

REPORT | SEPTEMBER 2019

Redesigning Your College Through Guided Pathways

Lessons on Managing Whole-College Reform From the AACCC Pathways Project

Davis Jenkins | Hana Lahr | Amy E. Brown | Amy Mazzariello





TEACHERS COLLEGE, COLUMBIA UNIVERSITY

The Community College Research Center (CCRC), Teachers College, Columbia University, has been a leader in the field of community college research and reform for over 20 years. Our work provides a foundation for innovations in policy and practice that help give every community college student the best chance of success.

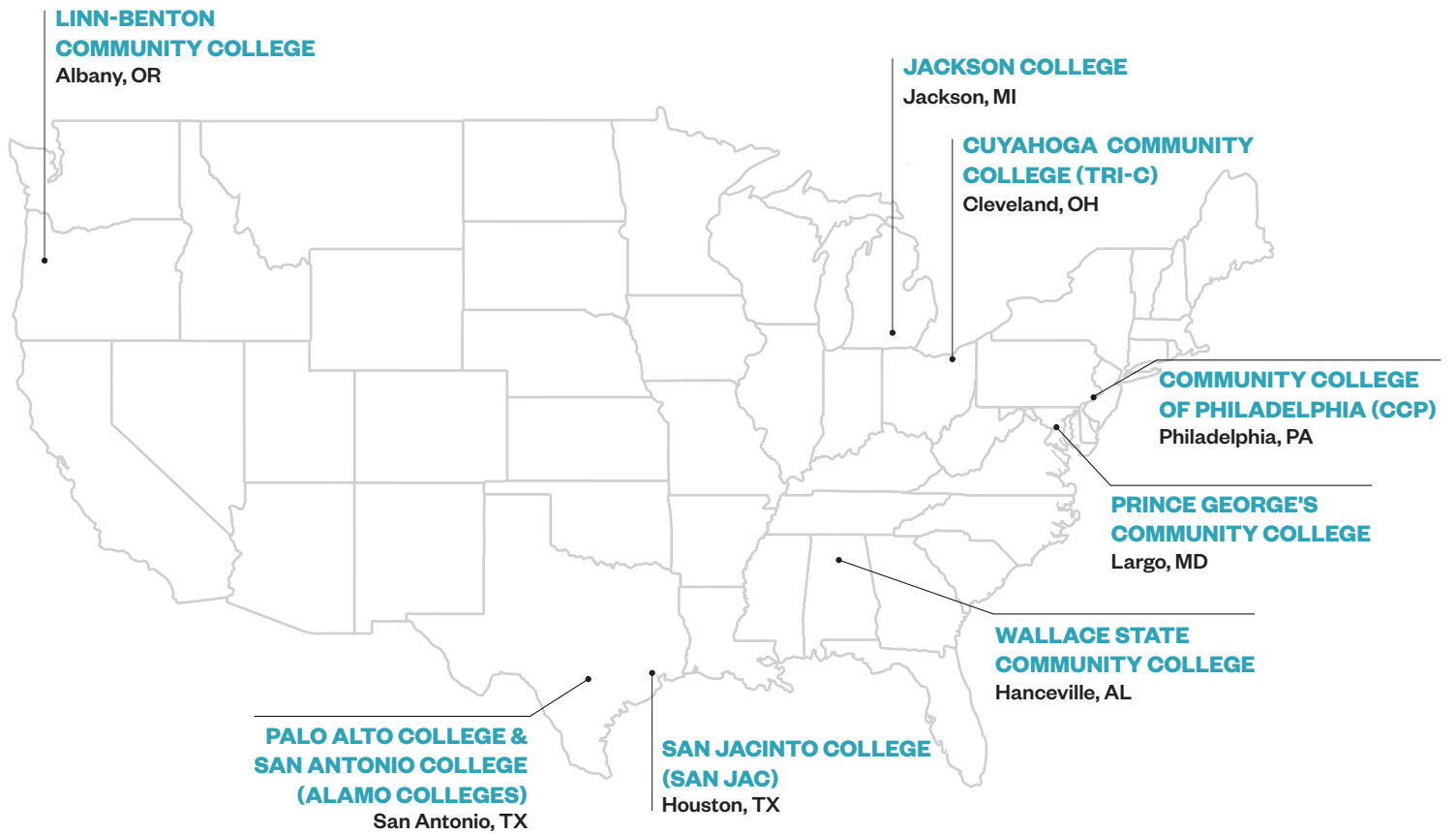
Acknowledgments

Funding for this report was provided by the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation. The authors would like to thank the other members of the research team, including Maggie Fay, John Fink, Sarah Griffin, Serena Klempin, and Lauren Pellegrino. We are grateful to the administrators, staff, faculty, advisors, counselors, and students at the colleges featured in this report for allowing us to learn from their work on guided pathways. We are humbled by their willingness to question and change their practices to improve students' college experience and success. Thanks also to Thomas Brock, Kay McClenney, and Gretchen Schmidt for their comments on earlier drafts of the report. Finally, we wish to thank Hayley Glatter for her editorial assistance and Stacie Long for expert design work.

Table of Contents

- 1 | Introduction**
- 3 | Overview of Guided Pathways Change Management Strategies**
- 8 | How to Lay the Groundwork for Whole-College Redesign**
- 14 | How to Introduce Guided Pathways to the College Community**
- 19 | How to Support Collaborative Planning and Implementation**
- 26 | How to Sustain and Institutionalize Student Success Reforms**
- 29 | Reflections on the Timeline for Implementing Guided Pathways Reforms**
- 30 | Conclusion**
- 31 | References**

Field Research Sites



Introduction

Over the last several years, the guided pathways approach to whole-college redesign has become a national movement in community colleges. Approximately 300 colleges are implementing guided pathways reforms as part of formal state or national initiatives, and many more are doing so on their own. Some of the earliest colleges to implement guided pathways are the 30 in the first cohort of the American Association of Community Colleges (AACC) Pathways Project, a national demonstration initiative that was launched in late 2015 to show how community colleges could create clearer pathways to program completion, employment, and further education for all students. CCRC serves as the knowledge-development partner for the project and has been studying the implementation of guided pathways reforms at participating colleges to understand how they are redesigning academic programs, student supports, and related support systems; how they are managing the redesign process; and how the reforms are affecting early student outcomes.

This report presents findings from field research CCRC conducted between September and December of 2018 at eight of the AACC Pathways colleges to learn how they are managing the broad-based redesign of academic programs and support services and systems under the guided pathways model. It also shares new findings on how long it takes to implement guided pathways at scale. Accompanying the report are five case studies that detail how a diverse subset of the colleges we visited have redesigned their academic programs, student services, and related support systems using the guided pathways model.

Case Studies in Our Series on Change Management at AACC Pathways Colleges

From Pockets of Excellence to Engaged Innovation at Scale: Guided Pathways Reforms at Cuyahoga Community College

Davis Jenkins and Sarah Griffin

Wild Thinkers: Linn-Benton Community College's Creative and Collaborative Approach to Guided Pathways Reforms

Maggie P. Fay and Hana Lahr

Collaborating to Break Down Barriers to Student Success: Guided Pathways Reforms at San Jacinto College

Davis Jenkins and Lauren Pellegrino

Balancing Urgency and Patience: How Community College of Philadelphia Set the Pace for Guided Pathways Reform

Hana Lahr, Amy E. Brown, and John Fink

Approaching Institutional Change with Clarity and Commitment: Guided Pathways at Wallace State Community College

Amy E. Brown and Hana Lahr

We selected the eight colleges for study to ensure variation in size, geography, and student demographics, as shown in Table 1. Five of the colleges (Community College of Philadelphia, Cuyahoga Community College, Jackson College, Linn-Benton Community College, and Prince George’s Community College) have collective bargaining agreements with faculty and staff, while the other three (the Alamo Colleges, San Jacinto College, and Wallace State Community College) do not, though all have faculty senates or other deliberative bodies that help govern academic programs and student services. Overall, we conducted interviews and focus groups with 340 administrators, faculty members, advisors and counselors, staff members, and students. (See Table 2 for details.)

