providing needed resources, communicating the need for capacity improvement, monitoring the effectiveness of capacities, and setting the conditions for continuous improvement. In these ways, a vision from senior leadership is needed if capacities are to improve an entire institution and contribute to college-wide transformation.
- **The process of strengthening capacities engages both subject matter experts and end users.** For each capacity to be effective, colleges must have a department or unit that has expertise in that capacity, as well as staff outside that department with skills in that area. For example, data capacity requires strong analysts and experts in institutional research and information technology, as well as data and technology skills within the staff and faculty across the college who make decisions using data. For this reason, the leaders working to advance capacities should themselves be technically capable, while ensuring the capacity is well resourced and includes an effective employment strategy for those who ultimately are charged with advancing student success, including faculty and advisors.
- **Interconnectedness is essential.** Transformational capacities do not exist in silos—transformation depends on capacities being connected to one another (as well as to student success strategies). For example, consistent internal communications about the importance of strategic student success priorities, and data that demonstrate why they matter, are essential to transformation. Without a commonly shared set of data-informed goals, student success strategies, and a related communications strategy, cross-functional teams may not effectively move together as they devise, implement, and assess their reform strategies.

The following sections offer insights into how leading colleges have shifted these five capacities from traditional to transformational to advance substantial student success and equity outcomes, with examples from Frontier Set institutions.

The bulk of the research Aspen conducted on Frontier Set institutions focused on three capacities: **internal communications**, **cross-functional teams** (one element of implementation capacity), and **data capacity**. The **strategic finance** and **human capital** sections of this brief include a summary overview of Aspen's prior research on Aspen Prize-winning institutions, with insights from exemplars in the Frontier Set. All five capacities are included in this document because of their importance in driving student success and equity.

Each capacity section includes an explanation of the senior team's role in this capacity, and actions senior leaders can take to move this capacity from traditional to transformational. Charts at the end of this report summarize both a "traditional" and "transformational" version of each capacity.

Internal Communications

Insights on strategic internal communications are drawn primarily from Frontier Set research.

At its best, internal communications helps align those at a college around a common purpose, fosters collaborative decision-making, and helps focus the implementation of priority goals and evaluate progress toward them. At many community colleges, traditional "communications" departments focus only on external communications. Effective colleges also prioritize internal communications, understanding that without them, large amounts of the college's work will remain disconnected from its mission, units may work at cross purposes, and faculty, staff, and administrators can feel disconnected from one another in ways that damage employee morale, limit productivity, and reduce retention.

The Role of Senior Leadership

College presidents are "communicators in chief." They use internal communications as a core tool for aligning the college around a common purpose and bringing people together in collaborative decision-making. Effective presidents understand that their words and actions matter, but so too do those of other leaders throughout the institution. For this reason, effective presidents adopt strategies for internal communications not just from their offices, but also from the board, the senior team, and engaged and empowered faculty, staff, and administrators across the college.

ALIGNING THE SENIOR TEAM AROUND A COMMON PURPOSE

At colleges that are advancing student success, the president and senior team work to ensure they are aligned around a common purpose. This work requires gaining joint clarity on why reform is important, what the specific goals of reform are, and the broad strategies that will be used to enact reforms.[20] With that common purpose in place, the senior team has a unique responsibility for devising and rolling out internal communications strategies within their units, to ensure everyone in the college understands why change matters so much and how their work connects to college-wide goals.

Executing this kind of communications strategy requires that the senior team define a limited set of priorities and initiatives, and develop talking points—often including compelling data and stories—to repeat across the institution.[21]

Based on that shared foundation, they can ensure clear, cohesive messages consistently flow from all the members of the senior team to the rest of the institution.

ALIGNING THE COLLEGE AROUND A COMMON PURPOSE

The goal of internal communications is to ensure every person at the college understands the reasons for and the broad outline of reform strategies—and, importantly, sees how their work fits into those strategies. This involves frequent and timely communications that share clear, consistent, data-driven messages tailored to each audience. As a former president of a Frontier Set college put it, "There is never enough communication."

At **Sinclair Community College** (Sinclair), the mission is so identifiable that one senior administrator explained that "every single employee" makes a reference to the college's motto, "Find the need and endeavor to meet it":

"It just rolls off the tongue with everybody, and they talk about how their work relates to the mission. I think that's part of student success at Sinclair. It's simple but profound."

Sinclair's motto is the core of its mission statement, and it's salient because the phrase describes how staff at the college work to achieve their strategic priorities—which are similarly simple and easy to remember: "alignment, equity, and growth."[22] These three priorities are accompanied by succinct, unambiguous definitions,[23] and everything being done at the college is meant to meet these measurable goals.

20 See Senior Teams Curriculum, developed by the Scaling Partners and Aspen, rooted in research into 19 high-performing colleges, funded by BMGF. This curriculum is available on request, and will be made public on Aspen's website in 2022.

21 Some institutions call this "executive sponsorship."

22 Sinclair College. "About/Mission." Accessed 2021. https://www.sinclair.edu/about/mission

23 Sinclair College. "About/Mission." Accessed 2021. https://www.sinclair.edu/about/mission

USING FRAMING MECHANISMS

Presidents and senior leaders often use what experts call framing mechanisms[24] to help align organizational change. These mechanisms can be regular addresses, dynamic convenings, or widely shared artifacts that convey messages clearly for people across the college.

At Sinclair's annual conferences on data use and equity, leaders use "big sheets"—printouts that state clear goals and provide related data on student success priorities. Such actions communicate that the institution has a common purpose and consistently measures itself against a defined set of quantitative goals.

At **Columbia Basin College** (Columbia Basin), the president shares a message about student success in what people across the college call "the blue slides"—a few key slides that share the college's vision, with data and metrics.

At **Davidson-Davie Community College** (Davidson-Davie), administrators came together and created a "placemat" on which all student success strategies were aligned under a framework that staff were familiar with at the time. A senior administrator who was a part of that process explained:

"We had one person doing Completion by Design, another doing Achieving the Dream, and someone else doing our Quality Enhancement Plan for accreditation. And, you know, we had a lot of duplicated effort … so three [senior leaders] sat in a room and we brainstormed: 'How can we communicate this?' We played around with some ideas; we had the loss/momentum framework … we had mapped the student pathway … and we decided to create the placemat where we put all the initiatives that were happening in the connection, progress, and completion boxes. Then underneath that we explained how we were going to measure ourselves."

This placemat is a living document. Soon after developing it, the group began revising it each year to include new initiatives. Staff use the placemat to understand how their work and their colleagues' fits into the college's student success and equity goals.

In each case, the framing mechanism helped people at the college understand which strategies and information to prioritize. It repeats key ideas, uses data to emphasize that the institution is on track, and builds confidence among individuals across campus that they're interpreting the strategy correctly.

BRINGING PEOPLE TOGETHER IN COLLABORATIVE DECISION-MAKING

Effective leaders aim to create a culture in which everyone at the college feels instrumental in helping achieve college-wide student success and equity goals. This involves two-way communication and collaborative decision-making from the beginning of each major reform initiative, reducing challenges to securing "buy-in" at the end of the decision-making process. As communications expert Andrea Sussman proposes based on her experience supporting internal communications in community colleges, leaders should "stop seeking buy-in and start involving people in decision-making."[25] Although this may seem inefficient to leaders who feel urgency to create reforms, opening spaces for dialogue and shared decision-making can facilitate deeper and more widespread change adoption, while at the same time boosting engagement and satisfaction across the college.

At Sinclair, the president owns and leads communications, and is visible and available to the entire staff. He regularly meets with vice presidents and deans, attends faculty senate meetings, hosts open forums where anyone can join him for coffee, and more. During the pandemic, he conducted surveys of staff and shared video reports that include "the good, the bad, and the ugly."

One senior administrator at Sinclair explained that the president's openness has created a culture where "people are very comfortable talking about what they like, and what they don't like" to the president and others at the top. They feel heard and respected, she explained, which is especially helpful during times of change. Together, the clear and consistent message about student success, and the openness between employees and senior administration, contribute to Sinclair employee satisfaction: The college has been voted by its employees as one of the best places to work in the state of Ohio for multiple years in a row.

24 Pamela L. Eddy, "Sensemaking on Campus: How Community College Presidents Frame Change," Community College Journal of Research & Practice, 27:6 (2003): 453-471, DOI: 10.1080/713838185.

25 Sussman's research focused on community colleges, many of which participated in the Frontier Set. Publication is forthcoming.

Coordinating Internal Communications Practices Across the College for Transformation

At effective colleges, internal communications strategies and plans are crafted centrally and then carried out by people across the institution. This requires planning within divisions and departments for who will share the message, through what venue, and at what times. Effective colleges rely on senior team members to work with mid-level leaders to develop and target messages to each audience, so each leader is prepared and equipped to emphasize key messages, underscore why the message matters to the specific audience, and speak to their specific concerns. Finally, having a cadence of communications and collaboration throughout the year is important to ensure the message doesn't get lost in the presence of so many other priorities and daily tasks.

San Jacinto College District (San Jacinto) has effective internal communications practices, which start at the top: the president and senior administration strategically engage in open, timely, coordinated, and consistent dialogue with the staff. Because of the large size of the multi-campus institution, senior administrators understand the need to synchronize messages. As one senior administrator shared:

"… being multi-campus, it's even more important because one of the things you battle … is people at one campus saying, 'Well I heard this is going on at another campus, and nobody said anything about it here' … You have to think about who is going to communicate it, and you script it out so that all of your staff are saying essentially the same thing, at the same time, in the same way."

San Jacinto aligned communications practices as part of the shift to a "one college" structure, which was essential to its student success reforms. A decade ago, campuses behaved as independent agencies (with different syllabi for the same courses across different campuses, different program review processes for the same program on different campuses, and so on). Campuses often competed against each other for students, fueled by a system that allocated resources to each campus based on enrollment. Students had different experiences, depending on which campus(es) they attended. Unifying the college campuses was part of a major culture shift that started with establishing and reinforcing the key message that San Jacinto was one functioning unit, "One San Jac," with the objective of serving students better across all the campuses.

San Jacinto shows that strategic communications capacities can be improved. Recognizing their somewhat haphazard internal communications, senior administrators began rolling out detailed communications plans—and noticed a boost in clarity, trust, and efficiency across the campuses. Now communications plans are required for all work at the college. One senior administrator who witnessed this change now sees it this way: "You have to be thoughtful and intentional about everything. Everything."

MESSAGES TO STUDENTS

Clear communication to students is also critical to advancing student success. At many colleges, student receive a clutter of messages through multiple channels, including emails and texts. Because those communications originate in different departments throughout the college, it's hard for the college as a whole to prioritize what matters most. Effective colleges establish priority messages for students, and work to ensure those messages are elevated to students while other messages are deprioritized—or stopped altogether.

At **Lorain County Community College** (Lorain), administrators and functional area leads mapped the communication process and learned that students were being inundated with messages, leading them to inadvertently ignore the ones most important to their success. Leaders came to understand that students found it hard to discern what was most important, because they experienced everything at the same level of importance (such as intramural softball league recruitment, FAFSA submission dates, and feedback on assignments). With this insight, the college started to clarify which departments and organizations could send campus-wide emails and what communications they were responsible for, prioritizing those departments sending emails critical to the college's student success goals. Based on similar insights and objectives, other Frontier Set colleges have restricted who can send text messages to students.

Putting It All Together

A from-to comparison chart of "traditional" and "transformational" internal communications summarizes what Aspen learned from Frontier Set institutions and Aspen Prize-winning colleges, in the form of a usable tool. See Appendix B, page 56.

REFORM PRIORITIES FOR SENIOR LEADERS

- Align the senior team on vision and strategy. This may require considerable time to uncover where gaps in vision exist, and to increase alignment.
- Develop a strategic internal communications plan for the senior team that includes:
  - How to advance vision and strategy based on identifying key audiences in each team member's division.
  - What the college wants each audience to do differently, the specific messages and data points needed to achieve that goal for each audience, and the venues to be used to communicate messages.
  - Who in the cabinet will "own" execution of each part of the communications strategy.
  - Details of the authority and resources needed to implement the plan.
- Develop a limited set of student success data points that align with the vision and strategy, along with presentation tools (such as slides), prioritized language, and data definitions.
- Evaluate all internal communications processes and venues by audience (including faculty and students), assess whether they are aligned with student success reforms, and make plans for using these processes and venues more effectively. Inventory staff and student communications separately.
- Develop a "stop, start, modify" list for existing communications. For everything continuing, ensure it is reflected in the strategic communications plan.

Cross-functional Teams

Insights on cross-functional teams are drawn primarily from Frontier Set research.

When enacting college-wide reforms, cross-functional teams are a particularly powerful tool for collaboration. These teams sit adjacent to the department and division structure, and scaffold and connect reform efforts across the college. They help overcome institutional tendencies to operate in silos, bringing people and skillsets together to understand reforms and bolster the work within departments and divisions. In addition, cross-functional teams establish a center for reforms that enable colleges to continue those efforts through leadership or internal structural changes.

Traditionally, cross-functional teams are not organized and used *strategically*. They're often standing committees that can do as much to prevent change as to promote it. In contrast, colleges that use cross-functional teams to support transformation have an understanding of how to create effective teams and create an ecosystem of teams that are clearly and explicitly aligned to the institution's vision for student success reforms.

The best teams have clear charges, support, authority, autonomy, and accountability, and they bring about substantial improvements in student success and equity outcomes.

The Role of Senior Leadership

The senior team is the most important cross-functional team for college-wide transformation. At strong colleges, the senior team works in concert to determine the key priorities and initiatives that will drive student success and equity work across the institution. They communicate these priorities, leading (and at times personally managing) them across the college in organized and purposeful ways.[26] They set and regularly monitor key performance indicators, using them to assess progress and inform course corrections, as a senior team and in meetings with division heads, project managers, and others.

Deeper within the institution, cross-functional teams have varied functions: some craft strategies, some oversee decision-making and planning, and others implement strategies.[27] Whatever their function, effective teams have clearly defined purposes that align with the overarching strategy for student success and equity reforms. An effective and interwoven set of cross-functional teams serves as scaffolding for leaders to develop, implement, and refine the student success and equity strategies, building the muscle for reform.

Highly effective cross-functional teams facilitate collaborative progress in the following ways:

COMMUNICATING COMMON PRIORITIES AND ELEVATING CHALLENGES AND CONCERNS

Cross-functional teams provide a venue for senior team members and mid-level managers to share messages with common purposes, ideally reflected in internal communications plans (see previous section). As teams consider and discuss these messages while they design how reforms will take place, they deepen their understanding of why reform matters and what can be accomplished, making them more effective messengers with their key audiences.

Cross-functional teams also provide a space for reciprocal communication, where staff and faculty elevate issues to one another and to leadership, ensuring views from throughout the institution are incorporated into how reform is enacted.

Engaged senior and mid-level leaders set the conditions for honest feedback by listening closely, celebrating staff who raise concerns in constructive and problem-solving ways, and reminding everyone why reform matters. Perhaps most important, leaders demonstrate their commitment to both the reform and the staff enacting it by dedicating time and resources to support solutions to the challenges identified by cross-functional teams.

26 Some call this "executive sponsorship," as all major initiatives should be sponsored by someone on the executive team, used interchangeably in this report with the "senior team."

