



California Guided Pathways

Project Description

Building Capacity for Reform at Scale in California Community Colleges

A decade of intensive focus on improving student success in community colleges has produced notable effects: a dramatic increase in awareness of the challenges and in commitment to college completion as a critical goal, a sea change in the use of data to assess and monitor student success and institutional performance, a growing body of evidence regarding effective educational practice in community colleges, and increasing numbers of institutions that are putting that knowledge into practice and demonstrating encouraging results. These promising developments can be attributed to the unprecedented efforts of a collection of philanthropies, national organizations, state systems, and institutions that have worked both collectively and individually to investigate practices, implement change, and produce results.

Recently, there has emerged a striking convergence of research and experience, as national and state-based organizations, state systems, research centers, and individual institutions have come to the shared understanding that progress in improving postsecondary outcomes and equity, while evident in some places, is too slow; that the favored solutions of the past decade, while often necessary components of change, are too small for the magnitude of the challenges community colleges face; and that typically, the changes thus far achieved have not been fundamental

enough—and certainly not scaled enough—to achieve the improvements in completion of college credentials with strong labor market value, especially among low-income students and students of color.

In collaboration with the American Association of Community Colleges and national partners in the AACC Pathways Project, community college and organization leaders in California have committed to a project focused on bringing guided pathways reforms to a larger number of California community colleges, working as appropriate with their California State University (CSU) transfer institutions and with K–12 system partners. Guided pathways, a reform practice firmly based on a student-centered approach, hold great promise for dramatically increasing the number of credentials completed, and for closing the equity gap (by gender, race, and socio-economic status) for those completing.

The Pathways Institute Series

The project builds a model series of six institutes, each 2.5 days in length and each engaging five-person teams of varying composition from a selected group of 20 colleges. All institutes support committed community colleges in work to design and implement clear, structured student pathways to high-quality credentials that are aligned both to California State University transfer and to jobs with value in the labor market. Designated college teams attend the six institutes during the grant years of

2017–2019, and each event focuses on a critical aspect of institutional change and pathway design/implementation; each requires advance work by the colleges, and each results in products developed by the participating college teams, including action plans and assessment of needs for technical assistance. The institute format combines discussions with experts, technical assistance, and facilitated discussion/ planning sessions for college teams.

Knowledge Development

In addition to providing direct support to college teams, the project aims to build knowledge in the field that will lead to broader and better adoption of the pathways reforms. Accordingly, participating colleges will (1) collect, monitor, and report data on selected metrics depicting student connection, progress, and completion; and (2) participate in evaluation of the institute series. The project partners will develop open-source resource materials for broad use by community colleges.

Achieving Scale

The project employs the Pathways Institute series developed by the national AACC Pathways Partners, with care taken to incorporate learning and improvements from the national project. The California Guided Pathways Project reflects the original intent of the national partner organizations to demonstrate success, continuously improve upon the pathways institute model and related tools, and replicate the work, with appropriate tailoring to differing contexts, in

other settings. Accordingly, investment in this project supports design and implementation of guided academic and career pathways at scale—for all students—at 20 competitively selected California community colleges, while also building capacity within the state for spreading that work to much larger numbers of colleges.