Table 1.
Student Demographics

COLLEGE	CREDIT ENROLLMENT	RACE (%)					FEMALE (%)	PART-TIME (%)
		Asian	Black	Hispanic	White	2+ Races		
Community College of Philadelphia	25,570	8	47	12	23	3	63	71
Cuyahoga Community College	36,659	3	27	6	55	3	60	69
Jackson College	7,372	1	10	4	63	3	55	60
Linn-Benton Community College	11,107	3	1	8	60	5	53	53
Palo Alto College (Alamo Colleges)	17,646	1	4	71	20	2	61	78
Prince George's Community College	17,365	4	71	11	5	3	62	73
San Antonio College (Alamo Colleges)	34,787	3	7	60	26	3	58	81
San Jacinto College	42,202	5	11	52	27	2	57	77
Wallace State Community College	7,270	1	6	4	85	1	62	52

Note. Figures are based on unduplicated headcounts from the 2016–17 academic year obtained from the Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System. Palo Alto College and San Antonio College are part of the Alamo College District. We visited both colleges in fall 2018, but the Alamo College District is considered one college for purposes of the AACCC Pathways Project.

Table 2.
Interview and Focus Group Participants

COLLEGE	INTERVIEWS	FOCUS GROUPS			TOTAL
		Faculty	Advisors and Counselors	Students	
Community College of Philadelphia	29	4	5	6	44
Cuyahoga Community College	33	5	3	4	45
Jackson College	16	7	6	8	37
Linn-Benton Community College	18	5	5	2	30
Palo Alto College (Alamo Colleges)	14	5	6	5	30
Prince George's Community College	15	3	6	8	32
San Antonio College (Alamo Colleges)	15	5	5	0	25
San Jacinto College	44	6	8	10	68
Wallace State Community College	14	6	5	4	29
Total	198	46	49	47	340

When the AACC Pathways Project was launched, most of these colleges had only begun to think about guided pathways reforms. By the time we visited them in fall 2018, all eight had implemented at scale—that is, for every entering student, if not all students—remarkable changes to their academic programs and student support services using the guided pathways model. For example, all eight colleges had implemented:

- **Meta-majors and program maps.** All programs at the colleges are now organized into career- and academic-field-focused meta-majors. Faculty and staff have mapped course sequences for all programs based on the requirements for employment and bachelor’s degrees in the given field.
- **Career and college exploration and planning for all new students.** The colleges have redesigned their onboarding processes to help new students explore career and academic options and develop a full-program educational plan during their first term.
- **Redesigned advising.** Colleges have instituted new models of advising that provide better support for students as they explore and choose a program and as they work toward program completion. Colleges are assigning advisors to meta-majors to provide students with dedicated support and strengthening advisors’ connections with program faculty to help students complete programs, secure jobs, and transfer to four-year colleges.
- **Enhanced career and transfer information.** The colleges have enhanced the information on their websites to help current and prospective students explore program options within meta-majors, understand program requirements, and see the connections between particular programs and career and transfer opportunities.
- **Improved progress monitoring and scheduling.** Upgraded student information systems enable students and advisors to monitor students’ progress on their plans, and improved scheduling systems and processes help ensure that colleges offer the courses students need to complete their programs on schedule.

As this report and the accompanying case studies demonstrate, planning and implementing guided pathways at scale is an institution-wide effort that requires broad engagement and collaboration. Before even beginning to plan for guided pathways reforms, each of the colleges underwent a learning process about how to collect, analyze, and use student data; how the college’s actions and organizational structures contribute to student outcomes; and what the guided pathways model entails. And even after this foundational work, implementing guided pathways is not a quick or linear process but one that requires learning and iteration over several years.

Overview of Guided Pathways Change Management Strategies

Although the specifics differed, it is striking how similar the eight colleges we visited were in their overall approach to managing the planning and implementation of guided pathways reforms. In this section, we summarize common strategies the colleges took across four phases of implementation:

1. laying the groundwork for whole-college redesign,
2. introducing guided pathways to the college community,
3. supporting collaborative planning and implementation, and
4. sustaining and institutionalizing student success reforms.

These findings build on our report from spring 2017 about how colleges in the AACC Pathways Project were managing the change process (Jenkins, Lahr, & Fink, 2017). There, we framed our findings using the three main dimensions of Kotter's eight-step change leadership process (Kotter International, n.d.). Here, we present the colleges' strategies under the four phases listed above, which build on Kotter's framework but are specific to the community college context and the requirements of whole-college redesign.

Laying the Groundwork for Whole-College Redesign

Before beginning guided pathways reforms, all eight colleges spent several years building capacity and urgency for whole-college redesign. Perhaps the most common foundational practice we observed involved college leaders convening faculty, staff, and administrators from across the college to examine data on student outcomes, recognize barriers the college created for students, and build commitment to large-scale reform. In every case, this process involved efforts to become better collectors, users, and analyzers of student outcomes data. College leaders used data to show that most students were not meeting their goals and that the college bore a good deal of responsibility for this.

Further, as *Redesigning America's Community Colleges* (Bailey, Jaggars, & Jenkins, 2015) argued, reforms targeting small groups of students or one segment of the student experience would not suffice to improve student success overall. College leaders worked to foster an understanding that to help more students reach their goals, faculty and staff would have to fundamentally rethink programs, student supports, and related systems and processes across the college. Refocusing the college's efforts on student success required a cultural shift, and in every case, leaders appealed to the community's shared values and challenged all faculty and staff to consider how their work supports student success.

Most of the colleges instituted more inclusive decision-making structures, which were then used to plan and implement at least one large-scale change before the introduction of guided pathways. These efforts showed that real change is possible if everyone at the college is involved.

Introducing Guided Pathways to the College Community

After cultivating a commitment to whole-college redesign, college leaders began to make the case for guided pathways reforms. They held college-wide meetings, workshops, and other activities to educate the college community about the reform model and presented evidence to illustrate how guided pathways reforms could benefit students. Faculty and staff were often surprised to learn that many students were not enrolled in well-defined programs and that many were taking a large number of excess credits in their pursuit of an associate degree. In some cases, the *average* number of credits students earned before completing a 60-credit associate degree was around 90.

College leaders also emphasized that guided pathways would be a framework for organizing, enhancing, and aligning existing efforts to improve student outcomes. Because all of the colleges had spent years implementing student success reforms, it was critical that leaders communicate that their hard work was still relevant and that existing reforms could be refined to better help students choose, enter, and complete programs.

Supporting Collaborative Planning and Implementation

In every college profiled here, leaders engaged faculty, staff, and administrators from across the institution in cross-functional teams to design and implement reforms. Some teams were tasked with organizing programs into meta-majors and mapping out course sequences for programs to ensure alignment with the requirements for jobs and further education in related fields. Others were asked to map out the entire student experience at the college—from first contact to program completion—to identify barriers to access and success and approaches the college could take to mitigate them. Engaging faculty and staff in this way helped to create a widespread sense of ownership for the reforms, which promoted their broad adoption and sustainability. College leaders supported the teams' success by encouraging their creativity and experimentation and by providing time and support for them to engage in planning, formative evaluation, and professional development related to the reforms.

Sustaining and Institutionalizing Student Success Reforms

Colleges that are a few years into their guided pathways redesigns are taking time to reflect on their progress, celebrate their accomplishments, and regroup before entering the next phase of reform. To sustain the changes they have already made, colleges are reallocating resources and building funding for additional academic advisors, technology system upgrades, and ongoing professional development into their annual operating budgets. They are also recruiting employees who are committed to improving student outcomes through a highly collaborative approach and implementing onboarding models that orient new hires to the values and practices they have adopted in their reforms.

Taking the Long View

Transforming college structures and practices at scale in the way that guided pathways requires is a long-term project. As the following timeline illustrates, each phase of implementation we identified involves multiple strategies that are complex in and of themselves. To help colleges in earlier stages of transformation find their way forward, in the sections that follow, we provide detailed examples of how the eight colleges in the current study approached each strategy listed in the timeline under the four implementation phases.

All eight colleges have made exceptional progress in implementing guided pathways reforms, and the lessons they have learned in the process have broad applicability. Though even they still have years of reform work ahead of them, their successes offer reassurance that major change is possible. And in the words of Dr. Samuel Hirsch, vice president of academic and student success at Community College of Philadelphia, it is “not just about building it for the next couple years but for the next 50 years.”