27 Findings from literature review done by Phase Two Advisory for BMGF in 2021. Available upon request.

FACILITATING COLLABORATIVE EFFORTS

Cross-functional teams are most effective when they're informed by a clear vision and strategy of *what* outcomes will define success and *what* reforms are needed, and then provided a clear "charge" for *what* the team is designed to accomplish. With those things in place, these teams can help de-silo an institution by enabling staff to collaboratively design *how* the institution will advance that vision and strategy. In turn, this process of collaboration can ensure that the scope, timing, and other design reform elements are coordinated, so reform work in all parts of the institution is aligned and coordinated. One leader at **Wake Technical Community College** (Wake Tech) likened cross-functional work to that of the spinal column, aligning and connecting the rest of the bones to work efficiently: "A backbone can help you sequence, it can help you say, 'I know you're doing this over here, but did you know that [another group] is trying to do this as well? Why don't we get together and do this *together*?'"

ENSURING THE NEEDED EXPERTISE IS PRESENT TO ADDRESS CHALLENGES

Cross-functional teams foster communication and collaboration among those with expertise in different functional areas, so expertise can be used effectively and problems can be elevated and solved more quickly. This is important not just when implementing reforms, but also when evaluating an initiative's effectiveness. Several leaders from across Frontier Set institutions shared that it's crucial to bring data partners from institutional research and information technology divisions into early stages of cross-functional team deliberations. When these experts are brought in later, the work is often slower and more complicated, and can even be derailed because those engaged cannot demonstrate the outcomes needed to justify continuing the reforms.

Two Strong Examples of Cross-functional Teams

Below are two detailed examples of Frontier Set community colleges that strategically used cross-functional teams to supplement the adjacent hierarchical structure and effectively advance reforms.[28]

San Jacinto College District

San Jacinto has effective cross-functional teams at multiple levels: a strong leadership team dedicated to driving common priorities across multiple campuses, and a robust structure of cross-functional teams organized purposefully to engage leaders, faculty, and staff from across the district in reforms. A multi-campus institution, San Jacinto must balance the goal of enacting unified reforms with the need for location-specific customization. Cross-functional teams solve for some of that tension.

San Jacinto's teams have proved effective in part because leadership manages and tracks all teams and their representatives. Though some are ad hoc, most teams are interconnected through the college's "standing councils," designed to connect broad cross-college areas—such as a Fine Arts Council, Service Learning Council, STEM Council, and DEI Council that coordinate efforts in these areas across campuses. For example, the Service Learning Council worked on defining service learning across the campuses and training faculty to implement these principles in their courses. Council members have term limits, to rotate membership over time. Within the councils, subcommittees coordinate efforts on specific issues or initiatives. For example, the DEI Council has 12 subcommittees with specific and unique charges related to the larger council mission. In addition to subcommittees, task forces are deliverable-based and convene a smaller group for a short time to achieve a specific goal. For instance, one task force researched faculty load at colleges across Texas, so administrators and faculty could examine and revise their load policy. All task forces, and many other committees and subcommittees, sunset once their goals are achieved. Teams—whether councils, committees, or task forces—have life cycles relevant to their charge.

Leaders actively monitor these teams' work and the faculty and staff engagement within them; a readily available organizational chart keeps track of these teams and their membership. Progress tracking, term limits, and intentionality in membership are what set this approach apart.

Indian River State College

At Indian River, the cabinet oversees student success initiatives while a broad range of stakeholders work in cross-functional "workgroups" to implement reforms and develop new ideas. Indian River has used this structure since 2001 to solve multiple pressing challenges.

A workgroup is formed after the senior team identifies a critical challenge or area for improvement. Workgroups are made up of approximately a dozen individuals, including staff, faculty, and administrators from areas impacted by the topic, and include at least one person from the cabinet and one from institutional research.

Indian River's workgroups are unique in one significant way: they're always temporary. When they're commissioned, the workgroups are charged with meeting for a predetermined amount of time to study a topic and make recommendations to the cabinet, and then disbanded. The workgroups play a role in defining the scope of their work, and after evaluating an issue, they propose a refined charge and set of deadlines to the cabinet, which approves it and then monitors progress. Leadership keeps the number of student success initiatives and workgroups low to ensure they're all given proper attention.

This structure is different from traditional committees in six key ways:

1. A convincing case has to be made at the cabinet level to create a workgroup.
2. The limited number of workgroups and their importance to the college creates a culture that treats workgroups as an opportunity to contribute and a form of professional development—an honor rather than something people get stuck doing.
3. All workgroups start with members studying existing student success data so members understand the problem holistically and can strategize with one another before proposing solutions.
4. Their temporary structure, clear goals, and defined timelines help focus deliberations and contribute to a sense of accountability.
5. The groups propose solutions directly to the cabinet, offering an opportunity for mid-level leaders to communicate with cabinet members and grow their strategic skills.
6. Because there are a limited number of workgroups operating at one time, the cabinet has both the opportunity and an obligation to promptly respond to a workgroup's findings.

28 This idea is similar to John Kotter's "Dual Operating System": https://hbr.org/2012/11/accelerate

What Makes Cross-functional Teams Transformational?

Teams come in all shapes and sizes, with varying charges, time frames, and life cycles, and involving different people. Aspen found **five main qualities** of cross-functional structures that enable them to meaningfully contribute to transformational efforts.

PURPOSE AND ALIGNMENT

At strong colleges, the purpose of cross-functional teams aligns to college-wide priorities for student success and equity. Clear, specific charges offer several advantages:

1. Teams that understand priorities are more likely to agree on specific plans that extend beyond their divisional priorities.
2. Clear charges help team members readily define how to assess progress, including outcomes and timelines.
3. Team members with clear charges are more able to balance their work with other responsibilities.
4. Team members are better able explain to others in the college why the status quo needs to change.
5. With clear charges and goals aligned to institutional purposes, these teams' work can be more readily integrated into the institution, even after cross-functional teams sunset.

Davidson-Davie offers an example of aligning strategies and integrating teams to advance student success. As one senior administrator explained, the college put in place several concurrent initiatives focused on student success (such as Completion by Design, Achieving the Dream, and the Quality Enhancement Plan). They aligned these initiatives under a larger student success agenda and "Student Success Team" that oversaw the work and engaged stakeholders in completion, teaching and learning, and other areas. This cross-functional Student Success Team came to function as a space to develop new ideas for addressing student success and equity, and to evaluate pilots before scaling them. As ideas moved out of the Student Success Team and across the institution, more of the work became incorporated into divisional roles and job descriptions. Eventually, the team was disbanded because the critical reform work had been institutionalized across divisions.

Guilford Technical Community College (Guilford Tech) utilized cross-functional teams to address its guided pathways reform priorities. The college began this work with a survey made up of aspirational statements developed by the National Center for Inquiry and Improvement. Statements focused on areas such as student needs assessment and support, first semester experiences, math and English gateways, effective instruction, and equitable access. Respondents were asked to evaluate, in their view, the extent to which Guilford Tech's practices met those aspirations. Based on replies from 33 deans, directors, and administrators, plus 130 faculty and student-facing staff, the leadership team identified four main areas for improvement: student connection and onboarding, career and program selection, student belonging and communication, and student success in the first 12 credit hours.

The VP primarily responsible for each area established cross-functional design teams that included members from multiple divisions. Leaders shared principles for making decisions, requesting funds, using data, and involving students—then tasked each team with creating a culture and values work statement. Each design team identified a few challenges in their area and came up with strategies and action steps. When the teams finished, leaders placed all the strategies on a timeline the president uses to track progress and update the college community. The college plans to conduct the survey again, a year into implementation, to both gauge progress and identify new challenges.

LIFE CYCLE

Few institutions regularly sunset cross-functional teams. The result: Faculty, staff, and administrators may continue to meet even when their efforts are no longer aligned to the student success agenda, or may duplicate other efforts at the college. An administrator at Lorain shared that one of their learnings during Fronter Set engagement was that not all teams need to continue in perpetuity: "I think that there were times where we [felt like we] needed to find something for them to do."

Over the course of the Completion by Design (CBD) and Frontier Set grants, Lorain overcome this hesitancy to sunset teams or integrate the work of those teams into the organization. Their Student Completion Council, for example, had been created to lead the work on the CBD grant. Realizing the need to sunset work, Lorain changed the committee's charge from one that implemented student-facing work to a standing institutional committee designed to oversee, assign, and sunset the student success efforts using sub-committees tasked with focused strategic efforts.

For example, one sub-team redesigned the new student process, while another worked on connecting students to the workforce. When work on a sub-committee like this is completed it disbands, allowing people who made up that team to engage in other

reform efforts. In the words of the same administrator, "We'll form a different group with that specific charge, rather than hold onto the same committee and then look for new things for that committee to do."

MEMBERSHIP

Effective cross-functional teams need members with the skills and institutional responsibilities to accomplish the task at hand, as well as leaders with the right combination of formal authority and content expertise. Unfortunately, at many colleges the members and leaders invited or assigned to be part of cross-functional teams are chosen largely because they have time, regardless of whether they have the specific skills, knowledge, or authority needed.

Successful cross-functional teams often bring together two important "sides of the house"—student services and academic affairs—and include individuals with other expertise important to the student success effort, including institutional research, information technology, and human resources professionals.

In addition to providing needed expertise, these people expand the team's sphere of influence.

For teams to play a role in transformation, the team's expertise and authority must be aligned to its function. For example, teams assigned to build program maps need leaders from academic and advising divisions—such as deans, department chairs, and advising division leaders—as well as practitioners—such as advisors from different divisions and faculty from different disciplines. Why the range? Because program maps impact which courses are offered, how and when they're offered, how and when students are advised to take those courses to complete their degrees, and how students are advised when they deviate from program maps. Aspen also heard from administrators who choose co-leaders to represent both faculty and staff, so members from each group understand they're equally important to the team's efforts.

Frontier Set leaders noted that the team should not be composed solely of those who volunteer to be engaged. Members should be invited because they offer something critical to the task at hand—a particular kind of expertise, positional authority, or influence with key audiences that may help overcome anticipated "roadblocks."

LEADERSHIP SUPPORT

Senior leaders lend institutional power—and their voices—to ensure the success of cross-functional teams. For example, at San Jacinto and Indian River, senior leaders routinely speak about why advancing student success matters, and they express support for both the teams' role in reforms and the expectation that all will contribute. In these ways, senior team members ward off uncertainty—and dissension—about the goals of the team.

Effective senior leaders also ensure cross-functional teams receive the resources needed to complete their work. They signal that cross-functional team membership is central to team members' jobs, not extra "duties as assigned," by providing release time whenever needed.

These leaders work to make sure they hear about barriers that get in the way of team members' cross-functional work, and attend to them quickly when they arise.

When considering creating new teams, Frontier Set leaders also know the importance of deliberately thinking through whether key players are available. For example, if four committees need the director of advising, perhaps it's a sign that something should sunset, or that the administration needs to focus on other aspects of reform until some existing work is complete.

ACCOUNTABILITY AND PROGRESS

Finally, cross-functional teams thrive when senior leaders strike a balance, providing teams autonomy to devise how reforms will proceed while holding teams accountable for accomplishing goals that align to college-wide priorities. As described above, at Indian River both the cabinet and the team have a role in setting the charge for working groups. If goals are not met, the cabinet and team leadership decide together if they need more time or resources, or if a more structural solution is warranted. Leaders encourage creativity, emphasizing that not all ideas will succeed as planned. They give room for flexibility and innovation.

Project Management

Administrators highlighted the importance of having project management skills on cross-functional teams, either by making sure team leaders have those skills or by assigning trained project managers to support each team. For instance, at several Frontier Set institutions—Northeast Wisconsin Technical College (Northeast Wisconsin), Wake Tech, and San Jacinto—leaders discovered that dedicated project managers made the work go faster and helped navigate the complexity of integrating efforts. As one manager explained, these staff members could "get momentum going and sustain it" by leading the team's efforts. These roles are not replacements for formal leaders—often, subject-matter experts—who lead the team to accomplish its charge, but rather there to provide them support and free up their capacity to lead. These project managers often end up with keen insights into the inner workings of different parts of the institution, knowledge that can be mined by institutional leaders to consider additional reforms or changes in resource allocation. Over time, these Frontier Set institutions have included project management roles in institutional or grant budgets.

Human Capital Strategy

Thoughtful composition of a cross-functional team can advance a college's human capital strategy by identifying and developing future leaders. Membership on a cross-functional team can provide stretch opportunities for mid-level leaders and student-facing practitioners. A Lorain leader said he benefited from membership on the cross-functional Completion by Design team, which led to him being tapped for expertise in redesigning developmental education and contributed to his transition from faculty member to senior administrator. Opportunities like that are powerful ways to publicly recognize valuable service and grow leaders.

Putting It All Together

A comparison chart of "traditional" and "transformational" cross-functional teams summarizes what Aspen learned from Frontier Set institutions and Aspen Prize-winning colleges, in the form of a usable tool. See Appendix B, page 58.

REFORM PRIORITIES FOR SENIOR LEADERS

- Inventory all committees and other cross-functional teams and their membership, evaluating alignment with the college's strategic student success and equity priorities.
- Consider which committees to "stop, start, and modify."
  - Consider sunsetting any that aren't aligned with institutional student success, equity, or other priorities.
  - If important work is stalled or needs to advance in a new or more rapid way, consider starting a new cross-functional team or combining and recharging teams.
- Assess the membership of all remaining and new committees and teams to ensure they have:
  - Strong charges with SMARTIE (Strategic, Measurable, Ambitious, Realistic, Time-bound, Inclusive, and Equitable) goals.
  - The needed expertise and authority (consider whether existing teams should be revitalized with new/different members).
  - Concrete plans to sunset or modify their charge.
  - Plans to institutionalize reforms within their charge, where appropriate.
- For all remaining committees and teams, inventory membership and determine whether important college units, individuals, expertise, or demographic representation are absent or under-engaged, and develop a concrete plan for their inclusion.

Data Capacity

Insights on strategic internal communications are drawn primarily from Frontier Set research.

Leaders at successfully transforming colleges use data in several important ways. They analyze data about community conditions and student success to devise priorities. They include data in internal and external communications strategies to help clarify why reform and key strategies are important. They use (and make sure others use) data to evaluate progress, celebrate successes, and make changes in strategies as needed.[29] Traditionally, colleges have focused more on using data for compliance-based reporting, while institutions with transformational data capacity use data in their vision and strategy, and for monitoring progress toward goals.

Transformational data capacity requires partnership between the president and senior team—who set a vision for student success and equity and communicate the importance of outcomes—and institutional researchers,[30] who help determine a key set of data metrics aligned with that vision, develop materials to help communicate the vision across the college, help communicate data's importance to enacting a vision through data presentations and participation in key cross-functional teams, and support the senior team in monitoring progress toward the vision.

To effectively use data for transformation, colleges also need employees beyond institutional researchers who are skilled in data use—namely, those who develop and enact student success reforms. For this reason, the institutional research function must provide data to divisions and units so they can assess their own progress toward institutional goals, as well as understand how their efforts connect to college-wide goals. Ideally, information technology (IT) is also involved, developing and implementing the infrastructure and technical capacity to make data readily accessible and usable by staff and students alike.[31] Together, these institutional players enable data to be a lever for transformational change.

Reporting, Research, and Assessment Functions

Three main functions undergird data capacity at colleges. The first is reporting, which provides information about the institution to outside sources and is often mandated by governments, accreditors, and funders. The second is research, which informs the assessment of community conditions and student success in terms of completion, transfer, and other student outcomes; helps identify areas for improvement for everyone engaged in reform work; and supports developing leaders' vision, strategy, and communications. The third is assessment, which informs practices by measuring both student outcomes and specific programmatic/reform outcomes against defined goals.

The data functions and departments in community colleges can be housed together or separately. Regardless, these functions can best support transformation if they're harnessed in ways that align with institutional leaders' vision for student success and equity. When aligned, these functions can receive support from the highest levels of the institution, so needed data experts can help lead strategy.