Timeline and Strategies for Leading Guided Pathways Redesigns

Pathways implementation

LAYING THE GROUNDWORK FOR WHOLE-COLLEGE REDESIGN

2+ Years Prior to Pathways

- Build awareness that college creates barriers to student success and that only large-scale, cross-college reforms will remove them
- Build a culture of data-informed practice
- Reorganize decision-making roles and structures to facilitate broad engagement in planning and implementing improvements
- Foster individual accountability for contributing to the college's goals for student success
- Encourage creativity and experimentation in developing strategies to improve student success
- Provide time and support for collaborative planning and professional development

INTRODUCING GUIDED PATHWAYS TO THE COLLEGE COMMUNITY

Starting in Year 1

- Make the case for guided pathways by showing how a lack of clear program paths and supports hurts students
- Communicate a guiding vision for the reforms
- Cultivate a shared understanding of guided pathways through college-wide in-person meetings and virtual communication
- Allow time for reflection and deliberation
- Present guided pathways as a framework for aligning and enhancing existing student success efforts

SUPPORTING COLLABORATIVE PLANNING AND IMPLEMENTATION

Starting in Years 2–3

- Support cross-functional leadership and collaboration to plan and implement pathways
- Engage faculty and staff from across divisions in mapping program pathways to good jobs and transfer in a major
- Ask staff and faculty to map the entire student experience—both the status quo and what it should be
- Identify and support change leaders throughout the college

SUSTAINING AND INSTITUTIONALIZING STUDENT SUCCESS REFORMS

Starting in Years 4+

- Take time to celebrate wins, reflect on progress, and plan next steps
- Reallocate and align resources to help scale and sustain effective practices
- Ensure that employee hiring, onboarding, and promotion practices support a culture focused on improving success for all students

How to Lay the Groundwork for Whole-College Redesign

All eight colleges we visited had been working to improve student success for many years before joining the AACC Pathways Project. Each had been involved in Achieving the Dream (ATD) and in some cases other national efforts focused on building data capacity and implementing interventions to improve student success.

Interviewees from every college acknowledged the importance of their institutional capacity and experience implementing interventions as foundations for guided pathways. But even more important, they explained, were their efforts to bring about organizational changes by first changing the college's culture. This section offers guidelines for laying the groundwork for guided pathways by describing how the eight colleges built institution-wide commitment to change, provided time for faculty and staff to engage in professional development, and fostered creative solutions to address barriers to student success.

Build awareness that the college creates barriers to student success and that only large-scale, cross-college reforms will remove them.

Leaders from every college we visited observed that previous efforts to improve student success through ATD or other initiatives tended to involve interventions targeting particular student populations or parts of the student experience. These interventions were often developed by small groups of dedicated faculty and staff, and because most faculty and staff were not involved in their development, broad-based adoption was often limited. For example, before joining the AACC Pathways Project, **Cuyahoga Community College** (commonly known as Tri-C) implemented numerous interventions as part of ATD, but most of them benefitted small numbers of students—and because different campuses often tried different approaches, their impact was not always felt college-wide. Moreover, most of the interventions were focused on developmental education and new student onboarding, so their potential to benefit students throughout their time in college was limited. The strong emphasis on developmental education also meant that faculty outside of math and English were generally not involved in the reforms. Leaders at Tri-C and other colleges recognized that to improve success for all students—and to address persistent equity gaps in outcomes for particular student groups—would require much larger, better coordinated efforts to change the student experience from entry to completion.

To undertake whole-college change, leaders engaged a much broader segment of faculty and staff than had been involved in previous initiatives. Every college we visited held college-wide forums and discussions to build recognition of the need to improve student outcomes and persuade members of the college community that

To undertake whole-college change, leaders engaged a much broader segment of faculty and staff than had been involved in previous initiatives.

large-scale changes involving faculty and staff from across the college were necessary to bring about such improvements. At Tri-C, Dr. Alex Johnson said that when he became president in 2013, there were many “pockets of individual excellence” at the college, but a wholesale focus on improving all students’ experiences and outcomes was absent. Because previous reforms were often perceived as directives from senior leadership without a clear overarching strategy, and relatively few faculty and staff were involved in implementing them, faculty in particular showed symptoms of “initiative fatigue.”

To engage the college community in strategic thinking about how to improve student outcomes, Tri-C’s leaders launched an initiative in 2014 called *One Door—Many Options for Success*. In the past, the quality of information, guidance, and supports students received depended too much on which “door” they entered. Some students entered via TRIO Programs or other special programs that provided strong support, but most were left to navigate the college on their own. Dr. Johnson and other college leaders argued that all students, not just those served by special programs, should have a consistently high-quality educational experience. Tri-C held a series of summits where presenters shared data on poverty rates and increasing demand for workers with college degrees in the Cleveland area, the college’s low completion rates compared with other colleges in Ohio and nationally, and the college’s worrisome prospects for future funding under Ohio’s newly enacted performance funding policy. The aim was to build a common understanding that the college needed to make major changes to improve student outcomes and to protect its financial health.

Build a culture of data-informed practice.

At **Prince George’s Community College**, building a culture in which practice is informed by data was a critical step in the journey toward redesigning the student experience. Before the college joined ATD in 2011, many members of the college community questioned the validity of institutional data presented on student outcomes because they did not align with individual beliefs about students’ success or lack thereof. Additionally, staff and faculty members had varied understandings of data definitions.

To improve understanding and use of data across the college, the leadership team started using data more frequently in presentations and discussions with the board of trustees, faculty, and staff. A senior leader at Prince George’s noted that faculty have now become more receptive to data on student outcomes and are asking more sophisticated questions, such as which students are in the denominator of a given statistic and what the time frame is for the analysis. Among the more compelling data college leaders presented were those showing that students were often graduating with more than 80 credits and that most students were in programs that did not clearly lead to a good job or transfer in a major, while other programs had few or no students. Moreover, college leaders presented data showing that most students referred to developmental education

Among the more compelling data college leaders presented were those showing that students were often graduating with more than 80 credits.

were dropping out before they reached college-level courses. These analyses led to several realizations:

- The college needed to reexamine its definition of a “program.”
- The college needed to do more to help all students explore options, choose a direction, and develop a program plan.
- Unless the college reformed its long sequences of developmental education courses, other reforms would not have an impact because many students were not reaching college-level courses.

At **Jackson College**, an important part of building a data-driven culture involved working with the board of trustees to deepen their understanding of student success data. President Daniel Phelan increased the number of yearly board retreats from one to three and began working with the board to focus less on data points (such as enrollment) and lagging indicators of student success (such as degree completion) and more on leading indicators of student success (such as the percentage of students earning six or more college credits in their first semester, the percentage of students completing college-level math and English in their first year, semester-to-semester retention rates, and fall-to-fall retention rates). Dr. Phelan also bolstered board members’ knowledge in areas such as federal accountability policies and financial aid; involved them in national leadership seminars and as attendees at student success conferences; and gave them background information on the guided pathways model and the college’s progress in implementing reforms. Since 2017, the college and its board have been tracking progress toward meeting three persistence and completion goals:

1. 90 percent fall-to-spring retention;
2. 80 percent fall-to-fall retention; and
3. 70 percent completion.

The board receives monthly performance reports on topics such as student persistence, student learning, leadership, and college access. (These reports are also publicly available; see Jackson College, 2019.)

Reorganize decision-making roles and structures to facilitate broad engagement in planning and implementing improvements.

Leaders at all eight colleges revised their organizational structures and created incentives for faculty and staff throughout the institution to participate in and take ownership of student success reforms.

Make student success everyone’s business.

In 2014, Dr. Donald Guy General was hired as **Community College of Philadelphia’s** president. Early in his tenure, he combined the college’s academic affairs and student affairs divisions and created the role of vice president of academic and student success

to oversee the new division. The college's leaders, with support from the board of trustees, wanted to signal that they were "not going to tinker around the edges ... or just develop another program" to improve student success. They also wanted to convey that academics and student affairs were not independent from each other. College leaders began reframing faculty members' role as essential to students' program completion, encouraging them to take responsibility for the success of the students in their programs and support them beyond the classroom walls. More generally, the restructuring was instrumental in facilitating collaboration between departments in ways that would support college-wide reform efforts.

Establish an inclusive leadership structure.

When Dr. Johnson arrived at **Tri-C**, he brought with him the belief that to foster a culture of involvement and adaptability, decision-making should not be top-down but "from the middle." To shift the locus of leadership, he increased his number of direct reports from three to 12 and expanded the president's council to include faculty union and senate leaders and chief administrative officers. He also expanded the college-wide cabinet—a deliberative body that makes recommendations to the president's council and facilitates college-wide communication—to include more deans, department chairs, and program directors. Parallel bodies were established at each of the college's three campuses. Each campus also formed a student success team led by the campus president with representation from all constituent groups, including faculty, counselors and other student services staff, academic administrators, and students.

Moving forward, everyone at the college would have an opportunity to participate in developing strategies for improving student success.

The expansion of the president's council and college-wide cabinet and the development of student success teams signaled that moving forward, everyone at the college would have an opportunity to participate in developing strategies for improving student success. The involvement of faculty leaders in strategic improvement efforts also sent a clear message to faculty that their perspectives were valued and that the college's leadership team was committed to transparency and inclusion. As one college leader observed, before Dr. Johnson's arrival at Tri-C, the relationship between faculty and administrators was not always cooperative, so the president made early efforts to build a strong partnership with Tri-C's faculty. Several of our interviewees noted that Dr. Johnson's actions showed that he valued the college's collaborative decision-making model.

Strengthen leadership for instructional and program improvement.

Two colleges in our study redesigned the role of department chair to focus on institutional and program improvement. Before 2013, department chairs at **San Jacinto College** were appointed for a short time while maintaining a full teaching load. Under the new model, chairs are competitively hired as full-time, permanent faculty. They teach only one course a year (in the summer) and devote the bulk of their time to supporting instructional improvement by observing classes, coaching faculty,

overseeing program reviews, and organizing professional development for full- and part-time faculty. San Jacinto's department chairs were instrumental in engaging faculty in program mapping as part of the college's guided pathways reforms.

At **San Antonio College**, a redesigned program chair role was implemented in fall 2017. Before the redesign, chairs were selected by their peers for a nine-month period during which their teaching load was reduced so that they could carry out departmental administrative duties. Chairs tended to be responsible for either transfer-oriented or career-technical programs. Under the redesign, joint chairs oversee both transfer-oriented and career-technical programs within meta-majors (referred to at the college as the "Alamo institutes") and hold a 12-month position focused not just on administration but also on ensuring program quality and improvement. Prospective chairs are now required to interview with the president for the position. Consequently, the number of chairs was reduced from 21 to 12—but to ease the transition, the new chairs were permitted to keep their faculty status and teach evening or weekend classes. According to one program chair, overseeing both transfer-oriented and career-technical programs was "one of the best decisions made" during San Antonio's guided pathways redesign because it brought faculty and chairs in different programs in closer contact. Previously, faculty in related programs such as American Sign Language and foreign languages typically did not know each other or work together. One joint chair told us, regarding bringing together the college's arts and sciences and career-technical programs, that the reorganization "really has created a synergy. Before the reorganization, it was us and them. Before, we didn't know each other. But once the college developed the joint chairs, we started helping each other."

“

Before the reorganization, it was us and them. Before, we didn't know each other. But once the college developed the joint chairs, we started helping each other.

”

Foster individual accountability for contributing to the college's goals for student success.

Several colleges noted the importance of ensuring that all employees understand their role in achieving the college's vision and goals for student success. **San Jacinto College** instituted a performance management system in 2010 in which all employees set personal key performance indicators (KPIs) directly related to the college's values and goals for student progress and success. Employees meet twice a year with their supervisors to assess their performance against their KPIs. Pay increases and recognition are tied to KPIs, although the system is designed to be formative and developmental, not punitive. San Jacinto has invested heavily in training and professional development to ensure that employees have the support they need to reach their goals. **Jackson College** has a similar incentive system to reward employees for working toward the institution's vision, values, and goals. The system is designed to be consistent with the college's collective bargaining agreements with faculty and other staff.

Similarly, in the 2013–14 academic year, the **Alamo Colleges** adopted the 4DX model (McChesney, Covey, & Huling, 2012) and established annual wildly important goals (WIGs). All college employees have their own KPIs that support the district-wide WIG

of increasing the number of degree and certificates awarded by 10 percent. College leaders said this model has helped build broad ownership for the college's redesign work because everyone started to see that they had the ability to influence the WIG. For example, faculty in biology started to see how student retention in their program could affect their college's overall completion rate, so each faculty member decided to reach out to a certain number of high-risk students each week. One of the keys to the model's success was that everyone had to create their own goals and explain how they contribute to the WIG. For example, across the colleges, advisors set a goal to meet with a certain number of students each day outside of their offices because they noticed that students who visit their offices are usually the ones who need the least attention. As a result, the district created "Advisors on the Go," where advisors meet with students in different buildings across campus. Each college keeps a scoreboard showing how many students are reached each day.

Encourage creativity and experimentation in developing strategies to improve student success.

All of the colleges in our study sought to promote new ideas and approaches in their efforts to devise better ways to serve students with limited resources. In 2012, **Linn-Benton Community College** changed its mission to focus more on goals than on actions. Dr. Greg Hamann, the college's president since 2010, observed that a mission focused on actions dictates behavior, while a mission focused on goals leaves room for more creative approaches. To redefine the college's mission, Dr. Hamann convened a committee of volunteers to form the Wild Thinkers Forum and instructed its members to think as creatively as possible, deferring concerns about practical constraints. Linn-Benton has continued to use this approach to mitigate the tendency of working groups to try to develop the perfect solution before implementing changes.

At **San Jacinto College**, we repeatedly heard from interviewees that they felt supported by college leaders to try new ideas, even if they did not work out. A member of the registrar's office said:

When somebody comes to you and says, "Everything is on the table; there are no barriers to anything," at first it's very uncomfortable. After a while, you begin to have ideas that [are] ... I don't want to say "outside of the box" because that's used so frequently, but you do begin to think about things in a different way when you are not inhibited.

Another staff member said:

The college's leaders don't start with a mandate. They start with a team of people who have open minds and are enthusiastic about student success and say, "Think outside the box. Don't worry about cost. I want your best idea of what will work. We'll get you what you need to make it happen."

A student services dean expressed a similar sentiment:

We have a sense from our administration that they trust us to figure out how to do what we need to do to help students and then to do it. ... We also are given the message that not every idea will pan out, so we're not afraid to fail.

Provide time and support for collaborative planning and professional development.

Colleges used different approaches to providing time and support for faculty and staff to work together creatively. **San Jacinto College** implemented a Monday through Thursday class schedule in 2015 so that faculty and staff—including frontline student services staff—could participate in required “Framework Friday” meetings. Nearly everyone we interviewed at San Jacinto said the weekly meetings, which rotate among the college’s campuses, were among the most powerful means of ongoing communication, learning, and planning about guided pathways. Faculty and advisors have been able to use Framework Fridays to form closer working relationships because they now have the time and a place to collaborate across roles.

San Jacinto College implemented a Monday through Thursday class schedule in 2015 so that faculty and staff—including frontline student services staff—could participate in required “Framework Friday” meetings.

In 2015, **San Antonio College** held its first SAC SCORES event for all faculty, staff, and administrators. The college has since held this daylong event each fall and spring, closing the college so that everyone can participate. SAC SCORES is organized by the division of integrated planning and performance excellence (which includes institutional research, learning assessment, strategic planning, and unit reviews), whose staff members prepare prework work for attendees. The event often includes guest speakers, breakouts by division and department, and discussions about college and individual goals through the 4DX process. It also provides opportunities to distribute and discuss data reports, review and develop learning outcomes assessments, and engage in strategic planning.

How to Introduce Guided Pathways to the College Community

All eight colleges introduced guided pathways through well-orchestrated campaigns that educated faculty and staff about the reform model and encouraged broad involvement in adapting pathways ideas to achieve shared goals for student success.

Make the case for guided pathways by showing how a lack of clear program paths and supports hurts students.

Focus on key data points.

In every case, college leaders presented data to make the case for guided pathways, highlighting the college’s role in contributing to low rates of student success. For example, faculty and administrators from **Linn-Benton Community College** who attended the first AACC Pathways Institute in early 2016 came away with the realization that to ensure guided pathways would be adopted in a meaningful way, it was critical to inform the college community about the nature and scope of the college’s

student success problems. To explain the rationale for adopting guided pathways using institutional data, college leaders hosted forums open to the entire college, where they focused on three simple points:

1. Only 11 percent of students were completing their chosen programs in three years.
2. Less than 30 percent of students were completing their chosen programs even in six years.
3. Financial aid awards, as dictated by the federal government, only cover 150 percent of time to degree. If students take more than three full-time years' worth of credits, they risk depleting funds to continue their education.

To counter the idea that students were mainly responsible for low completion rates, college leaders presented data showing that course pass rates were high, hovering around 83 percent—a credit to students and to strong teaching by faculty. To improve degree completion rates, however, faculty and staff would need to look beyond success in individual courses and identify ways to support students' progress through programs. By sharing a few highly salient data points, Linn-Benton's leaders were able to galvanize the college community to address barriers to student success created by the college's policies and practices.

Demonstrate the excess credit problem.