To carry out these critical functions, highly effective colleges engage researchers in ways that use their expertise in planning, defining key data metrics, devising evaluation systems, and making useful data available to staff to use in their daily work. At Sinclair, a senior administrator focused on institutional research summed it up: "Our mission is to take data and information from across our reporting systems and build them into a cohesive reporting platform for the college."

29 Note that this section covers student data used by staff at the institution, but does not address data that go to students (such as for program choice, degree audits, early alerts, etc.). Data use by students is important, but beyond the scope of this report.

30 The term "institutional researchers" is used in the broadest sense: staff whose job function is to collect, store, analyze, or report on data. Some institutional researchers sit in the institutional research department; others may be in reporting or assessment roles.

31 Of course, information technology also encompasses and enables other aspects of the work, such as access to the right facilities, hardware, and software to do an institution's work; in this document the focus is on data capacity.

PARTNERSHIP WITH INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY

Together, institutional research and IT can help establish a powerful, unified, effective, and sustainable data culture. Because institutional researchers and other data users rely on the infrastructure built by IT to access and use data, collaboration between research and IT is critical. A senior administrator in institutional research at San Jacinto explained that building a relationship with IT staff is the first thing he recommends to institutional researchers. Without this collaboration, research, assessment, and reporting processes will be inefficient and, at times, ineffective.

At many colleges, IT is separate from the research, reporting, and assessment functions. Some institutions, such as Indian River, house data infrastructure and dashboard functionality under IT while reporting and research (such as data analysis) are under institutional research. Others, including San Jacinto and Lorain, have several employees in the research offices with IT backgrounds or skills who are liaisons with IT staff, working to coordinate infrastructure and data storage. Regardless of structure, what matters is that IR and IT work together in ways that effectively support the institution's data capacity.

Strong partnerships between institutional research and IT can help establish the relationships that make way for better data use in other departments and divisions—particularly at colleges with smaller research, reporting, and assessment staffs who cannot alone maintain needed communications with staff and faculty.[32] The IT department can help bridge that gap based on their other connections with employees across the institution. This partnership can also strengthen training on data use. At Indian River, whenever new software is adopted staff have mandatory training that covers how to use the software and how to view and interpret related data.

The Role of Senior Leadership

Senior leaders play an important role in building and advancing data capacity. They root all vision and strategy for the institution in data, making clear that outcomes lie at the heart of student success and equity strategies. They work with institutional researchers to choose key data related to the student success and equity agenda, and then use those data points to communicate why reform matters and how it will be measured.

They use data to assess progress, celebrate wins, and set the expectation—including by modeling the practice themselves—that reforms will be modified when data reveal a lack of progress.

Leaders set the tone and provide the resources necessary to ensure researchers are included in student success and equity initiatives from the planning stages forward. They include researchers in their own decision-making processes and reinforce their importance by using data in strategic communications. And throughout the reform process, they exercise discipline in tying all reform efforts, over multiple years, to a consistent and limited set of leading and lagging indicators that reflect the college's reform agenda.

ROOTING VISION AND STRATEGY IN DATA

Senior leaders partner with institutional researchers to decide what data to examine in the process of developing a vision for student success and equity, working iteratively to land on key metrics that are used to define concrete goals and benchmark progress. This requires senior leaders to strike a balance between asking questions aligned to their emerging vision and trusting institutional researchers to help refine those questions, identify gaps in what is being asked, and provide answers that inform strategy. In this process, it is important for leaders to understand the skills and capacity of their institutional research department (for instance, smaller departments may need more direction whereas larger ones may have the capacity to play more of a leadership role in the process). At Lorain, an institutional research leader explained that leaders helped catalyze data use by partnering with institutional researchers to decide which key metrics were most important to their student success and equity agenda.

Deciding what student data are important is a decision that should be tightly aligned with the vision and strategy of the college. It is critical that the number of metrics chosen are limited, especially given the vast amount of student data available today, which is increasing due to digitization of campus processes. With too many metrics, leaders can become paralyzed; rather than having data meaningfully shift practices, data become a diversion. Narrowing in on a key set

32 Volkwein, J. F., Liu, Y., & Woodell, J. "The structure and functions of institutional research offices." In The Handbook of Institutional Research, edited by R. D. Howard, G. W. McLaughlin, W. E. Knight, et al., 22-39. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2012.

of data at the senior-team level is a pivotal step in successful reform efforts.

Once key data are decided upon, institutional researchers can be vital to communicating them effectively across a college. Among their important functions, institutional researchers help craft reports and systems that make data readily accessible to staff and faculty, with standardized data definitions that ensure data quality and consistency. At Lorain, institutional researchers emphasized clarity and transparency about early predictors of student success, making them accessible in "What Matters Most" dashboards.[33] Researchers ensured employees across the campus could easily access a clear, concise, and constantly updated set of data metrics to inform decision-making. Accessible, understandable data allow staff and faculty to view metrics and make decisions seamlessly. A director explained that in the past, data were provided on request, whereas now,

"Being able to look at those 'What Matters Most' metrics, that is huge for us, because now if somebody needs something for a grant, it's there. If somebody needs something, if they're trying to inform what their program design is, or where we still have work to do with students, or where do we have opportunities to re-think how we're doing something, a lot of what they need is right in there."

BRINGING RESEARCHERS INTO EARLY PLANNING STAGES OF INITIATIVES

Senior leaders set the expectation that those responsible for the research, reporting, and assessment functions will be included in the planning stages of each major student success and equity initiative. Doing so ensures that institutional researchers understand reform objectives and provide real-time feedback about what relevant data are available. In this way, early engagement helps ensure time is not wasted trying to find, understand, and combine datasets—a problem often seen at other institutions that wait too long to involve institutional researchers.

At San Jacinto, as at Indian River and several other Frontier Set colleges, the institutional research team is pulled into early conversations about student success and equity initiatives. They help frame questions, develop data collection and storage structures, and establish analytics and reporting plans. At some Frontier Set colleges, this was not always the case. As one institutional research administrator explained,

"There were definitely times where we wouldn't get brought in until toward the end, and all of a sudden there's this expectation of data … If we had known about this, if we had been involved from the beginning, we might be able to provide something more informative."

At most Frontier Set colleges, the process has improved. That same administrator explained: "Over the years, folks across the college have become very knowledgeable and recognize that if they're going to have an initiative, a team, that's going to require data—they're asking for something from my office from the get-go."

At **William Rainey Harper College** (Harper College), a senior administrator reflected on the need for presidents, chancellors, and provosts to bring in institutional research expertise early:

"I would venture to guess most people on campus do not associate the services and the talent of institutional research with [framing questions and proposing data collection and storage practices]; I think they just immediately think of the analysis, or the reporting on the back end … and I think that would be important, from an executive leadership position, if they could help facilitate that communication. [Institutional research offices often have] expertise in that area, and they want to play that role."

By bringing institutional researchers in early to planning meetings, senior leaders can signal that their expertise matters and model that research staff are integral partners in framing research questions, identifying data, or establishing data collection and storage practices that can help answer those questions effectively and efficiently. They are key to an effective planning process in other ways as well.

MODELING AND ENCOURAGING DATA USE

Senior leaders, institutional researchers, and technology experts at Frontier Set institutions all made clear that senior leaders are critical in developing a culture of using data in decision-making processes. Ensuring that staff and faculty use data in day-to-day decision-making can feel impossible to those aiming to lead reforms throughout the college, unless senior leaders themselves use data in communications and decision-making, require data to support division and department decisions and resource requests, and empower institutional research staff to support divisions and departments in their decisions.

33 Analysts at the college did a probabilistic analysis to identify which indicators were most correlated with eventual student success. They also found that correlation does not equal causation; even a student who hits all the indicators is not guaranteed to succeed, and the predictors may change as institutional practices and the student body change.

At Sinclair, a senior administrator shared that data modeling is important to have:

"Presidents, down to the vice presidents, on down… really and truly being open to having a data-informed decision instead of having a preconceived notion that 'I know that my program that I oversee does really well for students, and I don't need an analysis to tell me that it's doing well.'"

Senior leaders can add value by repeatedly sharing carefully chosen data to frame discussions, asking questions that lead audiences to look at the data that are both relevant to the issue at hand and aligned to institutional priorities. This visibly ties consequential decisions on budget or policies to specific data points, and integrates data into discussions of an initiative's success.

At Sinclair, the president transparently discusses data and their implications in meetings, including town halls that are open to all. At Columbia Basin, the president shares key data slides (always in blue, as a visual cue) in meetings across the college to share progress on student success and equity. When Davidson-Davie began implementing major student success and equity initiatives, the president emphasized common data in quarterly meetings to identify and address how well they were meeting their goals. Over time, this and other data practices by the president helped create a data-driven culture.

At effective colleges, the commitment to visibly use data extends from the president to the senior team, from senior leaders to mid-level leaders, and so on. By actively encouraging others to use data, senior leaders can, over time, ensure that mid-level leaders and frontline staff and faculty are "singing that same song or preaching that same message about the use of data," as one senior administrator at Sinclair put it.

At San Jacinto, data are actively used across the college, and one institutional research administrator attributes the robust data culture to the senior leadership's actions:

"It all started 14 years ago with the former chancellor—and now, our current chancellor—preaching that message that we're a data-informed institution, and the expectation is that we're going to use data to make decisions… It's made our job much more pointed, because we provide information and we know that when people ask for something it's not just out of curiosity, it's because they want to make the best decisions that they can."

Having San Jacinto's chancellor require using data in decision-making allowed institutional researchers to deepen data use at their institution, paving the way for well-attended data presentations, strong relationships with faculty, staff and administrators, and developing and delivering data trainings for staff across the college.

RESOURCING DATA CAPACITY

Senior leaders must ensure the presence of resources—including money, staff positions, and the time of existing staff—necessary to effectively collect, manage, and use data across their college. Colleges need resources to secure the hardware, software, and human capital to collect high-quality data, to develop an effective data management system, and to conduct high-quality analyses. Without this investment, researchers are likely to focus their time on mandatory reporting, not leaving enough bandwidth to do the things needed to transform the institution or improve student outcomes.

CREATING PLACES AND PROCESSES TO USE DATA

Providing accessible, high-quality data does not guarantee they will be used. College leaders who have built data-informed cultures understand this, and work actively to facilitate data quality and data use. They engage staff in ways that relate data to their daily work and tasks, thereby building the habit of data use more deeply and quickly than when done solely through separate training sessions. They work to ensure supervisors and colleagues emphasize the importance of data use in their day-to-day work, so using data is not seen as "extra work" but part of "the work."

Lorain found that integrating data into existing processes was a keystone for building its data culture. For example, the college began to require that the agendas of cross-functional committees—a foundation of their student success and equity work—be rooted in data. Over time, the work that flowed from those committees into operational units at the college helped create a culture where data are used routinely. At **Santa Fe College** (Santa Fe), leaders integrated data into all department and staff meetings. They started with voluntary meetings but quickly extended the policy to mandatory meetings that engaged everyone at the college. Sinclair trains staff in data use during their onboarding process, explicitly setting expectations that data will be used in decision-making. Sinclair also engages staff in popular all-day Data Summits, which attract about half the campus each year.

To expand data practices across campus, Northeast Wisconsin and Columbia Basin both use groups of volunteer staff and faculty who are specifically trained in data use. These volunteers can be effective when data are already aligned, standardized, centralized,

trusted, and accessible. In such cases, trained users can answer their own questions without much support from researchers or IT. However, using volunteers in a culture that does not have data that are already aligned, standardized, centralized, trusted, and accessible may not be very effective, resulting in only some roles or divisions of the institution using data to drive decision-making.

Institutions run into problems when they have rogue data sets and limited capacity to centralize and standardize data. Such was the case at Sinclair, causing the college to centralize data sources in a single campus division. Today, new data sets can be introduced to inform college-wide decisions, including budget allocations, only if they're vetted and approved by centralized data researchers.

HIRING AND TRAINING TRANSFORMATIONAL DATA USERS

To develop a transformational data culture, it's important to hire leaders in institutional research and IT who think about, and have expertise in, using data thoughtfully and expanding its use to other institutional actors.

Successful research and IT staff have strong skills in translating data and research to non-data audiences.

They build relationships with divisions and departments by meeting with people, to understand what they're trying to accomplish and creatively helping them use data to understand their impact. As much as technical know-how, this requires skills in coaching, mentoring, and training people to understand and use data to improve decision-making.

Of course, it also helps to have personnel throughout the college who are receptive to becoming data users. Several Frontier Set institutions do so by requiring separate ongoing data training (such as Santa Fe), incorporating data training and discussion into already existing structures (such as Lorain, Santa Fe, and San Jacinto), or including data-related training in onboarding processes (such as Columbia Basin).

Frontier Set colleges are considering how to factor data literacy in hiring personnel across the college, moving beyond it being professional development after the fact. One leader at Sinclair put it this way:

"Thirty or 40 years ago we said reading and writing were important, and being able to use a computer. Now we kind of take it for granted … but we're not there with data literacy. I don't think people come in with that analytical mindset … So, I think [it's important to have a] data literacy requirement as part of our hiring. I'd like to see a carve-out on how you would use data to help inform [decision-making], especially at the managing ranks and above."

Putting It All Together

A comparison chart of “traditional” and “transformational” data capacity summarizes what Aspen learned from Frontier Set institutions and Aspen Prize-winning colleges, in the form of a usable tool. See Appendix B, page 59.

REFORM PRIORITIES FOR SENIOR LEADERS

- Use data to undergird efforts to develop a vision and strategy for student success and equity.
- Inventory all data systems across the institution and consider whether they:
  - Contain the data needed to enact and measure the college-wide vision and strategy around student success and equity.
  - Are adequately integrated with one another to enable key insights.
  - Contain reliable data.
  - Reflect a single (versus different/competing) version of the truth.
  - Are being adequately utilized by actors who can benefit from the data contained therein.
  - Together provide a strong ROI.
- Ensure the research function has capacity to do both reporting/compliance and transformational work, including planning, analysis, and data training and evaluation for faculty and staff.
- Integrate data capacity into the human capital function, including hiring, onboarding, professional development, and performance evaluation.
- Define a limited set of key student data metrics (disaggregated data by race, ethnicity, and income level) that the senior team will monitor to align reform strategies and awareness throughout the institution.
- Integrate data into strategic communications plans for institutional stakeholders.
- Model and encourage the use of disaggregated data in decision-making, meeting agendas/deliberations, and key processes (program approval/review, course scheduling, etc.).
- Equip and empower the research and technology functions to collaborate for transformational data capacity.

Human Capital

Insights on human capital are drawn primarily from research on Aspen Prize-winning institutions, with select examples from Frontier Set institutions.

Typically, a community college spends more than 80 percent of its operating budget on its people. And it's those people who interact directly with students, make key decisions, manage vital processes, and, ultimately, define the college's culture. For these reasons, a strategic human capital function is essential to advancing student success and equity, as well as the culture of evidence and continuous improvement needed to do so.

Strategic human capital begins with recruiting, hiring, and onboarding staff; ensures effective professional development; and aligns promotion and other incentives with behaviors that drive student success and equity. It requires a fundamental shift, from the traditional view of human resources (HR) as a compliance function to a transformational view of what is described here as human capital, or HC—a strategic lever to sustainably improving equitable student outcomes.

The Role of Senior Leadership

Aligning human capital with a culture of student success and equity begins with the senior team. Institutions with a well-developed human capital strategy ensure that 1) someone on the senior leadership team owns HC as a strategic function; and 2) the president is committed to ensuring the senior team is focused on implementing a strong HC strategy and directs ample resources to it.