Upon joining the AACC Pathways Project, leaders at **Tri-C** organized numerous forums to acquaint members of the college with guided pathways. After attending the AACC Pathways Institute on program mapping in spring 2016, the college's faculty union president and colleagues organized a colloquium on guided pathways and made presentations at department meetings and at the college's convocation. At these and other convenings, presenters shared data to illustrate how pathways reforms could benefit students. For example, degree audits showed that some students had earned over 100 credits at Tri-C without earning a degree, and additional analyses demonstrated that graduation rates were higher for students who entered a program of study early in their college careers. These data helped the college community understand that with its focus on helping students explore and enter programs of study early on, guided pathways could help Tri-C graduate more students with fewer excess credits.

Highlight equity implications of student data.

Institutional researchers at **San Jacinto College** also presented data on excess credits at an all-college kickoff event for guided pathways. According to a campus leader, "Something is amiss when students are taking 90 hours even before they transfer. ... That resonated with faculty. ... They realized that having a bunch of electives doesn't help the students transfer." College leaders stressed that taking excess credits can be particularly harmful for students from low-income families because it increases time to completion and therefore increases costs. They also presented data from the college's institutional research (IR) department showing that Black and Hispanic students

Taking excess credits can be particularly harmful for students from low-income families because it increases time to completion and therefore increases costs.

were more likely to enroll in technical programs, whereas White and Asian students tended to enroll in transfer-oriented programs. College personnel were challenged to ask themselves whether the institution contributes to racial/ethnic minority students being tracked into programs with lower returns.

At **Community College of Philadelphia**, there was a broad consensus that change was necessary due to graduation rates that were well below the national average for community colleges, but even more compelling were data showing that success rates for the college's Black male students were far below those of other students. This gap in outcomes was especially troubling in a city where over a quarter of families are living in poverty. As one administrator explained, "any way you sliced the data, these gaps remained." The release of a Pew Center report that highlighted lower-than-average rates of degree completion and transfer to four-year colleges (Ginsberg, 2015) prompted members of the college community to begin having deeper and more frequent conversations about equity. The college's vice president for academic and student success articulated the consensus that faculty, staff, and administrators came to as a result of these conversations: "We can't afford to lose another generation of students." This consensus marked the beginning of the college's shift away from boutique programs designed to help small numbers of students and toward large-scale reform geared at improving outcomes for all students.

“

We can't afford to lose another generation of students.

”

Communicate a guiding vision for the reforms.

Leaders at all the colleges we visited communicated a clear and succinct vision for why the college community should commit time and resources to implementing guided pathways. **Wallace State's** president, Dr. Vicki Karolewics, described the case for institutional transformation as follows:

Every student who comes here has a goal. If we fail any of those, then we have not done our job. ... As long as we have not yet done everything that we know we need to do or must do to help every student succeed, we will always be striving to do better, by whatever means.

At **Community College of Philadelphia**, to build on the college's ongoing student success work and move it forward in the guided pathways model, senior leaders explained why the college was adopting guided pathways and how it would be more effective than past reforms. To begin, they indicated that guided pathways would be more than an effort to improve specific college programs and practices—it would require faculty and staff in all areas of the college to ask, "What are we going to do differently, and how are we going to do better for students?" College leaders capitalized on faculty and staff members' awareness of the challenges facing students and emphasized that the redesign was about finding ways to help more students reach their goals. They also sought to reframe the longstanding idea that students are in either academic or career-technical programs, instead describing the college community's work as clarifying paths for students to reach their goals.

At **Prince George's Community College**, one senior leader explained, “I—and others—didn’t get into higher education so that less than half of our students can meet their goals.” To engage the college in improving student outcomes, leaders knew they needed to communicate how current efforts were falling short and how guided pathways could strengthen the college’s student success work. They reiterated that the college needs to meet students where they are and address whatever barriers they have—a particularly important message, given the changing demographics of the college and its primary service area. Over the last 15 or so years, the proportion of students of color at the college increased to about 90 percent. Meanwhile, nearly half of full-time faculty members teaching credit-bearing courses are White. Thus, the college was conscientious about ensuring that its guided pathways work was supporting its diversity goals and contributing to economic equity in its service area. Senior leaders also explained that boutique interventions—even successful ones—would not help the college meet its student success goals. In a college of nearly 40,000 students, systemic change was necessary to achieve widespread improvements in outcomes.

“

**I—and others—
didn’t get into
higher education
so that less
than half of our
students can meet
their goals.**

”

A key idea that emerged from the early meetings of **San Jacinto’s** pathways steering group was that “a student should never fail because of a barrier we overlooked or unintentionally created.” Several people we interviewed reported that breaking down barriers to success became a touchstone for all pathways work at the college. Similarly, at the **Alamo Colleges**, senior leaders acknowledged community members’ dedication to helping students but pointed out that when students transfer with credits that do not count toward a bachelor’s degree, the college is not succeeding at its purpose. Showing faculty and staff the costs to students of taking courses that do not apply to degrees, as well as data on which degrees did not lead to living-wage jobs, catalyzed faculty members’ participation in developing program maps. In describing the colleges’ motivation for undertaking guided pathways reforms, one senior leader told us, “We have a moral imperative to do what’s right for students.”

Cultivate a shared understanding of guided pathways through college-wide in-person meetings and virtual communication.

Leaders at all eight colleges organized a series of forums and professional development activities to educate faculty and staff about the guided pathways model and its benefits. These forums and activities created opportunities for faculty and staff to discuss their concerns about guided pathways and ask questions of senior leaders. For example, at **Wallace State**, despite a growing awareness of the need for institutional transformation, when the guided pathways model was first introduced, some faculty and staff had concerns about it being “just another initiative.” Some were also concerned that overly structured programs would limit student choice, or that certain courses would be eliminated. College leaders addressed these concerns through

college-wide professional development days and faculty-led workshops that clarified the purpose and promise of guided pathways. College leaders included faculty in initial conversations about adopting guided pathways, on teams attending AACC Pathways Institutes, and on college committees. As more people at Wallace State learned about the model, senior leaders began to step back and encourage faculty members to teach their colleagues about guided pathways. For example, in one workshop, a faculty member who had attended one of the AACC Pathways Institutes led a discussion of the *Guided Pathways Demystified* report (Johnstone, 2015). Because faculty contributed to the early development of the reforms at Wallace State, the college's discussions about guided pathways addressed critical questions about the implications for teaching and learning. Many of our interviewees credited these professional development activities with encouraging a shared understanding of the guided pathways model and responsibility for student success.

At **Community College of Philadelphia**, to help introduce guided pathways to the college, senior leaders held multiple meetings with deans and faculty to review retention and graduation data and reiterate the need for college-wide change. The vice president of academic and student success led the creation of a dedicated space on the college's website with information on guided pathways and updates from the president and vice president of the college (Community College of Philadelphia, n.d.). College leaders also made pathways the focus of summer faculty institutes; encouraged departments to participate in book club discussions about *Redesigning America's Community Colleges* (Bailey et al., 2015); and asked members of the Faculty Center for Teaching and Learning to lead briefings on guided pathways, which engaged dozens of adjunct faculty members in discussion.

Allow time for reflection and deliberation.

At many colleges, but especially at those with strong faculty representation, leaders took steps to reassure the college community that changes would be made gradually and that faculty and staff would have a say and a role in the redesign process. For example, while senior leaders at **Linn-Benton Community College** recognized the urgency for change, they understood that institution-wide reforms could not be rushed or forced. The first year of the college's transformation process primarily consisted of deliberation and creative discussions among faculty and staff about what guided pathways would look like at Linn-Benton, what reforms to adopt, and how to implement the desired changes. College leaders acknowledged that this stage of Linn-Benton's reforms probably looked slow and messy, with "little progress on paper," but allowing time for deliberation early in the reform process was critical in minimizing internal battles and reducing the propensity for the college community to view potential reforms as a threat.

Allowing time for deliberation early in the reform process was critical in minimizing internal battles and reducing the propensity for the college community to view potential reforms as a threat.

Especially important were the discussions that took place among faculty about the significance of the proposed reforms. When Linn-Benton joined the AACC Pathways Project, its president noted that though there was not uniform faculty support, faculty

leaders, including the president of the faculty senate, were supportive. College leaders invited different faculty members to each AACC Pathways Institute and were careful to include both skeptics and proponents of the reforms. After two years, more faculty members had been encouraged by their colleagues to engage with the reforms than would have been possible if administrators had tried to do this alone.

Present guided pathways as a framework for aligning and enhancing existing student success efforts.

One message we heard from leaders at the colleges we visited is that it is critical that guided pathways not be viewed as another “flavor of the month” reform that will be discarded when the next new idea comes along or current leaders move on. At **Tri-C**, rather than portray guided pathways as a new strategic initiative, college leaders talked about it as a framework for enhancing and connecting ongoing reforms. **Linn-Benton’s** leaders sought to ensure that guided pathways was not viewed as a project but as a cultural transformation, emphasizing the importance of shifting from a “student-interested” approach to one that was student-centered.

Dr. Karolewics described guided pathways as the “glue” for the college’s student success efforts.

At **Wallace State**, Dr. Karolewics described guided pathways as the “glue” for the college’s student success efforts and as a tool for organizing efforts and mobilizing constituents around shared goals. When Wallace State joined the AACC Pathways Project, its leaders created a 30-member pathways team to lead planning and program mapping efforts. However, they respected the expertise and dedication of the college’s existing working groups (e.g., a cross-functional group working to identify “loss points” in student progression and groups focused on developmental education and learning communities), so they maintained each group’s membership, meetings, and activities alongside and in coordination with the pathways team’s work.

How to Support Collaborative Planning and Implementation

Although the specifics differ, leaders at the eight colleges all used similar strategies for managing the design and implementation of guided pathways on their campuses.

Support cross-functional leadership and collaboration to plan and implement pathways.

Top administrators at all eight colleges organized the work of designing and implementing guided pathways reforms in ways that promote cross-functional leadership and collaboration. The committees and councils each college formed to oversee and carry out the work were generally representative of faculty and staff from across departments and divisions.

Every college assigned individuals to head its guided pathways redesign efforts, in most cases appointing co-leads from different parts of the college. The pathways steering group at **San Jacinto** was co-led by a faculty member and a student services staff member. **Tri-C** appointed a faculty member, a student services administrator, and a campus president to co-lead its guided pathways efforts.

Moreover, every college created well-managed, cross-functional teams to design and implement reforms to programs, processes, and systems according to pathways principles. The teams were designed to be broadly representative and bring together individuals who typically do not work with one another, including faculty in career-technical and liberal arts programs; faculty in credit and noncredit programs; student services staff in advising and admissions; staff from the registrar's office, financial aid, and career services; and staff in key support functions, such as information technology, human resources, and marketing. Some colleges also included students on their teams.

Bringing together many perspectives in this way typically makes for better solutions. It also promotes widespread use of reforms because when people are involved in their design, they feel a sense of ownership. According to **Tri-C**'s chief information officer (CIO), when designing a new system:

It is very important to get lots of input from potential users. . . . If you roll out a major system or process change and people don't understand what it is intended to do or where it came from, it won't be successful. . . . When everyone is at the table and everyone has a voice in [the design], then everyone wants it to succeed.

As a five-college district adopting guided pathways reforms, the **Alamo Colleges** created several within-college and cross-district groups to work on planning, implementing, and communicating about pathways. The pathways leadership council is a district-level committee started in 2017 that includes vice presidents, deans, and directors from across the five colleges. The group meets once a month to share practices and challenges related to pathways, discuss implementation progress, and ensure that there are no silos between colleges. The leadership of the group rotates so that deans from different colleges all have an opportunity to lead. Participating in the group has also provided opportunities for deans to extend their work outside of their respective colleges by contributing to system-wide change efforts.

Other Alamo guided pathways committees are organized by meta-major (or "Alamo institute") and meet within each college and across the district. Membership in these committees varies across campuses but generally includes leaders from academic programs and advising teams, advisors embedded within meta-majors, and faculty. These committees facilitate communication between advising leads, deans, and student services staff and help keep them up to date, as one vice president explained:

Because we are part of a district system, we try to have continuity across colleges while allowing for colleges to do things differently. The institute committees, which meet every week, and the institute leads function as conduits of information regarding curriculum changes, changes from the district.

Prince George's Community College developed a project planning structure to organize its initial pathways work with groups at three levels: the pathways core team, the pathways steering committee, and “think tanks” and working groups. As the college moved from planning to implementation, the project planning structure and team makeup have shifted to support the work. The pathways core team—which mainly includes senior leaders and deans—serves as an executive committee and provides leadership to the other groups. This team meets weekly to develop a work plan and a communication strategy for guided pathways; it is also responsible for making final decisions about new practices and recommendations from the working groups and think tanks. The steering committee (now dissolved) included leads from each working group who were responsible for communicating pathways-related decisions and information back to the departments or divisions they represented. Finally, the college had about a dozen think tanks and another dozen working groups, whose number and function have evolved as implementation has progressed. Think tanks, tasked with thinking creatively and developing innovative pathways practices, focus on the student experience, including new student onboarding and advising. The working groups, meanwhile, are permanent subcommittees representing areas such as communications and marketing, advising, and finance. Their purpose is to plan and discuss how pathways practices could be implemented and how they would affect their respective areas and then to carry out aspects of implementation.

Engage faculty and staff from across divisions in mapping program pathways to good jobs and transfer in a major.

Every college formed teams of faculty, advisors, and other staff to organize programs into broad, career-oriented meta-majors and to map program pathways to employment in a family-supporting job or transfer with junior standing in a major, laying out course sequences, learning outcomes, and other program requirements.

Wallace State's program mapping process engaged faculty, advisors, and student services staff in redesigning curricula across disciplines. To inform program mapping teams' selection of recommended electives, the college brought together a wide-ranging group of full-time and adjunct faculty, staff, and administrators at its 2017 humanities and fine arts summit, where faculty in those fields explained how the skills and knowledge taught in specific humanities and fine arts courses relate to Wallace State's meta-majors. After hearing these explanations, program mapping teams came to think of electives for program students not in terms of “getting general education courses out of the way” but as essential to disciplinary learning.

In the past, there was little crossover between the liberal arts and career-technical divisions at **Linn-Benton Community College**. However, collaboration between division deans to design meta-majors, along with discussions about what the first term of courses should look like for students in career-technical and liberal arts programs, led to productive reconsiderations of how core courses could support students' development as a “total person.” Students in different programs now collaborate on cross-curricular

Collaboration between division deans to design meta-majors led to productive reconsiderations of how core courses could support students' development as a “total person.”

learning activities on campus. For example, students in art and welding programs collaborated to make a public sculpture for the college, with the art students developing the design and the welding students leading the construction efforts.

The **Alamo Colleges** are building program maps with an emphasis on connecting transfer and career opportunities by organizing both career-technical and transfer-oriented programs within meta-majors, including career information in transfer advising guides, and involving both employers and university program representatives on meta-major advisory committees. The colleges are also working with local universities through a university compact to increase the number of community college students who earn bachelor's degrees in nursing, education, advanced manufacturing, and other fields of economic importance in the region. The advisory committees for each of Alamo's meta-majors hold "signature events" where programs and students are showcased for employer and university representatives.

Prince George's Community College

went through a curricular redesign process before it even started mapping programs. The impetus for the work was ensuring that every program was "relevant to 21st-century workforce needs" and that transfer-oriented programs were well aligned with baccalaureate programs at four-year transfer partners. As part of the redesign, college deans and department chairs developed a rubric for assessing academic programs. Program teams looked at enrollments and graduation rates for the previous five years and compared them with those of other programs at the college. They then evaluated the "need for each program" by examining expected growth in related occupations. Because this process was often difficult for program faculty, college leaders encouraged teams to focus on two questions: "What serves the students best?" and "What serves the community best?" A rubric was developed to help faculty determine whether to keep particular programs, merge them with other programs, or eliminate them. By the end of the process, the college had reduced its programs from 160 to 80.

Program Mapping 101

Program mapping is an important guided pathways process, but its purpose can easily be misunderstood. In a typical mapping process, program faculty and advisors outline the optimal course sequences in consultation with university transfer partners, employers in relevant fields, advisory boards, and partner organizations. The goal is not to dictate student course-taking but rather to provide expert guidance on the most applicable courses for each program and their optimal sequencing. Ideally, program maps not only lay out the courses in a major but also include experiential learning opportunities, key milestones, and semester-by-semester action steps for students, preparing them for direct entry into program-relevant, well-paying jobs (with clear opportunities for further education) or transfer with junior standing in their field of interest. Importantly, as many colleges have learned, program mapping clarifies and supports educational planning processes. Every student creates an individualized educational plan—a customized version of the program maps—that accounts for the student's timeline to completion, prior credits, learning support needs, and elective choices.

Ask staff and faculty to map the entire student experience—both the status quo and what it should be.

Just as they mapped programs to uncover curricular barriers to student success, most of the colleges we visited engaged faculty and staff in mapping the student experience to identify noncurricular barriers to persistence and completion and redesigning student supports to facilitate students' progress in their programs.