Effective leaders work to ensure the college communicates its focus on student success and equity at every stage of employment, for every employee. Prospective and new staff are informed about the college's priorities through job announcements and during interviews, and assessed for alignment to those priorities during each stage of the hiring process. These priorities are then communicated during employee onboarding, which makes clear that professional development and personnel evaluations will be aligned with student success and equity goals.

The senior team also plays a critical role in ensuring resources are in place to support human capital strategies, including the funds and staff needed to develop and maintain strong centers of teaching and learning, and required professional development that is aligned to student success and equity goals.

Strong leaders regularly consider which faculty and staff are doing work that is less aligned to mission. Where that is the case, they reallocate staff or create new positions aligned to strategic human capital functions.

In tough budget times, strong leaders protect positions that are most aligned to student success and equity goals, resisting the temptation to cut all parts of the institution equally.

Leaders focused on student success and equity reward staff whose behavior is aligned with those priorities, through retention, promotion, salary increases, and tenure processes, and through processes for allocating resources. Thus, incentives are less aligned to traditional measures of institutional success such as student enrollment and balanced budgets. Instead, incentives are more aligned to measures of student success and equity, such as high and equitable achievements in retention, graduation, and post-graduation success, such as transfer and employment.

ALIGNING HUMAN CAPITAL WITH VISION AND MISSION

Institutional transformation can only proceed if the HR function is seen as more than a compliance role. A process-oriented view of HR will ensure that many people at the college are not closely aligning their efforts to goals for student success and equity. An effective HC strategy aims to provide everyone clarity about and support for aligning their work with the institution's vision and mission.

At San Jacinto, HC is a cabinet-level position that reports to the president. A senior HC administrator describes their approach as follows: "We work with our individual workgroups and develop priorities that are aligned to the college's mission and vision, and also to our strategic plan." The chancellor ensures that HC strategy extends to all levels of leadership. The chancellor also provides updates on senior leadership decisions directly to the board of trustees, ensuring all conversations regarding human capital and other strategic priorities are aligned with the vision of senior leaders and the board.

Similarly, at Sinclair HC has a seat in the president's cabinet, and decisions around staffing are seen as critical to aligning strategies for supporting the institution's mission and vision. A senior leader noted:

"We use documents such as that completion plan where we set goals ... and then we ask: 'What do we need to do? What staff do we need? What training do we need? And how do we create that environment and support?' And what I love is that our cabinet has these conversations all the time with one another, and we get to have an open exchange with the board and feel tremendously supported by the board."

When human capital is elevated to the level of strategy and staffed at the cabinet level, it becomes essential to advancing the institution's mission. Cabinet positions that oversee HC include titles such as vice president/provost for HC; alternatively, HC can be explicitly named as part of the duties of a vice president of operations.

UPDATING RECRUITMENT

Recruiting personnel whose expertise, attitudes, and abilities are aligned to student success and equity goals is an essential part of a successful human capital strategy.

Transformational recruitment practices begin by aligning job descriptions with the institution's overall mission and vision; they should include language reflecting the institution's commitment to both student success and equity.

San Jacinto recently updated all job descriptions to align with the overall mission and vision, and plans to update them at least every two years. Northeast Wisconsin has revised all its job descriptions to better articulate their equity focus:

"We have [added] the revised diversity statement to make sure that we are bringing cultural competence into minimum qualifications rather than just a bullet down somewhere in the job description. We're trying to find ways to communicate that it has equal importance with education and work experience."

Strong colleges intentionally revamp their recruitment processes to deliver strong, diverse candidate pools. An HR leader describes the San Jacinto approach to recruitment as follows:

"Our VP of HR operations leads a sub-team on recruitment initiatives that looks at our policies and procedures, looks at all the job descriptions, and makes sure that the questions that we're asking in interviews relate not only to the physical job description itself, but also how we ensure that the person we're hiring meets what we need here locally for our demographic and our students."

Institutions with a commitment to equity use creative mechanisms to attract diverse candidate pools. Sinclair, for example, created a recruitment pipeline with recent doctoral graduates from partnering Historical Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs).

REFINING HIRING PRACTICES

Effective institutions also align hiring practices to student-centered goals. They create and train staff on using hiring tools—such as interview questions and assessment rubrics to incorporate into hiring processes across the college—that put a priority on those employee characteristics most aligned with the institution's mission and vision.

Ideally, hiring committees reflect the institution's student body, and include individuals who have a strong equity mindset and understand the core competencies required to advance student success and equity.

For example, many hiring committees in the Frontier Set are starting to screen for cultural competence (such as previous work with diverse populations that mirror the demographics of the college); they also aim to select candidates who provide services in ways that are aligned with their vision for student success, such as appreciative advising.

To align hiring to mission, Frontier Set colleges sometimes require that full-time hires be approved by the president or a member of the senior team. At San Jacinto, for example, the screening committee "provides our top two or our top three candidates, and then the provost—basically from a clean slate—interviews the two or three and then makes the final decision."

BROADENING ONBOARDING PRACTICES

Strong onboarding processes can contribute to employees' long-term success. Traditional onboarding practices often focus on providing basic information about matters necessary to employment such as technology systems, administrative policies, and procurement procedures. Transformational institutions use onboarding to orient employees to their role in accomplishing the college's mission. They use onboarding to create a sense of belonging, making clear the institution's commitment to the employee—

and their professional development—as the central way the college achieves its mission and vision.

At San Jacinto, onboarding is a year-long process, called “SJC Connections.” Rather than beginning onboarding with orientation to technology and procedures, SJC begins with an overview of professional development for faculty and staff, focusing on how it’s aligned to the college’s mission. At Northeast Wisconsin, an administrator explained, “faculty go through the Instructional Preparation Academy (or IPA). It’s a cohort model that starts with a five-day IPA boot camp in the week before they begin service.” Faculty are released from other duties, including teaching, several times in their first year for these onboarding activities.

EVOLVING PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Professional development is a critical—and often underutilized—way colleges can align people to mission. Often, professional development dollars are centered on technical skills and distributed on a first-come, first-served basis. When budgets get tight, professional development dollars are often among the first to be cut.

Transformational institutions set requirements for professional development and connect them to advancing student success—and employees understand that professional development is reflected in the employee review process. At San Jacinto, each staff member creates and commits to an annual plan of specific professional development activities. At **Miami Dade College** (Miami Dade), the collective bargaining agreement with full-time faculty has a professional development requirement. As an administrator explained,

“The approval process [for professional development] runs through the academic deans and that’s one of the ways that the goals get set, because the deans will look at a proposal for faculty professional development through the lens of the college strategic plan and whether the proposed training supports the student learning outcomes. And if it’s not doing both of those things it won’t get approved.”

A successful professional development strategy also includes both department-level and college-level activities, allowing for growth in one’s specific role at the institution while ensuring that role aligns with the institution’s overall mission and vision. Strong human capital strategies centralize significant professional development resources to align them to college-wide student success and equity strategies.

ALIGNING RETENTION, PROMOTION, AND TENURE PRACTICES WITH MISSION

Finally, a successful human capital strategy aligns retention, promotion, and tenure practices to student success and equity goals. At transformational institutions, faculty and staff who diligently engage in advancing student success and equity are rewarded for their efforts. Institutions are transparent about the relationship between student outcomes and related reforms on the one hand, and faculty/staff retention, promotion, and tenure on the other. Participation in professional development aligned to student success and equity goals is also rewarded.

At Miami Dade, faculty have developed “standards of faculty excellence,” which are aligned with required professional development and inform faculty retention, promotion, and tenure. Additionally, the college provides a peer-reviewed faculty endowed chair, awarded to faculty who go above and beyond to promote student success. At San Jacinto, all employees are on a performance-pay plan aligned with the state’s performance funding mechanism, which is tied to promoting student success. Individuals who work collaboratively to advance equitable student success are eligible for awards and receive electronic badges that are placed on their employee record. These badges are then considered for promotion purposes and during annual evaluations.

At Guilford Tech, they host a semi-annual President’s Leadership Seminar, a professional development opportunity for established and emerging college leaders. For this multi-day event, the college invites experts to speak about community college culture, programs, and policy. Attendees are nominated by their managers or colleagues, signaling that participation is an honor and resulting in high levels of participant engagement. As the event closes, participants are assigned to teams and given longer-term projects, which have included helping refine annual employee and student satisfaction surveys, analyzing and improving call center processes, and building a framework for student contact and check-in experiences. These projects extend the experience and give participants further opportunity for career growth.

Putting It All Together

A comparison chart illustrating “traditional” and “transformational” human capital summarizes what Aspen learned from Aspen Prize-winning colleges and Frontier Set institutions, in the form of a usable tool. See Appendix B, page 61.

REFORM PRIORITIES FOR SENIOR LEADERS

- Ensure someone at the cabinet level is responsible for developing and implementing a mission-aligned human capital strategy.
- Assess how recruitment, onboarding, retention, promotion, and tenure processes align with student success and equity goals and strategies.
- Set systems that:
  - Align recruitment and hiring with student success and equity goals.
  - Align mandatory onboarding and professional development for all staff with student success and equity goals.
  - Align decisions on retention and promotion, salary increases, and the size of annual budgets with measures of student success and equity.
  - Reward staff behaviors aligned with those priorities through the retention, promotion, and tenure processes.
- Provide staff with the financial resources to execute a strong human capital strategy.
- Reallocate staff or create new positions to support strategic human capital functions.
- Publicly recognize those in the college doing the most powerful work in advancing student success and equity.

Strategic Finance

Insights on strategic finance are drawn primarily from research on Aspen Prize-winning institutions, with select examples from Frontier Set institutions.

Strategic finance for a college includes marshaling needed resources and allocating them intentionally across the institution to achieve its mission.[34] Done well, strategic finance ensures that a college prioritizes resources for those functions that are essential for delivering higher and more equitable student success outcomes—and it also provides clear and consistent messaging about the mission of the college, shaping a culture that values student success and equity.

The Role of Senior Leadership

Presidents play a critical role in strategically acquiring and using money and other resources, ensuring that both are aligned to the college's vision and strategy. At many community colleges, Chief Financial Officers (CFOs) have primary ownership of the budget and fiscal resources.

At transformational colleges, presidents own strategic finance in partnership with the CFO and the entire senior team; finance and strategy are intertwined.

Strategically aligning finance to mission requires engaging the entire college, beginning with the senior team. Strong colleges ensure the entire senior team is trained in finance, and finance staff are involved in designing and implementing the student success and equity agenda. A senior administrator at Lorain said their new CFO "is every bit as much a part of student success" as the vice president of student success:

"Since we hired [our new CFO] four years ago, we've been able to advance equity and we've been able to find resources to do what we need to do, because we're setting the priorities together. And if you have the right strategic plan and you bring individuals along so that they're part of defining the vision, and everyone's goal is student success … It's not about a vice president who has student success as a title, it's about everyone having that commitment for that student to cross the stage."

San Jacinto hired a CFO who is committed to using finance to drive student success and equity. A senior administrator there explained: "Instead of feeling like the CFO is a banker that turns down the loans when you ask for them, this CFO is more like a financial planner who helps you identify your goals and resource them well."

In its research into colleges that achieve high, improving, and equitable levels of student success, Aspen has seen many change the way they hire CFOs. They rewrite the job description to convey the need for a "systems thinker" who understands that advancing student success and equity is the college's highest priority. During the hiring and onboarding process, the president sets the tone by emphasizing that student success and equity are the priorities, making clear that this mission will always prevail, even if the financial bottom line conflicts with the student success/equity bottom line. To put it plainly: They make clear to CFOs that the core mission of the college is student success and equity, not a balanced budget and a maximum level of reserves.

Senior leadership drives strategic finance as a culture throughout the college. This involves transparent, multi-year budgeting,[35] including resource allocation and monitoring, high-quality training for administration and staff managing resource allocation, and creative resource development.

Key Principles of Strategic Finance

Aspen's research has identified three key principles in strategic finance: transparency, discipline, and partnership.

TRANSPARENCY

Transformation requires transparent and accessible budgeting that is aligned to the college's vision. When people know where dollars are being spent and why, and those dollars are aligned to student success and equity, they increase their trust in the college and its leaders. This enables everyone to connect more deeply with the mission. Administrators are then more likely to align their own resource allocation decisions to college-wide priorities for student success and equity.

Consider what happens when budgets are not transparent: Employees don't know if spending is tied to the mission, vision, and strategy for student

34 There are, of course, other aspects to resourcing a college, though the focus of this section is on budgeting and resource allocation.

35 If possible; some states do not allow for multi-year budgeting in their budget processes.

success and equity. Employees can become distrustful, assuming resources are being hidden and used for pet projects unrelated to the institutional mission.

Sinclair has tied all financial decisions to a few simple, clearly defined strategic goals: alignment, growth, and equity. These three words clarify the mission and vision for people across the college.[36] They provide visual access to budgeting and spending via electronic dashboards developed by their joint institutional research and IT department—budget managers can easily see the budget and spending for their unit. Sinclair has developed a cadre of well-trained budget managers, dispersed throughout departments, which allows quick and thoughtful financial decisions. This structure allowed Sinclair to nimbly respond to the COVID-19 pandemic, creating an institution-wide budget every two to three months, which it plans to continue until finances stabilize.[37]

DISCIPLINE

Rather than using division requests to decide how to incrementally modify the budget each year, transformational colleges begin the budget process by grounding it in strategic priorities. They start by asking what their top student success and equity strategies are, and what resources they need to execute them. Based on those priorities, leaders set key financial priorities, outline broad budget allocations, and ask each department to align budget requests with those priorities.

Colleges reviewing resource allocations often find that many funds—which Aspen calls “stranded assets”—are being used for non-mission-related activities, or not being used at all. Transformational institutions consider where these stranded assets reside, and decide whether and when to activate them toward the mission. They often find such resources in inefficient course scheduling, personnel funds for vacant positions that are reallocated without considering mission, and excessive reserve funds, sometimes hidden in multiple accounts for a “rainy day.”

Strong leaders also actively look to create efficiencies by identifying services that could be shared across departments, such as marketing, online services, and back-end operations, for example. Sinclair and Indian River both use collaborative budget processes that identify and use stranded assets across departments, which builds confidence across the college that this money is boosting student success and equity. Strong colleges also benchmark against their peers.

By understanding how similar and exemplar colleges are resourcing their work and driving impact, leaders can strategize to bring better and more efficient operations to their own campuses.

Lastly, multi-year budgeting is critical for achieving long-term impact. At Wake Tech, leaders use a multi-year planning process that enables them to draw from grants and other funding sources—so they can front-load the student success investments that cannot be funded through state resources that fund colleges annually. Miami Dade’s CFO calculates many potential projections of state funding, so the senior team can create various budget scenarios for the upcoming years and then assess the risks of making new multi-year commitments.

PARTNERSHIP

Creating mission-aligned partnerships is an important way effective colleges can marshal the resources needed to achieve student success and equity goals. Leaders at these college do not limit their student success and equity resource considerations to what they have in their budgets. Instead, they join with partners to draw substantial resources to support the college’s mission; sometimes these resources never appear in the budget at all. Community colleges strategically access resources through partnerships with K-12 schools, employers, universities, and community-based organizations—all have a stake in achieving the same student success and equity goals.

For example, Miami Dade shares advisors with a four-year university partner, Florida International University, efficiently allocating resources between the two institutions to advance successful transfer and bachelor’s attainment. Harper College partners with three feeder school systems to jointly fund a collaborative partnership that aims to improve high school graduates’ math preparation levels, which in turn boost the college’s student graduation rates. In these and other Frontier Set partnerships, the college works with others to resource their student success and equity agenda.

36 Sinclair College. “About: Mission.” Accessed 2021. https://www.sinclair.edu/about/mission

37 The Key Podcast, *Inside Higher Ed*, April 30, 2020. https://www.insidehighered.com/quicktakes/2020/04/30/new-podcast-episode-president-sinclair-community-college

Putting It All Together

A comparison chart illustrating “traditional” and “transformational” strategic finance summarizes what Aspen learned from Aspen Prize-winning colleges and Frontier Set institutions, in the form of a usable tool. See Appendix B, page 63.

REFORM PRIORITIES FOR SENIOR LEADERS

- Assess clarity and transparency for the budget and budgeting process, and work with the CFO to devise and implement plans that increase transparency to the senior team and the entire college.
- Charge finance staff with ensuring senior team members are trained on finance, and working with the team to ensure everyone at the college has the information and training they need to be effective resource stewards.
- Begin the budgeting process at the senior team level by identifying three or four top student success and equity priorities, and gaining clarity on what fiscal and staffing resources are needed to accomplish those in the coming year and over a three-year period.
- Evaluate all external partnerships for alignment with mission and budgetary impact. Prioritize a few that deliver the highest return on mission and bring new resources to student success and equity.
- Establish an annual process for identifying stranded assets and activating them in service of student success and equity goals and strategies.
- Establish annual processes for the senior team to benchmark the college against peers on student success and expenditures, resulting in a concrete plan to pursue greater efficiency that will advance student success and equity.

PART 5

Adopting and Adapting a National Model for Transformation

In this section, three case studies illustrate how Frontier Set institutions adapted a national model for transformation—guided pathways[38]—to their institutional and community context. While the overarching framework for guided pathways contains fundamental elements that remain consistent, implementing this model at a college requires adapting it to the college culture and student needs.

Reform implementations at **Lorain County Community College**, **Davidson-Davie Community College**, and **William Rainey Harper College** offer examples of how leaders adopted and adapted guided pathways as an organizing framework for their student success work, including how they messaged this work, developed a sense of shared understanding, created a sense of urgency, and aligned roles, structures, processes, and data. The examples underscore the importance of institutional capacities and how they can hinder or catalyze adopting the framework on campus.

At the end of each case study, we provide reflection questions to help new and aspiring presidents apply concepts to adapt a national model to their own institutional context.

38 College Research Center, 2015, What we know about guided pathways, https://ccrc.tc.columbia.edu/media/k2/attachments/What-We-Know-Guided-Pathways.pdf

Lorain County Community College

How did Lorain implement guided pathways?

Lorain began work on guided pathways implementation in 2012 as part of its participation in the national Completion by Design (CBD) initiative, which shared many student success and equity goals and strategies with the Frontier Set.

At the outset, several factors pushed the institution to critically review its data and take action: external pressure from the community, a challenge from a journalist, and a shift to performance-based funding (PBF) in Ohio in 2013, which tied institutional budgets to student success metrics.

Just as faculty, staff, and administrators at the institution were reviewing student data as part of the CBD effort, they received a query from a journalist pushing them to not just take a hard look at their overall enrollment and graduation numbers, but to also review their disaggregated graduation rates. What leaders realized was that the combination of low graduation rates and high credit-accumulation totals among graduates was most pronounced among students of color at the institution. And, in fact, those rates were poor for all students: Lorain ranked near the bottom of institutions in the state on both metrics.

Lorain's guided pathways work began with a developmental education and gateway redesign. Their initial data showed developmental math was a significant barrier for most students. A student services administrator described the challenge this way: "Such a small number of students who started off in the first level of dev ed who actually ever even made it to college math, let alone passed college math and then moved on to get a degree."

Activities linked to this redesign eventually evolved into work creating meta-majors, to identify courses students needed to be successful in key areas of study. Their meta-major work led to the program mapping that would define their pathways, and later an advising redesign centered on the meta-major design.

As Lorain's work progressed, relationships with key organizations such as the Community College Research Center (CCRC) and Achieving the Dream (ATD) served as catalysts to their guided pathways work. In addition, Lorain's transformational student success work was boosted when it was selected as part of a cohort of Ohio community colleges chosen to replicate the City University of New York's Accelerated Study in Associate Programs (CUNY ASAP) program. This helped accelerate Lorain's transformational student success work.

What made Lorain's implementation unique?

Lorain developed nine meta-major pathways, grouped by discipline. These "within-institution" pathways also serve as the foundation for My University and the Students Accelerating in Learning (SAIL) model. My University is a set of pathways that connect high school students with Lorain pathways, as well as pathways through baccalaureate degrees with select partner universities. As described on their website,

"The My University program, a unique partnership between Lorain and area high schools, provides a pathway for high school students to the full college experience—for less! Students taking advantage of the program have the opportunity to graduate high school with both an associate degree and a high school diploma, free of charge. College courses may be offered at your high school, but other courses will have to be taken at Lorain, online, or at one of our Learning Centers."

With My University, students can complete their associate degree while enrolled in high school—and complete their baccalaureate on campus with Lorain and its university partners.

Faculty and administrators indicated that their model for implementing guided pathways is unique in its focus on holistic student support and a culture of care, undergirded by mandatory advising. Specifically, the college established two reforms:

- The Advocacy and Resource Center (ARC), which serves as a one-stop intake point and provides a welcoming review of students' needs across food access, emergency aid, legal help, safety, mental health and physical well-being, public assistance eligibility, and childcare programs.
- The Students Accelerating in Learning (SAIL) model (their version of the CUNY ASAP model), which connects students to scholarships, textbook vouchers, and incentives such as gift cards to grocery stores, to remove financial barriers and promote using supports such as tutoring and advising. The program uses high-touch advising, workshops, and boot camps, along with personalized career advising, to accelerate students through to credential completion.

The pathways, and the connected Advocacy and Resource Center and Students Accelerating in Learning models are supported by mandatory advising. All students in the college are assigned an advisor who helps them determine their program pathway, as well as connecting them with necessary supports to help them complete their degree. Advisors monitor students' likelihood of persistence using analytics that help them target outreach to the students who need it most. According to a senior administrator,

"Advisor relationships with students also encourage more frequent contact than required, and grouping advisors by career and academic pathway creates a strong working relationship between student support services and the academic disciplines and divisions they support. This highly relational advising approach … ensures all students have at least one single point of navigation as they attend Lorain."

Lorain has carefully designed pathways to include very specific course sequences and intentionally built stackable credentials into their pathways, aiming to not just improve completion rates but also to ensure what is completed is aligned to higher degrees. This isn't limited to 2+2 and 3+1 pathways to university—Lorain also has engaged in "degree mining," including reverse transfer options, to support students who have stopped out or transferred out without a degree.

What capacities were key to implementation?

The primary institutional capacities that allowed for successful guided pathways implementation at Lorain are cross-functional teams, communication, human capital, strategic finance, and data capacity.

CROSS-FUNCTIONAL TEAMS

Lorain's Student Completion Council was the primary implementation structure for developing guided pathways and other transformation initiatives. While it started as a temporary committee, over time the council became so critical that it evolved into a standing committee. Faculty and staff described the Student Completion Council as the place where all their student success initiatives and related oversight were housed, including student success and completion reports and plans that were required by the State of Ohio.

The Student Completion Council, described by many as a large cross-functional group cutting across almost every area of the institution, was composed of different sub-teams, including an academic sub-team (with activities such as streamlining curriculum and meta-major planning) and a student support sub-team (with activities such as advising redesign and first-year-experience design). Other sub-teams focused on key areas of student success such as career services and holistic support.

As the work moved into sub-teams, faculty and staff champions were essential to success. Respondents repeatedly alluded to the immense value of a faculty champion in the accounting discipline, as well as a math faculty member (who has since become a provost) who served as a key liaison tasked with engaging other faculty in the work. Student advisors co-led the effort to redesign the new student experience by serving as co-chairs for some of the sub-teams.

The involvement of the senior team, beginning with the president but also including the entire leadership team, also contributed to the success of guided pathways implementation at Lorain.

The president clearly and regularly voiced her belief in the efficacy of and support for the guided pathways model.

That theme was echoed by each member of the senior team, dissuading anyone from believing that guided pathways reforms at Lorain were, in the words of a senior administrator, a "trend in higher education that would come and go away." Respondents noted that the communication was not one-way, and that open lines of communication with leadership allowed everyone to be "blunt" with the senior team on what was needed. Finally, the senior team didn't just talk the talk; they also got support and approval from the board for the needed finances and the institution's completion plans, which were later submitted to the state.

COMMUNICATION

A critical component of developing and implementing guided pathways at Lorain was using multiple communication avenues to ensure broad-based understanding of the need for, and progress in, the reform effort. Three primary venues were used: college-wide convocations, division meetings, and smaller role-based meetings.

College-wide convocations and meetings were especially important during the launch. These larger events allowed the college community to understand the institutional focus and urgency of the work. As described by a senior administrator, "There's a sense that this is important enough for it to take center stage at those … campus-wide engagements."

Sharing data in college-wide meetings was a key step in ensuring institutional buy-in, especially from the faculty. One senior administrator described it this way:

"[Faculty] just didn't want to believe that the data was correct; they couldn't believe it was correct. [It was in] those early large sessions where we showed people how long it was taking students to complete, how many credits people were taking but not having selected a major."

Often, especially in the early stages of guided pathways development, external speakers were brought into convocations to emphasize the overall message and the relationship between the work at Lorain and work being done nationwide. All these communication methods contributed to promoting college-wide understanding of the need for guided pathways—understanding this would then "trickle down" through the divisions and sub-team structures of the Student Completion Council.

Using data in these large-scale conversations was key to setting a tone of urgency and building a common language to understand both challenges and progress.

The Student Success Council served as a vehicle for data-driven communication across the college, informed by institutional research (IR) staff as well as the council's sub-teams; they conducted the on-the-ground work and reported to the council. The council then reviewed the data and ensured it was communicated through convocations and other college-wide meetings.

Reports from the Student Success Council were then used to set the agenda at more focused division meetings and administrative leadership meetings. These meetings were facilitated by dedicated leads assigned to each division, to ensure consistent communication. A senior academic leader described the interaction between advisors and faculty: "From a division perspective we have a lead advisor that the faculty know and can build a relationship with. Then they come to our division meetings and we communicate with that lead advisor."

Smaller, more tailored meetings with employees in similar roles were important to ensure continued implementation participation and monitoring. One example is faculty brown-bag meetings, held three times a year, focused on processing recent data on student success.

Now that the guided pathways work is fully underway, these same communication venues continue to play a critical role in ensuring all campus stakeholders understand the ongoing progress—and their impact on student success. A senior administrator described how these groups continue to play a central role:

"The Student Completion Council and Institutional Planning Council (IPC) spend time talking through the areas for improvement and identifying institutional redesign. The Student Completion Council reviews and recommends changes to catalog policies like withdrawal, incomplete grades, and academic dismissal to better support students through loss/momentum points identified in the metrics. IPC develops, tracks, and monitors the metrics for the strategic plan, many of which are from the 'What Matters Most' metrics."

The president hosts a series of President's Forums to ensure the institution hears directly from her about priorities, and the institution's CFO launched the "CFO Series" to update the college community on the budget and how their efforts relate to state allocations based on key performance metrics. One senior administrator underscored the importance of these sessions to help stakeholders understand how increasing student success can drive the financial health of the institution: "A part of his message is that an increasingly larger share of our revenue stream is the state share of instruction, and that is dependent on how well we're doing with student success."

Finally, the president and provost have ensured that communication efforts include student voices. The president hosts coffee chats with students, and the provost meets once a semester with the student senate. These conversations help ensure the student voice is central to the decision-making process, and that the guided pathways are indeed serving the needs of Lorain's students.

HUMAN CAPITAL

Because advisors and faculty play such a critical role in helping students access and stay on a pathway, most of Lorain's professional development opportunities focus on these two groups of individuals. Investing in professional development for these employees supported a successful guided pathways implementation.

Advisor training was intensive, consisting of nearly 20 sessions in one year, with topics including becoming poverty-informed, career counseling, customer service, new student processes, holistic advising, and using degree maps. A large portion of training focused on how to use the institution's predictive analytics technology to manage caseloads,

and how to use data drawn from the system to better support students.

For faculty, the professional development's focus was on the classroom. The institution has consistently invested in both internal and external professional development to help faculty improve the teaching and learning process. Coordinated out of the Lorain Center for Teaching and Learning (CTL), faculty development topics included best practices in online teaching, corequisite remediation, and inclusive teaching. The Center for Teaching and Learning monitors faculty needs and emerging trends in the field, to update professional development curricula and assist faculty in meeting students' needs.

STRATEGIC FINANCE

Developing and implementing guided pathways required a multi-pronged financial strategy. Among the key sources of revenue to support Lorain's guided pathways implementation are non-recurring grant dollars, reallocated institutional resources, performance-based funding (PBF), a new student fee structure, and fundraising through donors and philanthropic groups.

Staff noted that early on, grant support was an important catalyst for developing guided pathways. They pointed specifically to support from the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation (through Completion by Design and later the Frontier Set), as well as a key Title III grant focused on adult learner success.

Sustaining the pathways required reallocating resources to support emerging priorities.

This included shuffling staff positions to support the newly established pathways, as well as creative cost-saving moves such as refinancing bonds and renegotiating contracts. The State of Ohio allowed Lorain to enact a career advantage fee for students that directly funds initiatives supporting career exploration and overall student success. And now that Lorain has achieved measurable gains in student success, the state share of instructional dollars has increased and PBF has become a much more substantial source of financial support.

Lastly, the institution has been able to augment its fundraising efforts. Lorain's continued improvement in student success metrics has allowed the college to successfully cultivate individual donors to support the Advocacy and Resource Center with emergency funds for students in need.

DATA CAPACITY

Lorain has developed a strong data culture undergirded by a limited set of clearly defined metrics that are consistently communicated with all stakeholders.

In particular, the institution developed a report, "What Matters Most," that includes 31 regularly monitored metrics used to ensure progress in student success. These metrics are regularly discussed during committee meetings, are included in campus-wide reports such as the Campus Completion Plan and Equity Progress Update, and are used to set biannual goals. They align with the State of Ohio's PBF model, but also draw on national research to ensure the institution is tracking "what matters most" in student success. To signal their importance, The Board of Trustees formally adopted these metrics to signal their importance. A senior administrator described how ubiquitous these metrics are on campus: "We use them everywhere; we put them into a dashboard very intentionally so they can be accessed at any point."

When asked to reflect on the student outcomes that made them most proud, respondents spoke of increased completion and decreased excess credits. To reduce excess credits, Lorain revised the approach to developmental education and improved gateway mathematics and English completion; the college also ensured students met early and regularly with their advisors. A senior administrator expressed his pride:

"One of the great data points is the fact that every year since 2012 … we have reduced the number of credits to degree for our students, and I think that is attributable to the work that we did early on with academic advising and the new … requirements that … students … meet with an advisor … I think the advising is huge."

Tailored advising helped increase completion rates, as did Lorain's focus on stackable credentials. A senior administrator noted: "There was real emphasis on how we can help students by creating certificates that stack to the associate degree, but that also have labor-market value because they're aligned with industry certifications and street credentials."

Because ensuring equitable student outcomes is a core focus of the Lorain guided pathways model, the college created the "Equity Progress Update" (EPU), which applies an equity lens to the What Matters Most report. The Equity Progress Update is used to develop the institution's strategic vision, and is broadly distributed through brown-bag sessions and staff update meetings. One senior administrator described how they use the report:

"The EPU, released annually, serves as the central point for data and information related to equity in access and outcomes at Lorain. The EPU is shared across campus through both committees and constituent meetings. Individuals are empowered to share the call to action and drive change and response. One example is the focus of the recently transformed Teaching and Learning Center (TLC). In response to data shared within the EPU, the TLC will be providing more professional development to support practical application of equity-informed pedagogy within the classroom."