The human resources department at **San Jacinto College** led a team of nearly 40 individuals in process-mapping the entire student experience outside of the classroom. Team members included faculty, department chairs, and deans, as well as staff from admissions, financial aid, orientation, counseling, the registrar's office, and the library. The team used flowcharts to map students' path through the institution from the first point of contact to graduation, aiming to uncover barriers students encounter along the way. In addition to process-mapping the student experience and the college's existing processes for serving students, the team laid out how college services should ideally be designed to enhance students' connection with the college and their programs. Members of the process-mapping team indicated that their findings highlighted the ripple effects of poorly designed or inconsistently applied policies, processes, and systems. In the past, San Jacinto's three campuses often approached the same functions differently, so when students moved from one campus to another, they were often confused and frustrated by inconsistent practices. The director of institutional research and effectiveness said, "When we took a more collaborative, holistic perspective on student success, we recognized that we create barriers because we work in silos."



When we took a more collaborative, holistic perspective on student success, we recognized that we create barriers because we work in silos.



Jackson College also mapped out several stages of the new student experience: showing an interest, applying, attending new student orientation, registering, paying for college, starting the semester, attending and participating in classes, and getting ready for the next semester. For each stage, faculty and staff mapped out what students experience and do and identified who from the college is in contact with them. They also noted challenges or barriers students might encounter and when students tend to give up and leave the college. As a result of this mapping process, Jackson College completely redesigned its new student experience. Now, all new students receive a call from their "navigator" (an academic advisor) before they enroll to discuss their academic history and their college and career plans. In a redesigned new student orientation, students are required to meet with their navigator one-on-one for an hour to build a rapport, confirm their initial program choice, and create a first-term schedule.

New students at Jackson College are also required to take a three-credit course designed to help them develop the skills to take charge of their academic and career success. All students in the course attend "Pathways Showcase Day," an event where they can meet faculty and learn more about academic programs and career options in their meta-major. As a capstone assignment in the course, students develop an educational plan, which they review with their navigator near the end of the term before they sign up for courses for the next term. Staff and students then use this plan to monitor their progress.

Identify and support change leaders throughout the college.

Even though the guided pathways model is widely understood as a whole-college reform, some roles receive more attention than others in discussions about the reform. For example, college presidents and vice presidents often have a highly visible influence over the message and direction of the reform. However, as we learned from the colleges we visited, it is important to identify reform leaders from across the college, including deans; faculty members; advisors and counselors; and business office, IR, and information technology (IT) staff.

Identify faculty champions and let them teach and lead.

At every college we visited, faculty members led key aspects of the redesign process. At the **Alamo Colleges**, one vice president said that the “one essential thing is having faculty champions lead conversations about pathways.” Another Alamo vice president described how once faculty learned how many credits students were accumulating and how confusing the transfer process was, they began actively mapping programs and developing action plans for high-risk courses that went into effect if students’ grades dropped below 70 percent. Since faculty began redesigning programs and working closely with academic advisors to help students develop educational plans, the average number of credits associate degree graduates accumulate has dropped from 92 to 82.

“

One essential thing is having faculty champions lead conversations about pathways.

”

Reimagine deans as transformational leaders for program redesign in their field.

All of the colleges we visited recognized the critical importance of deans and department chairs in supporting the work of faculty and staff in redesigning the college, and some of them modified deans’ roles to enable them to be more effective under guided pathways. For example, at the **Alamo Colleges**, the academic dean role was redesigned to align with the colleges’ meta-majors. Previously, deans oversaw either transfer-oriented programs or career-technical programs. But the creation of district-wide meta-majors brought transfer-oriented and career-technical programs together in six areas: creative and communication arts, business and entrepreneurship, health and biosciences, advanced manufacturing and logistics, public service, and science and technology. At San Antonio College (which only offers five of the six meta-majors), leaders determined how many full- and part-time faculty and staff were in each and how many degree programs were part of each meta-major to determine which each dean would oversee. Now, one dean oversees two meta-majors (creative and communication arts and science and technology) and the other dean oversees three (health and biosciences, business and entrepreneurship, and public service). A third dean oversees “academic services,” which include cocurricular and extracurricular activities, distance education, learning resources, faculty mentoring, grants, instructional innovation, student learning centers, an honors academy, and several other departments. At Palo Alto College, meta-majors are divided between three deans, who also serve on the college’s institute committees and the district-wide pathways leadership council. The three deans meet weekly with the newly appointed joint chairs

(who oversee transfer-oriented and career-technical programs within meta-majors), a process that has facilitated cross-college collaboration and communication.

Leverage the power of IR and IT.

Leaders overseeing IT and IR staff are also crucial to guided pathways reforms, but their importance is often overlooked. At **Community College of Philadelphia**, the CIO was a critical behind-the-scenes pathways leader. With an interest in using technology to support the college's initiatives and knowledge of the academic side of the college from experience as a faculty member, she approached the college's guided pathways work from a systems perspective. This entails giving serious thought to the architecture of the IT system; logically implementing new systems to support the college's pathways work; and integrating educational plans, degree audits, and other new applications. Moreover, the CIO recognized that members of her department needed to understand guided pathways so that they could see how IT processes and structures contribute integrally to the reforms. To facilitate their learning, she gave staff a one-page document on the goals of the college's guided pathways reforms, and then she quizzed them on the content. The CIO believes that developers need to understand the "why" behind the early alerts triggered when an allied health student, for example, steps off a pre-established educational plan. Further, because keeping curricula up to date throughout the college's systems often requires significant IT department involvement, she participates in the college's curriculum review committee.

The CIO believes that developers need to understand the "why" behind the early alerts triggered when an allied health student, for example, steps off a pre-established educational plan.

Tri-C's CIO was a critical member of the team that developed OneRecord, a system that centralizes student information and staff notes about interactions with students. The system was designed to facilitate information continuity for student points of contact, eliminating the need for students to tell their story to multiple staff members and thereby freeing up time for faculty and staff to offer in-depth, personalized advice. The CIO's staff conducted many training sessions with staff to support them throughout the transition to OneRecord. As the CIO explained, technology staff needed to be involved in pathways planning from the outset because "technology will not fix a broken process." The IT team helped to map out ideal student processes on a whiteboard and from there developed systems to support students along their path through the college.

Finally, research staff in the Office of Data and Decision Support at **Linn-Benton Community College** have been instrumental in working with departments and academic divisions on campus to use data to support decision-making. One researcher told us that for many years, people at the college were afraid of data and reluctant to work with the office. In response, researchers spent several years working to make the office more improvement-oriented and less reactive, or as one researcher described it, "too late to be helpful." Linn-Benton's research staff embarked on a public relations campaign to foster broader acceptance and awareness of student data. Additionally, one of the college's three researchers is on each of its innovation councils—working groups tasked with thinking creatively to develop new approaches to student success—to ensure that the councils have access to up-to-date student data and other information pertinent to their work.

How to Sustain and Institutionalize Student Success Reforms

All of the eight colleges we visited have made substantial changes to programs, practices, and systems within a short timeframe. The challenge for these institutions now is to sustain a high level of innovation in the face of leadership and staff turnover; the uncertain policy and fiscal environment facing community colleges; and, frankly, exhaustion among faculty and staff who have worked hard to implement big changes with limited resources. When we asked leaders at these colleges how they intended to sustain the innovation they had started, they mentioned several strategies.

Take time to celebrate wins, reflect on progress, and plan next steps.

In our interviews, we observed that faculty and staff often did not recognize how substantial the changes they have implemented are. But in both their practices and their attitudes, these colleges have made significant progress.

The guided pathways reforms at these colleges have changed the way faculty and staff approach helping students succeed. For example, the coordinator of curriculum development at **Community College of Philadelphia** said that conversations about learning outcomes for general education courses and meta-majors were revitalized through the college's reform efforts because they were no longer viewed as just "a box to check." Instead, learning outcomes were recognized as a meaningful articulation of the core competencies students need to develop in their field. At **San Jacinto College**, a career-technical instructor said that she had been at the college for nine years but did not know how to advise her students until recently; being able to access students' personalized educational plans through DegreeWorks has helped her better support them. She told us, "Now that I can 'GPS' my students, I can much better advise them." This instructor also indicated that as a result of the college's increased focus on preparing students for careers, she and her colleagues now conduct mock interviews with students and otherwise integrate soft skills that employers look for into their classes.

The guided pathways reforms at these colleges have changed the way faculty and staff approach helping students succeed.