The original Student Completion Council that helped develop and implement the Lorain guided pathways model has evolved into the institution's Equity by Design team. Within that team, smaller groups are developed to address specific findings in the EPU report. Those groups have dedicated time and resources to make changes, which supports a culture of innovation and redesign. Broadly, the Equity by Design team establishes monitoring and accountability to equity metrics as a campus-wide priority.

Takeaways

Lorain has built a robust communication and professional development platform to support long-term implementation for their guided pathways model, which is fiscally supported through a combination of grant support, resource allocation, and state funding through the PBF model.

When asked to reflect on what's next for the Lorain guided pathways work, a senior administrator pointed to a renewed emphasis on the fourth pillar of guided pathways: teaching and learning.

"I think there's much more attention now to what happens in the classroom and how we can do more to support student learning through assessment of [that] learning—through a focus on learning outcomes and making sure that they're clear not only to ourselves but to our students."

REFLECTION QUESTIONS FOR INSTITUTIONAL LEADERS

- Has your college decided on a limited set of specific data points that it aims to improve to increase student success and equitable outcomes? Are those data woven through all major evaluation and reform efforts, including the strategic plan, guided pathways plans, and accreditation review and reports?
- What implementation structures—such as college-wide meetings, standing committees, workgroups, and leadership meetings—can you use to support broad participation, communication, and regular data and progress check-ins? Have you developed a communications plan that reflects messages sent and data presented in each of those contexts?
- What role can your president and senior leadership team play in communicating priorities and progress to key stakeholders within the college? Has your college leadership team developed a communications plan to reflect its priority messages?
- How can your institution leverage external forces, such as state funding and federal or foundation grants, to support priorities in student success reforms? How might resources be reallocated?
- How can you build a more intentional equity focus into your institutional transformation initiatives? How can you use data reports, convenings, and other processes to ensure equity gaps are consistently identified and discussed, and solutions crafted?

Davidson-Davie Community College

How did Davidson-Davie implement guided pathways?

Guided pathways at Davidson-Davie evolved over several years, beginning when the institution participated in Completion by Design and refined through participation in the Frontier Set.

When their guided pathways reforms began, Davidson-Davie had already been engaged in several student success reform efforts and was in the process of redesigning developmental education. That redesign included implementing multiple measures for placement and reviewing course sequence and course requirements, particularly in mathematics and English. Much of this work was also aligned with Davidson-Davie's involvement in the state's Student Success Center (supported by Jobs for the Future) and their work as a member of Achieving the Dream.

Against this backdrop, the work leading up to guided pathways reforms began by analyzing the course catalog and realizing the college had multiple superfluous or overlapping courses. After reviewing their student data and seeing significant room for improvement, the faculty, staff, and administrators came to a broader conclusion: course-level and advising reforms would not be enough. They reached consensus that the next phase of their work needed to focus on academic programming. This realization led Davidson-Davie to consider the guided pathways model. A senior academic administrator explained:

"We considered all of our different student success initiatives, and one of the things that we came to realize was that we were at the point where we had done advising, we had done orientation. We had looked at all these things and we really needed to turn our attention to academics… [one of the key issues] was making sure that we had a clear understanding for our programs and what the right pathway was for the student to be the most successful."

Davidson-Davie saw implementing guided pathways as a full-institution effort meant to change the way the college conducted its work to benefit the students.

This, combined with an intentional approach to engaging faculty and staff in the design process, led to success. One faculty leader at the institution described it as follows:

"It's not just creating a new initiative—it's making sure that what we are doing is all working together and it's all benefiting the student."

What made Davidson-Davie's implementation unique?

One important part of the process: Davidson-Davie's efforts to engage faculty in developing pathways. Faculty input was key to developing course sequences and adapting the guided pathways model to suit the college's unique context and students. For example, one faculty leader described attending a national guided pathways institute and learning very specific guidance about putting math and reading in the first semester—and immediately afterward being approached by a colleague with concerns about that approach in their program. That faculty leader noted:

"We chose to look at it in our institution, and we decided what programs this would work for. Will it work for these pathways or not? We understood that change isn't always something that has to take place. It only needs to take place if it's going to benefit us."

By addressing how to uniquely tailor guided pathways to each academic department, Davidson-Davie overcame some early instances of faculty and staff pushback. A senior academic leader explained the initial concerns around the removal of course prerequisites that had proliferated prior to guided pathways implementation:

"We had swung to the overkill side of requisites. As people started to look at those requisites, at the same time there were some conflicts there that people had to work through. And some people struggled with that a little bit, but we did wind up getting rid of, I would say, probably 90 percent of the local requisites through that process."

In eliminating courses, Davidson-Davie was able to make a greater number of general education courses applicable across programs. It also allowed them to create cohorts of students within the same program and schedule courses more effectively for programs with relatively fewer students. Davidson-Davie was able to find a compromise between the traditional "cafeteria" approach and a fully structured pathway.

As a senior academic leader recalled:

"We discussed what the ideal order of courses was for each program. Advisors know what the order needs to be, and students can be advised based on where they are. Courses that keep the student on track are approved by the advisor based on the ideal order, and those courses are the ones the student can register for. This is aided by requisites that are in place for some courses. By reducing the number of options where there are choices to make, we have reduced the instances where mistakes can be made along the way."

What capacities were key to implementation?

The primary institutional capacities that allowed for successful guided pathways implementation at Davidson-Davie included cross-functional teams, communication, and human capital. Data capacity also helped.

CROSS-FUNCTIONAL TEAMS

Cross-functional teams were critical in implementing guided pathways at Davidson-Davie. One senior academic administrator stated: "The biggest thing … that I think makes the difference is that … pathways are developed with a team of people around them; they're not developed in isolation by one person."

To ensure progress, Davidson-Davie created a steering committee to oversee several implementation teams. Academic-focused teams required greater faculty engagement, while advising-focused teams required greater student services staff engagement. But all teams included individuals from across the institution's divisions as well as faculty, staff and administrators. A senior academic leader described the structure:

"Even though you had the student support services team there were still people from academics on that team, and there were still people from student services on the academic team, there were people from both on the larger steering committee. There were faculty who were knowledgeable about the programs in terms of industry needs, and others who probably had more experience and a better grasp of student success from a bigger-picture perspective."

The teams had a flexible structure, allowing addition of new members to respond to needs. According to a faculty member, "It was very fluid. It was not a set group. We met throughout the year to make sure the right people were in place, and each year we would reassess and bring different people in."

Teams building pathways were necessarily focused on including front-line faculty, who understood learning goals, but they also made sure to involve advisors. As described by a faculty leader, "A lot of our student services staff were there—specifically the folks in advising who were helping students choose [their courses for] the next couple of years."

Faculty, administrators, and staff also underscored the importance of the institution's senior team providing the overall vision and direction for the implementation teams during college-wide meetings. One faculty member reflected on how they appreciated academic leaders being champions for this work, in part because they saw leaders as typically focusing on barriers to student success—but in this work they were looking for solutions, which was a nice contrast.

Faculty also appreciated the senior team's availability and receptivity during guided pathways implementation: "Leadership is the biggest thing. And you have to be blunt with your leadership, and they have to be 100 percent bought in."

The faculty noted leadership's importance in tying the guided pathways work to the institution's strategic plan, as well as the Quality Enhancement Plan (QEP) required for accreditation. One administrator explained, "There's no reason for us to be meeting and making changes or coming up with initiatives separate from that strategic plan. The idea is that [guided pathways] would be a part of our strategic plan and our QEP."

Recently, maintaining strong cross-functional collaboration has been more difficult. One student services administrator reflected that when student and academic affairs were combined into the same team, collaborative conversations about a collective vision and plan were a given. Recently, under new administration, teams were separated back into academic and student affairs divisions, making it more challenging to engage student affairs in guided pathways work.

COMMUNICATION

Constant, effective communications through various vehicles was another defining characteristic of implementing guided pathways at Davidson-Davie. College-wide communications began during "opening sessions" led by the president at the start of each semester, immediately followed by division meetings, which were followed by smaller targeted meetings and discussions throughout the semester. As described by a senior academic leader:

"At a certain point it was the responsibility of the administrator for each academic area to also keep moving that process forward with their programs, and making sure that they were helping their faculty and programs get where they needed to be."

The most striking aspect of the Davidson-Davie communication process was the faculty's central role in its coordination.

Faculty engagement in communications began when administrators identified a faculty lead to champion the process. This faculty member took ownership of regularly communicating with the rest of the faculty. He provided information, conducted surveys, and convened meetings to gather faculty input. He would ensure staff and administrators understood faculty viewpoints and, conversely, he kept faculty abreast of administrative decisions and how the process was progressing. The primary faculty lead described his role as follows:

"I really focused on making sure everybody knew what was going on and what we were working on—how everything was interconnected … I used surveys as one means for them to understand the different things that might be taking place or might change. It was a benefit both to those individuals and to those of us making changes."

HUMAN CAPITAL

Professional development, especially within division and department settings, was key to implementing guided pathways at Davidson-Davie. One faculty leader reflected on their process for connecting new professional development opportunities directly to changes (or "solutions") the college was considering, and dispersing the learning across a department:

"For instance, for course sequences, we started [training] within each school with the deans, and then we broke that down for the associate deans. They then took it to each department and then talked about how their courses fit into each program and what appropriate order would work best for them and what changes they want to make. And then that worked its way back up."

Leaders also made sure to provide time for individuals to participate in professional development. A faculty leader said, "As a general rule this college is very supportive, including giving somebody some release time—which means, of course, you have to get your classes covered and that increases your item cost."

As the guided pathways rollout progressed at Davidson-Davie, administrators saw the need for additional, sustained faculty development. So the institution invested in creating a Center for Teaching and Learning. A faculty leader noted how creating the center was one of the most meaningful changes related to the fourth guided pathways pillar (ensure learning)—both because of the data capacity it added to help measure learning, and the fact that it gave faculty "a specific entity that was creating professional development that … felt relevant to them and meaningful to them."

Other venues that were important for faculty and staff development included webinars, national meetings, and meetings through the North Carolina Student Success Center.

DATA CAPACITY

Davidson-Davie makes student progression and persistence the primary measures regularly reviewed to track the success of guided pathways implementation. Leaders disaggregate that student data to understand equity gaps. One faculty leader noted that Davidson-Davie built on the definition of achievement gap as the North Carolina Student Success Center defined it (the difference between minority success rate and the success rate of students who self-identify as white non-Hispanic) and defined the college's achievement gap as the difference in first-year progression rates of those same groups. This distinction allowed Davidson-Davie to identify barriers to success early in the student's academic path.

Takeaways

The Davidson-Davie work provides some key considerations for sustained pathways implementation, especially regarding cross-functional teams and communication across the institution. One senior administrator described the importance of a cross-functional group:

"It's not just about faculty and academic affairs. I think if you lose sight of that on the front end, from admissions and enrollment through the advising process and into the classroom—if you don't have all of that present at the table—then you're probably missing pieces of what can make your student successful."

Regarding communication, a faculty leader described it as a process of education:

"Educate yourself and make sure people around you know that you are there for your institution … I would definitely recommend to anybody (even non-faculty) [thinking about] leading this at another institution to have a very thick skin [and] constantly communicate to others that you're there as the facilitator … and not just directing [the] group or … the initiatives that are taking place. Make sure that everybody's voice is heard, and that they understand that everybody's voices can be heard."

REFLECTION QUESTIONS FOR INSTITUTIONAL LEADERS

- As you've built program pathways, how have you engaged both faculty and student services staff, including advisors?
- Thinking across your college-wide reform work groups and committees, how many have the right mix of people to ensure strong implementation? If not, do they feel empowered to bring in needed expertise?
- What other implementation structures can you develop to support broad participation and communication, especially in the early stages of institutional transformation?
- Who is engaged in communications efforts? Are messengers from key groups—including faculty and advisors—centrally involved in messaging college-wide guided pathways priorities? Do they help administrators understand the faculty and staff perspective on how reforms should proceed?
- How can you more strongly reflect institutional transformation efforts in your strategic planning process? In your accreditation review? Do those processes and documents reflect the same priorities and approaches to student success and equity?

William Rainey Harper College

How did Harper College implement guided pathways?

Harper College began its five-year guided pathways implementation process in 2016. There were two key catalysts that led to launching this work. The first was a data review as part of a strategic planning process, which revealed a need to improve student completion rates. The second was the institution's interaction with external entities, including the Community College Research Center (CCRC), with whom they collaborated to identify and implement best practices from other institutions.

Driven by these factors, the institution developed a five-year implementation plan. As described by a student services administrator:

"It was within that five-year cycle that 'areas of interest' were developed and implemented. It took about three years before we had them in a student-facing place … and then in the last two years of the strategic plan we were refining them and continuing to socialize areas of interest throughout the student experience."

The institution used external national experts and research to understand where to make changes. A student services administrator described the desire to move away from being a "cafeteria college" and instead get students on the most direct paths possible to completing their credentials. They were impressed by the research showing the benefits of implementing guided pathways, and noted: "We wanted to ensure that students were taking the classes that they need … We wanted to better organize and present options to students in a way that's not overwhelming."

Harper College's strategic planning process included six phases: campus dialogues, data summits, data synthesis, a conference to discuss emerging themes, plan review and approval, and plan launch. The data summits used a combination of student data, community data, and workforce data to inform the process. Goals from the most recent cycle included implementing innovative teaching and learning practices, removing barriers to student success, and building institutional capacity to support equity, diversity, and inclusion.

What made Harper College's implementation unique?

Administrators identified three unique elements that allowed Harper College to successfully adapt the national guided pathways model.

The first was the decision to create flexibility in their model. The faculty and staff at Harper College adopted the term "areas of interest"—rather than "guided pathways"—to describe their model, and they use those areas of interest to help students align the courses in their associate degrees to four-year institutions' transfer requirements. (The "areas of interest" are essentially the equivalent of meta-majors at other institutions.) A senior academic leader described the reason behind this approach:

"I think it really was because we had a lot of concern, particularly from faculty, around being too prescriptive with curriculum paths for students and eliminating courses … So rather than forcing students into a track, we came up with these nine or 10 areas of interest that were a little broader, that we could align with a first-year seminar and advising roles."

Adopting the term "areas of interest" reflects another priority: It allows Harper College to better customize pathways and provide more flexible options for transfer-seeking students. Because Harper students pursuing bachelor's degrees in the same subject transfer to multiple different four-year colleges, flexibility in the program maps enables students to choose slightly different courses within each area of interest, to ensure all coursework will be applied to their major at their chosen four-year destination.

This flexibility took strong and sustained interaction between advisors and students as they worked through the course options within each area of interest.

A student services leader at Harper College noted that as they were developing their model, they were looking to other colleges in the region for examples. They noticed that some of the "cleanest" guided pathways models were at colleges offering more career and technical programs, where students complete credentials at the college and directly enter the workforce. With Harper College's transfer-oriented model, they needed more flexibility to customize

students' curriculum maps to align to their transfer goals. The student services leader noted: "I think that leaving [it] open a little bit and flexible so that students are working with their academic advisors to refine those plans—that's our guided pathways."

The second unique way Harper implemented guided pathways was developing tools advisors could use to ensure students are on track and completing their degrees. Harper implemented an electronic degree-planning platform as they rolled out guided pathways reforms. This platform provides tools for advisors to not only monitor student degree progress, but also to work with students on "what if" scenarios when considering changes in majors and/or courses. Academic and student leaders noted that the electronic degree plans helped show students how close they were to finishing certain credentials and allowed advisors to "… provide a little bit more intentional and strategic outreach to students who were close to completing a credential." The platform also made it possible to reach out to students who had left Harper when close to completing a credential, to check in and see if they'd transferred or if they wanted to return and graduate. One academic leader noted that the "intentionality behind that outreach … did impact the overall graduation rates."

Third, the institution designed its "areas of interest" approach with the goal of ensuring strong collaboration between academics and student affairs. A senior student services administrator described the impact this more open collaboration and communication has had on the student-advisor relationship:

"We bridged communication between the academic side and the student services side … I think opening that communication channel has given advisors the tools to provide cleaner educational plans for students, and I think that has had an impact on keeping students on track so they're completing their credentials in the shortest amount of time possible."

Highly effective cross-functional teams were a central mechanism for this communication, as described below.

What capacities were key to implementation?

The primary institutional capacities that allowed for successful guided pathways implementation at Harper College included cross-functional teams, communication, human capital, strategic finance, data capacity, and technology.

CROSS-FUNCTIONAL TEAMS

While academic divisions carried the greatest responsibility for implementing guided pathways—including aligning courses and program outcomes—strong collaboration between the academic and student affairs divisions was a hallmark of Harper College's efforts.

For each identified area of interest, the college created a team consisting of a lead chair, faculty, advisors, and a librarian. Senior academic leaders and student services leaders attested to the importance of these cross-functional teams. One explained the model, noting that it operates similarly to a shared governance structure:

"Fairly early on we implemented areas of interest teams that met regularly. They had representatives from faculty from each area of interest, a dean and academic advisors, and some library support staff… Those teams are designed so that the faculty take what they've discussed within the areas of interest team and bring it back to the rest of the faculty from that area, and … the same thing with advisors."

Another leader added that these teams "had representation across the college, which I think was really important so that each area felt like they had a seat at the table to influence the direction of the areas of interest."

Senior leadership involvement was an important component of these cross-functional teams. For example, an associate provost was tasked with monitoring the work emerging from the teams and ensuring it was translated into technology tools, marketing tools, etc., and providing regular guidance and feedback to the teams via a faculty chair from each area of interest. In turn, those faculty chairs were charged with translating the provost's guidance back to their teams or departments to ensure the area of interest's structure was maintained.

COMMUNICATION

Senior administrators communicated the importance of guided pathways by tying it closely to the college's strategic plan. For example, the team that was charged with designing and monitoring goals for the strategic plan was assigned responsibility for overseeing guided pathways implementation.

The college accomplished strategic communication several ways, including college-wide meetings, forums, and individual departmental meetings. Given the link to the strategic planning process, the institution also included conversations about guided pathways implementation progress at strategic planning meetings and a strategic plan summit. A senior student services administrator discussed how the administration used

college-wide meetings to set the stage for smaller, more focused meetings at the departmental level:

"[On] a retreat that we did a few years ago, where we brought faculty and advisors together for a substantial period of time to really ask them what was working and where we still had some gaps or opportunities … We also did road shows and campaigning around areas of interest to help everyone grasp what it is, why we're doing it, and where they fit into areas of interest."

As guided pathways implementation has continued, the college has been challenged to maintain the commitment to strategic communications that it made in the early stages. Senior academic leaders at the institution are concerned about an emerging lack of communication to ensure fidelity in implementation. One leader explained: "One area where I think we could have really been more effective is to bring faculty and advisors together to participate in shared learning experiences, to be in the same room talking about the same thing." As a result, the college discovered that some students in some divisions have not been assigned advisors, which is troubling given the reliance on advisors to help students navigate flexible pathways.

Another challenge to maintaining strategic communications has been leadership turnover at Harper College. A lesson for others engaged in guided pathways work: Clearly document the strategic communications plan, and ensure new administrators are briefed on their responsibilities as part of the onboarding process.

HUMAN CAPITAL

Employee onboarding and professional development were important factors in successfully implementing guided pathways. Administrators at the institution noted that Frontier Set grant dollars were particularly important to support much of the pathways-related professional development. In addition to hosting college-wide meetings and inviting guest speakers, the funds allowed faculty and staff retreats focused on sharing information and best practices.

Additionally, Harper College implemented an employee onboarding program that spotlights the pathways model, so new personnel are aware how central this strategy is to student success.

The onboarding process covers the areas of interest approach and explains how new employees fit into and support the model.

Harper underwent some human capital challenges as well. One lesson learned relates to the role personnel, particularly advisors, play in pathways development. An academic administrator cautioned against overwhelming staff with significant and rapid shifts in how workload is managed:

"Shifting from a model where we had counselors working with students on courses to one where we had advisors managing very large caseloads, that at times felt transactional and perhaps didn't allow for their relationships to develop … So I think advising is a challenge—just the cultural shift away from how we did it before to now, the caseload, and certainly too the assigned advisor model."

Fundamentally shifting the advising model is often a hallmark of guided pathways reforms, so other colleges should take note of this challenge, and consider how to ensure there is enough time for the transition, adequate training to support adopting new responsibilities, and manageable caseloads for advisors.

STRATEGIC FINANCE

One of the strengths of Harper College's guided pathways approach was integrating the model into the institution's operations. Rather than using grant funds to support the reform, operational aspects of the pathways model were funded through the institution's operating budget—supplemented by grant dollars to support professional development. Administrators could fund the work through core operating dollars because of the tie to the strategic plan, which was already funded in that way.

One big area required reallocating dollars: new advising positions. A senior academic leader noted that, to reallocate funding and make way for these new positions, they had to eliminate positions including adjunct faculty counselors, while spreading advising capacity across areas. This reallocation was made easier because Harper College works regularly to ensure funds are available to resource what matters most.

DATA CAPACITY

Harper College frequently reports student retention, persistence, and completion metrics to all campus stakeholders as well as the Board of Trustees. The college's key performance indicators (KPIs) are identified by reviewing peer institution metrics and examining recent research and publications on key indicators in higher education, then aligning with the college's mission and vision.

The college sets targets to measure progress based on the KPIs. The Strategic Planning and Accountability Shared Governance Committee leads this target-setting process, and it includes input and feedback from key campus stakeholders, including trustees. For this target-setting, Harper College developed a framework with three categories: 1) expected targets if the institution maintains the status quo; 2) improvement targets that are challenging, but attainable; and 3) stretch targets that can only be achieved if they are prioritized and resources are marshalled.

Harper College also built data capacity at the advisor level to support student success. Another primary KPI the institution monitors: the relationship between advisement and completion. One senior academic leader noted that in addition to tracking when students choose an area of interest, the college also tracks which students meet with their advisors (and which don't) and examines the success rates of both. The college frequently reviews this data and shares findings with the board to demonstrate the value of advisement and the investments made in new advisors.

TECHNOLOGY

Harper College invested in technology to support degree planning and early alerts—and to help advisors manage their respective caseloads. Although it is an ongoing and continually evolving process, much of the college's technology effort has gone into integrating their platforms. One senior leader explained that "student data, registration, degree planning, and scheduling tools, all those things just work together seamlessly."

Another technology investment has been in the Harper College website, which the institution considers a primary vehicle for communicating with students. The college made significant efforts to reflect the areas of interest and supporting information on the website, to help students understand their guided pathways.

Takeaways

Overall, Harper College credits its cross-functional teams and flexible pathways models for their implementation success. A senior student services leader summarized the foundation of their sustained implementation:

"There isn't a one-size-fits-all pathways model. You have to give space for the full change management process to happen so that you are asking for input from a wide range of both faculty and staff on [the questions]: Where you do want to be more structured within your guided pathways model? Where do you … want to provide flexibility for students?"

REFLECTION QUESTIONS FOR INSTITUTIONAL LEADERS

- Are your guided pathways design and implementation closely connected to your strategic plan? If not, is there confusion as to how these plans fit together? Would your college benefit from tying them more closely—and, if so, what steps would you take to accomplish that goal?
- What significant investments will implementing guided pathways require? Redesigning advising? Adopting technology? How will your college resource those functions in ways that are sustainable after early implementation stages?
- What systems can you develop to ensure that people at every level—from senior leaders to team leaders to managers within divisions—monitor whether reforms are being implemented as intended? How can your college set the expectation that mid-course corrections are expected when challenges arise?
- What are ways you can leverage strategic internal communication to get everyone on the same page about the transformation process you're embarking on? How can you build communications plans that make clear what everyone's role is in communicating the importance of the reform? How can you ensure those plans continue even when leaders depart?

APPENDIX A

Table 1. Changes in overall three-year cohort graduation rate, from Cohort 2011-2012 to Cohort 2017-2018, for Aspen segment.

	2011–2012	2012–2013	2013–2014	2014–2015	2015–2016	2016–2017	2017–2018	% Change
CBC	18	18	18	18	18	16	16	-2
IRSC	21	22	23	24	28	29	29	+8
NWTC	33	33	32	32	36	38	40	+7
SJCD	12	13	14	16	18	19	19	+7
SFC	24	26	27	30	31	31	32	+8
WRHC	12‡	15‡	17‡	19‡	15	20	23	+11~
Overall Non-CBD	**22**	**22**	**23**	**24**	**24**	**26**	**26**	**+4**
DDCC	16‡	16‡	24‡	22‡	28‡	32‡	30	+14~
GTCC*	†	†	†	†	15	17	17	+2
LCCC	7	8	11	12	16	17	20	+13
MDC	15	15	15	14	15	21	20	+5
SCC	†	10	11	14	17	21	27	+17
WTCC	†	†	†	†	18	22	22	+4
Overall CBD	**11**	**11**	**12**	**13**	**16**	**20**	**23**	**+12**
Overall Aspen	**19**	**18**	**19**	**20**	**21**	**23**	**25**	**+6**

Notes: Data from the National Student Clearinghouse Postsecondary Data Partnership; quality assessed by American Institutes of Research.
† = No data available/reporting incomplete; ‡ = Data flagged due to quality concerns; ~ = Use with caution.

Table 2. Changes in *full-time* students' three-year cohort graduation rate, from Cohort 2011-2012 to Cohort 2017-2018, for Aspen segment.

	2011–2012	2012–2013	2013–2014	2014–2015	2015–2016	2016–2017	2017–2018	% Change
CBC	20	20	21	24	21	20	20	0
IRSC	27	28	29	30	36	36	38~	+11~
NWTC	33	34	34	35	40	41	44	+11
SJC	15~	15~	18~	20~	24~	26~	25	+10~
SFC	30	33	37	40	42	42	42	+12
WRHC	16‡	17‡	21‡	23‡	22	30	35	+19~
DDCC	17‡	22‡	38‡	39‡	37‡	42‡	47	+30~
GTCC*	†	†	†	†	21	23	24	+3
LCCC	9	10	16	19	25	26	33	+24
MDC	22	24	23	23	25	26~	26	+4~
SCC	†	13	14	17	20	23	31	+18
WTCC	†	†	†	†	25	29	30	+5
Overall Aspen	**21**	**22**	**23**	**25**	**27**	**28**	**30**	**+9**

Notes : † = No data available/reporting incomplete; ‡ = Data removed due to quality concerns; ~ = Use with caution.

The overall rate was calculated by taking the total number of students within a cohort who graduated within three years of enrollment at all schools, and dividing that by the total number of students in each cohort. This number includes data that had flags for caution; it is meant to show a trend.

*Data from other sources show upward trends for GTCC

APPENDIX B

Internal Communications From-To

Using internal communications to drive higher and more equitable student success

TRADITIONAL	➡	TRANSFORMATIONAL
Internal communications strategy		
Communications is primarily viewed as a tool to connect with external audiences and communications priorities, and actions are mainly owned by the communications department.	➡	Internal communications is owned by the president in partnership with the senior team and the leader of the communications department, and is treated as essential to mission fulfillment—valued and reflected in all college-wide reform efforts.
Communication leaders and the president formulate and enact internal communications messages episodically, deciding what needs to be communicated based on the particular issue being addressed, without adequate attention to communications goals associated with reform strategies.	➡	Internal communications associated with reform are planned and leveraged intentionally by the president and senior leadership team, to align the college around a common reform agenda. President and senior leaders utilize multiple internal communications venues (such as a central newsletter, institution-wide convenings, small group meetings, and institutional signage) to frequently, repeatedly, and consistently share their clear, compelling, data-backed messages about student success initiatives.
Internal communications are mostly one-way, disseminated from leadership to the rest of the institution after decisions are made.	➡	Leaders thoughtfully design internal communications to build understanding and trust, providing genuine opportunities for staff, faculty, and students to express views and provide expertise relevant to key reform areas. Leaders incorporate those inputs in decision-making processes, further building trust and collaboration.
Communications are generalized, with little thought as to the audience, intent, or messaging.	➡	Communications plans include differentiated messages and venues for effective delivery to specific key audiences.
Staff, faculty, and students across the college do not know when and where they will receive important information relevant to student success.	➡	Over the course of the year, staff, faculty, and students know when and where they can go for essential information, as well as when and where they will be able to hear from and engage with the president and senior leaders.

TRADITIONAL	➡	TRANSFORMATIONAL
Internal communications implementation		
Data are not regularly used in leaders' communications, and/or different and disconnected data are used each time leaders communicate.	➡	Leaders consistently emphasize common data and metrics that align to key student success reform strategies and initiatives.
Institutional data that are most frequently available and disseminated are disconnected from student success goals, instead often connected to enrollment and compliance goals.	➡	Priority data and assessments aligned to core student success and equity goals are defined by senior leaders (working with institutional research) and then regularly communicated throughout the institution in formats and forums that promote ready understanding by different audiences.
Cabinet members and other executive leaders do not regularly or strategically communicate with those outside their direct reports.	➡	The president and senior leadership script out communications plans for themselves and mid-level leaders that include a variety of strategies to ensure all stakeholders regularly hear key information about student success reforms. These messages are rigorously tied to the student success agenda, use common data and metrics, and are delivered in ways that allow time for questions (which are answered in real time and in follow-up communications).
Internal communications target faculty and staff; currently enrolled students are left out.	➡	Along with faculty and staff, students are considered a central audience for internal communications efforts, and comprehensive communications plans for students are developed separately from those for faculty and staff.
External communications aimed at recruiting students focus primarily on those currently in high school.	➡	External communications for prospective students include an intentional focus on adult learners, students of color, and other historically underserved students.
All messages to students are of equal priority.	➡	Colleges regulate messaging to students so students can sort high-priority messages (such as emails from financial aid, instructors, and administrators) from other messages.
College leaders are unaware of how students experience communications.	➡	There are regular audits of what students hear from the college, as well as when and how they hear it; the audit information is used to better align communications with reform efforts.
School websites are designed exclusively for external audiences, not tied to strategic internal communications plans.	➡	Internal communications goals aligned to student success reforms are used to inform the design and content of websites, and consider all relevant audiences (such as faculty, staff, current students, future students, and community members).

Cross-functional Teams From-To

Using cross-functional teams to drive higher and more equitable student success

TRADITIONAL	➡	TRANSFORMATIONAL
Advancing the student success agenda		
Establishing effective cross-functional teams is not a central part of the institution's change strategy or processes.	➡	Leadership understands the importance of cross-functional teams and leverages them strategically, using the structures and team compositions that are most effective to accomplish intended goals.
Cross-functional teams (often "standing committees") have broad and general purposes and goals, which do not provide clarity about their priorities or connection to transformation.	➡	Cross-functional teams have a clear purpose and charge that incorporate the elements of SMARTIE goals: strategic, measurable, ambitious, realistic, time-bound, inclusive, and equitable. The purpose, charge, or goal of the team is clearly connected to the central "why" of student success and equity and key institutional reform strategies.
Cross-functional teams are seen as places where conversations happen that are not necessarily connected to reform.	➡	Cross-functional teams serve as an important internal communication channel that supports institutional transformation, providing a way for leaders to communicate priorities, engage faculty and staff expertise and viewpoints, and develop trust and collaboration.
Leaders view cross-functional teams (committees) as permanent, without consideration for whether their work should be reassigned to other units within the institution.	➡	Leaders understand that teams have life cycles, and know when to create or sunset a cross-functional team, and how to integrate a sunset team's functions into other areas of the institution. Cross-functional teams are charged with ensuring the reforms they advance are sustainable, including how people will be involved and who will be in charge when the team sunsets (or assumes different tasks). They are rewarded for stopping work when it's no longer needed.
Team composition		
Teams are composed without intention (i.e., through volunteer membership), resulting in inadequate expertise, a lack of needed positional authority, and/or a limited number of people serving on multiple committees.	➡	Leaders intentionally recruit people to be on the team, in order to achieve the team's goal and engage relevant stakeholders (within the institution and the student body). Considering the purpose of the team, leaders assess members' interest, institutional role, positional authority, expertise, skills, and lived experience.
Cross-functional teams include members with obviously relevant academic and/or advising responsibilities, but not members with core operational functions such as data, technology, finance, and human resources.	➡	Cross-functional teams systematically include members with student-facing responsibilities (including academic and advising, and faculty) as well as those from core operational units (such as data, technology, finance, and human resources).
Cross-functional team leads are expected to add the work to their day-to-day job duties, limiting the effectiveness of the team and risking staff/faculty burnout.	➡	Leaders express strong support for the value of leading and managing cross-functional teams by ensuring the needed time (for example, through release time) and resources to get the job done.
Autonomy, power, and accountability		
Teams are given too little or too much flexibility to achieve their goals.	➡	Leadership understands the need to balance autonomy and accountability for cross-functional teams. Leaders ensure accountability by providing strong charges with clear parameters and expected outcomes aligned to the college-wide reform strategy, while at the same time genuinely valuing the expertise of the team and supporting their decisions about how they and the college should accomplish those goals. Leaders encourage creativity and support teams even when initial ideas do not succeed.
Teams do not have the ongoing support of leaders to achieve their goals.	➡	Leaders actively monitor the progress of the initiative—often through senior team membership in each important team—and provide the real-time, ongoing resources and communications support needed to advance reforms and overcome obstacles.
Teams are seen solely as a mechanism for getting things done, not as a mechanism for developing human capital.	➡	Cross-functional teamwork helps develop skills and leadership potential in employees, including in project management, knowledge of other institutional functions, data use and program evaluation, and collaborative institutional decision-making and implementation.

Institutional Research From-To

Using institutional research to drive higher and more equitable student success

TRADITIONAL	➡	TRANSFORMATIONAL
Research and data use to support mission, vision, and strategy		
Institutional research serves in a supportive role to leadership—primarily responding to requests for data on an ad hoc basis.	➡	The president and senior leadership team's vision and strategy for student success and equity are rooted in data, developed in partnership with institutional researchers.
Senior leaders have a compliance-based orientation to data, seeing institutional research as primarily a necessary evil required to comply with government, accreditation, and funder requirements.	➡	Senior leaders have a mission-based orientation to data, viewing institutional research as an essential capacity that is represented in cabinet-level discussions and integrated into planning, decision-making, professional development, and communications.
Institutional research serves as the sole representative or "champion" of data.	➡	The president and senior leaders see themselves as data champions, modeling and encouraging data use in planning, decision-making, professional development, and communications.
It's unclear what "student success" means, because the president and senior leaders use inconsistent data metrics when referring to student success and equity.	➡	When referring to student success and equity, the president and senior leaders consistently use a clear and limited set of data metrics, developed in partnership with institutional researchers.
Institutional research is perceived primarily as a customer-service body, asked to produce analyses on demand but not included in decision-making and implementation processes.	➡	Institutional researchers are viewed as thought partners in initiative development, providing exploratory analyses, refining research questions, ensuring that data are easily accessed and understood, and supporting effective communication of data.
Institutional research organization and collaboration		
Reporting and research functions are under-resourced, so staff are fully occupied by compliance and other reporting functions.	➡	The reporting and research functions are resourced at a level needed to serve both reporting/compliance functions and those associated with student success and equity.
Data are not routinely disaggregated by race, ethnicity, income level, or other important student characteristics, contributing to invisible equity gaps.	➡	Disaggregating data is standard practice, noticeable and asked about whenever not included in data reports and presentations.
Data collection and analysis is mostly constrained to quantitative data and the descriptive analysis needed for reporting.	➡	Institutional research regularly utilizes qualitative methodologies to explore student outcomes and experiences on campus, and with partners relevant to student success and equity (for example, universities, workforce, and K-12 schools).
Reporting and research are functionally separated from learning assessments, reflecting and contributing to a political divide between faculty and administration.	➡	Learning assessment functions are integrated with reporting and research, allowing learning data to be used in decision-making alongside other student outcomes data.
Institutional research and information technology operate separately, with minimal communication and collaboration.	➡	There is strong communication and collaboration between institutional research and information technology, fostered through organizational unit alignment, a cross-departmental staff member, and/or a common senior leader.
Data governance and accessibility		
There is a view that all data is beneficial and of equal value, resulting in multiple data sets of inconsistent quality being used.	➡	Senior leaders and institutional research staff prioritize common data sets that are clearly defined, centralized, transparent, and readily accessible, so people across the college routinely turn to the same sources to answer data questions.
Data provided at the unit and division levels are disconnected from institutional data sets, hindering collaboration.	➡	Data from a single source are proactively pushed out to meet the needs of individuals across campus so they can utilize data in their decision-making processes (for example, through personalized dashboards or individualized reports).

TRADITIONAL	➡	TRANSFORMATIONAL
Data use, training, and culture across the college		
Institutional research staff are hired for technical ability and are not developed for the skills to teach/coach research and data use.	➡	Institutional research leadership and staff are hired and developed to support data and data-driven decision-making across the college, providing professional training, facilitating data inquiry, supporting planning, and shepherding sense-making conversations.
Data are sporadically used.	➡	Data are integrated into the practices of all bodies across campus, to set the student success and equity agenda, assess progress and outcomes, communicate what matters most, allocate resources, set policies, and inform scale and sustainability.
Data literacy is not a component of hiring, onboarding, or professional development outside the institutional research and information technology functions.	➡	Data literacy is viewed as an important competency for all staff, faculty, and administrators, and communicated as necessary to advancing student success and equity. Data literacy is a key part of hiring, onboarding, continual professional development, and incentive/accountability structures across the college.
Employee performance and related assessments and processes are not tied to key student success data.	➡	Data are used in self-assessments and performance reviews, and are a key component of promotion and tenure processes.

Human Capital From-To

Using human capital to drive higher and more equitable student success

TRADITIONAL	➡	TRANSFORMATIONAL
Human capital strategy that supports vision and mission		
Human resources is a compliance and tactical function, needed to hire and retain staff but not used strategically.	➡	Human capital is elevated to the level of strategy, staffed at the cabinet level, treated by the president as essential to mission fulfillment, and reflected in all college-wide processes.
Human capital decisions are made at the division and unit level.	➡	Priorities for improving human capital are set at the cabinet level and aligned with student success and equity goals.
The relationship between human capital strategies and the senior team's actions, communications, and evaluation practices has not been considered.	➡	As part of human capital strategies, the president and senior leadership team set goals for themselves to model the values of the culture they aim to build.
The president views human capital as purely operational and thus beyond the scope of board policy and review.	➡	The president shares human capital strategies with the board, proposes annual goals and budgets that advance human capital strategies, and incorporates human capital goals in their annual review.
Recruitment practices		
Recruitment is seen as a task, and is done as it has always been done.	➡	College leaders have developed and are implementing a recruitment strategy aligned to mission, have adopted specific goals for recruitment across the college and for each major division, and routinely monitor progress toward those goals.
Recruitment is done through traditional (and often narrow) sources, resulting in candidate pools not aligned to diversity and other human capital goals.	➡	The president and senior team set expectations for strong, diverse candidate pools for every position, provide financial support for aligned recruitment strategies and professional development, and have equitable policies and procedures for recruitment that reflect human capital goals.
Job descriptions across the college predominantly list technical skills and related experience for the role.	➡	Position descriptions across the college reflect the college's vision and mission, including why equity-oriented, student-centered faculty and staff are important to fulfilling vision and mission.
Hiring practices		
Guidance on hiring focuses on compliance with legal and administrative rules regarding permissible hiring practices.	➡	The college requires the use of hiring tools that prioritize employee characteristics and experience aligned to the college's human capital strategy.
Divisions develop hiring committees from within the division, limiting perspectives.	➡	Hiring and selection committees include representatives from other college divisions or departments as well as senior leaders, include individuals with equity-based and transformational mindsets, and represent the diversity of the student population.
Hiring committees assess candidate qualifications based exclusively on technical skills and experience.	➡	Hiring committees assess candidates' commitment to student success and learning, equity-mindedness, and capacity to advance the college's mission.
The president is not involved in most hiring decisions at the college.	➡	The president has final approval on all new full-time hires at the director level and above, including department chairs and deans.

TRADITIONAL	➡	TRANSFORMATIONAL
Onboarding practices		
Onboarding focuses on processes and procedures, use of institutional technology and other systems, benefits, and compliance with institutional rules.	➡	Onboarding at the college: • Centers on the most important aspects of professional development related to student success and equity, thereby communicating the value the college places on mission-aligned professional development. • Includes orientation to the institution's history, mission, values, and strategies for equitable student success. • Promotes a sense of belonging for each individual by developing relationships between new hires and their department, supervisors, and other departments across the college.
Professional development		
Professional development and training opportunities are typically decided at the department level.	➡	College leaders have adopted and resourced a professional development strategy aligned to mission and informed by student outcomes data.
Most professional development is voluntary.	➡	Every employee has a professional development and training plan that ensures ongoing, sustained learning experiences aligned to student success and equity, which are differentiated based on their roles, professional goals, and career aspirations at the institution.
Required professional development is an event that occurs during a few days or weeks each year.	➡	The college provides professional development and training through multiple formats to foster both full- and part-time employee engagement. The college adopts a significant, centralized professional development budget each year, and requires that division budget submissions reflect professional development goals.
Retention, promotion, and tenure practices		
Job security is based on years of service and the unit's enrollment.	➡	The president, senior leadership team, and leaders in every unit monitor and reward faculty and staff engaged in mission-aligned student success and equity work.
Promotions for faculty and staff are based on time on the job.	➡	The college transparently rewards behavioral development and pursuit of practices that are designed to advance student success and equity outcomes.
Staff and faculty evaluations occur annually and are not linked to professional development plans.	➡	Salary increases and pay scales align to performance-based measures, including student outcomes, feedback, and progress toward the college's equity and student success goals.
Expectations for job performance are specific to each department or division.	➡	Tenure and promotion practices across the college are rooted in efforts to advance student success and equity, and require faculty and staff to refine their practices based on outcomes rooted in student-centered information.

Strategic Finance From-To

Using strategic finance in service of higher and more equitable student success

TRADITIONAL	➡	TRANSFORMATIONAL
Budget transparency and ownership		
The CFO “owns” the budget.	➡	The president “owns” the budget, with the CFO as partner.
The president and CFO have access to the budget.	➡	All institutional stakeholders have ready access to the budget.
The CFO and president are trained in finance.	➡	Everyone at the institution embraces the duty of stewarding college finances, so the entire senior team is trained in finance and employees across the college are trained in stewardship for impact.
Connection to mission, vision, and goals		
Finance is viewed as separate from strategy and student success goals.	➡	Leaders understand that “every dollar tells a story” about the values of the institution, so they align the budget to student success and equity goals as well as the strategic plan, and allocate resources in ways that consistently reinforce the importance of student success and equity.
There is no theory of action as to how institutional finances and student success are linked.	➡	Leaders signal that student success is a central goal in financial reports and requests.
Finance staff work independently of student success staff and faculty, and may only interact with senior leadership.	➡	The CFO and finance staff learn about the vision for student success and equity as well as the college’s day-to-day work—for example, by engaging in listening tours with faculty, advisors, counselors, chairs, and deans—and then use what they’ve learned to help align resources to high-leverage priorities across the college for scale and sustainability.
Allocations are not tied to the institution’s overarching student success and equity agenda.	➡	Cabinet members and departments have resource allocation plans that reinforce the importance of key student success and equity reforms.
Allocations remain the same from year to year, and last year’s budget is the biggest predictor of next year’s budget.	➡	When additional resources are allocated/approved, it is clearly conveyed that these allocations meet specific student success needs; when budget cuts are necessary, it is clearly conveyed that allocations that meet student needs are most often protected.
Financial and student success data are not used together to make decisions, and are often housed in separate, disconnected systems.	➡	Student success data is used to inform resource allocation at the institution. In addition, financial projections about the institution can be made based on projected changes in student outcomes.
The college’s foundation, reserves, and hidden funds should be as large as possible in anticipation of unforeseen fiscal circumstances.	➡	Achieving the mission is first and foremost, and leaders balance the need to have adequate resources available for unforeseen fiscal circumstances against the need to activate resources to achieve the mission.
Leaders need to prove financial return on every investment to the CFO.	➡	Leaders balance the goals of equitable student outcomes and return on investment—recognizing that some investments in student success will not have a short-term monetary return, but still developing ways to fund these activities from various revenue streams.

TRADITIONAL	➡	TRANSFORMATIONAL
Creativity and flexibility		
The budget is done as it's always been done; planning is a static, year-by-year process.	➡	Budget planning spans multiple years (within state and/or system restrictions), and administrators have adequate flexibility to adjust the budget during each year based on emerging needs and changing circumstances.
The budget is treated as a fixed amount of resources to be parsed among units within the college.	➡	Leaders are always looking for ways to creatively increase or redistribute funding across the institution in service of student success and equity goals.
The culture of the college is "use it or lose it," meaning departments or divisions are penalized for not spending their full budget by having year-end excesses taken away, often leading to end-of-year spending misaligned to mission.	➡	Departments do not feel penalized for underspending, because they know next year's budget will be based on goals and needs. There is transparency about how underspent money is used to fulfill the mission of the college.
Enrollment is viewed as the primary revenue strategy.	➡	Leadership creatively generates resources, by building and leveraging external partnerships, creating operational efficiencies, and activating resources traditionally regarded as unavailable (such as savings from hiring delays).
The college benchmarks its budget for each year based on allocations from the prior year.	➡	The college benchmarks itself against peer colleges in terms of impact and related spending, unearthing opportunities for efficiency and improved student success and equity performance.
Leaders allow state funding formulas (including performance-based funding) to drive resource allocation, without regard to aligning state funding to mission and desired reforms.	➡	Leaders know how performance-based funding in their state relates to their vision for student success and equity, and consider the mis/alignment to maximize revenue without hampering mission.
Partnership		
Resources that leaders pay most attention to are all accounted for in the budget.	➡	Substantial resources to support the college's mission are coming from—and going to—partners, sometimes never appearing in the budget or on the balance sheet.
Partnerships are handoffs.	➡	Partnerships reflect co-ownership of student success, accompanied by significant resource commitment and allocation.
The college seeks outside resources through fundraising, usually alone.	➡	The college accesses resources for its mission through partnership with K-12 schools, employers, universities, and others.