At all colleges, faculty and advisors attested to greater collaboration to support students between members of academic departments and student services. At **San Jacinto**, faculty and advisors said their involvement in cross-college working groups and regular meetings at different campuses have increased partnership, trust, and understanding across the college. One faculty member said that the college has begun to involve students in improving practice because its program mapping, process-mapping, and other working groups included students. She wondered, "Why haven't we been doing this all along?" Another staff member said, "Pathways has helped us see how interconnected we are." For example, the financial aid office convinced faculty of the need to take attendance to keep better track of students who have taken out loans

and identify those who may be at risk for default. This newly shared understanding has enabled the college to lower student default rates.

At **Wallace State**, faculty and advisors have been able to learn from one another by working more closely together—for example, with faculty members shadowing advisors and advisors getting regular briefings from faculty on program changes. Additionally, both groups learned more about how Wallace State’s programs connect to programs at four-year colleges through Wallace State’s transfer summit, which brought them together with faculty and staff from four-year transfer destinations. As a result of these types of cross-functional collaborations, advisors and faculty are now able to have more informed conversations with students about their goals and decisions, engage in enhanced career advising, and better facilitate referrals across different areas of expertise.

Attitudinal and behavioral changes among faculty and staff seem to have affected students, too. At **San Jacinto**, advisors noted that students have become more aware of the importance of planning, are putting more thought into choosing programs and courses, and are beginning to take more initiative and personal responsibility. One advisor said:

After pathways, they come to me and ask, “Will this class transfer for my degree?” ... They have become more aware of the implications for money and time of choosing the right courses. ... Slowly but surely, some of them are realizing that “I can’t be here for four-and-a-half years [before earning an associate degree].”

A faculty member confirmed, “Students now see that there is a reason for taking my class: ‘I need this class to move through my pathway.’”

Bringing about these changes has shifted attitudes among college community members about their potential to make big improvements. According to a senior leader at **Community College of Philadelphia**, the college’s guided pathways work has “fueled people to say, ‘Wow, look what’s possible.’”

Leaders at the eight colleges recognize the importance of taking time to reflect on and celebrate their accomplishments and regroup before taking their reforms to the next level. At **Wallace State’s** fall 2018 convocation, Dr. Karolewics reviewed the college’s successes, presented encouraging new student success data, and communicated the need for a “year of reflection.” Because many at the college had been working hard to continuously improve their practice for a long time, the president viewed this reflective pause as essential. She encouraged faculty and staff to “go back to the basics”—to step back, take stock, and ensure that the most important institutional changes are being carried out consistently and that everyone feels comfortable with their work. When we visited Wallace State, she was hoping to facilitate campus-wide reflection by meeting with faculty and staff informally and providing opportunities for people to connect and debrief. At these gatherings, she planned to collect insights from the community to inform future changes. As the year of reflection came to a close this spring, college leaders were encouraged by faculty and staff’s acceptance of and involvement in operationalizing guided pathways through improvements in curricula, institutional processes and policies, and practice.

“

Pathways has helped us see how interconnected we are.

”

Reallocate and align resources to help scale and sustain effective practices.

Implementing guided pathways reforms involves substantial costs. Given their limited resources, the colleges have had to reallocate funding to support the reforms. For example, the reforms **San Jacinto College** has implemented under guided pathways have required substantial investments in hiring new educational planners, upgrading the college's DegreeWorks educational planning software, training faculty and staff as needed to support redesign work and learning for new roles, and paying part-time instructors to participate in professional development activities. To cover these expenses, college leaders have reallocated funds from activities determined to be less critical to student success. Two years ago, for example, the college's board disbanded four of its six sports teams, resulting in substantial savings that were reallocated to better support the entire student population.

To ensure that all students would receive advising throughout their time at college, **Linn-Benton Community College** streamlined its advising processes and hired additional advisors, but it also further distributed advising responsibilities across other existing staff members. At intake, students register for their first term of classes with the help of student ambassadors and enrollment specialists, who are temporarily brought over from other units and divisions and trained on the college's curriculum and registration processes. After onboarding, students are assigned to a "meta-advisor" connected to their meta-major who helps them explore the field and choose a major within it. When students are confident in their choice of major, they are transitioned to a faculty advisor, who provides program, transfer, and career planning advisement specific to students' programs. Linn-Benton's collaborative approach to advising redesign, with different staff and faculty responsible for advising at different points in the student journey, allowed the college to reduce its student-advisor ratio by half while increasing the robustness of advising support for all students.

Linn-Benton's collaborative approach to advising redesign allowed the college to reduce its student-advisor ratio by half while increasing the robustness of advising support for all students.

Ensure that employee hiring, onboarding, and promotion practices support a culture focused on improving success for all students.

Colleges are now using several strategies to ensure that new employees are oriented to the guided pathways approach and that returning employees are more focused on supporting student success. Several colleges, including **Prince George's Community College** and **San Antonio College**, added knowledge of or experience with guided pathways into descriptions for new positions. **San Jacinto College** and **Jackson College** revamped their hiring processes to make commitment to supporting students' program completion and success a key criterion. New faculty at San Jacinto go through a weeklong orientation and then meet once a week for a year, with student success the primary focus of all new faculty professional development. Similarly, **Linn-Benton Community College** is working to solidify cultural changes, such as its strengthened

commitment to advising. To sustain this shift into future generations of staff, the college has instituted a new hiring criterion: New faculty must understand the importance of student advising to support completion and agree to participate in advising. Additionally, onboarding for new faculty at **Wallace State Community College** and **Community College of Philadelphia** involves training on pathways and how to be an effective academic advisor (as both colleges still largely depend on faculty advisors).

Reflections on the Timeline for Implementing Guided Pathways Reforms

In the 2018 publication *What We Are Learning About Guided Pathways* (Jenkins, Lahr, Fink, & Ganga), we presented an idealized timeline for implementing pathways reforms. It was based on the relatively small number of colleges nationally that had implemented guided pathways on a substantial scale as of fall 2017.

Our research on eight AACC Pathways colleges, all of which were far along with their reforms, as well as on others throughout the country has deepened our understanding of the process of implementing pathways. In each of the case studies that accompany this report, we include a timeline of the major activities undertaken by the given college to plan and implement guided pathways. Based on these college-specific timelines, we developed the summary timeline presented on pages 8 and 9 of this report.

Our earlier timeline is accurate in the sense that it takes a long time to implement guided pathways. But one thing that became even clearer from our visits to the eight colleges in the current study is how long it takes to lay the groundwork for pathways. **San Jacinto College** started working on institutional transformation for student success in 2009, with the appointment of its current president. The other colleges had been working on major reforms for at least three years before getting involved in the AACC Pathways Project. In fact, these colleges were selected to participate in the AACC Pathways Project not because they had necessarily begun to implement pathways but because they had taken steps like those described in this report to lay the groundwork for whole-college reform.

Our earlier timeline also suggested that implementing guided pathways is more or less a linear process consisting of a sequence of steps, such as introducing the reform, mapping programs, and redesigning student intake and advising. In reality, the process is not linear for most colleges. Some, such as **Community College of Philadelphia** and the **Alamo Colleges**, started with advising redesign and later moved to program mapping. Others, such as **Tri-C**, laid the groundwork for guided pathways by redesigning their new student onboarding and academic planning processes and supporting systems and then used guided pathways to refine those processes and systems to focus on helping students explore, choose, plan, and complete programs.

Further, as is evident from our updated implementation timeline, each phase continues throughout the life of the reform—including introducing pathways to the college, a process that needs to be ongoing. For example, **Prince George's Community College**

had a robust communication strategy around the launch of guided pathways, with its president and other senior leaders meeting with a wide range of constituency groups to discuss the reforms. However, as one mid-level manager pointed out, it is difficult to sustain a high level of communication once the college community is occupied with implementing reforms of this scale. To help sustain communication, the college's president sends a weekly message to the college community that always includes an update on guided pathways, including efforts in progress, small wins, lessons learned, and congratulations to faculty and staff for a job well done.

At **Wallace State Community College**, the college-wide professional development days, faculty-led workshops, and other guided pathways discussions that initially clarified the purpose and promise of guided pathways have continued well beyond the reforms' introduction. The college continues to hold summits and workshops on guided pathways to ensure all staff and faculty have a clear understanding of the reform model and to communicate how evolving efforts are contributing to comprehensive student support.

Similarly, at all eight colleges, program mapping continues as faculty and staff review and improve existing programs and develop new ones. The colleges have also continued to map the student experience to inform further redesign of student services and supporting business and information systems. And while leaders at some colleges find it essential to pause and reflect on what they have accomplished, all are working to make guided pathways practices part of the way the college does business.

Conclusion

The colleges in this study have all succeeded in implementing major changes in practice following the guided pathways model. Their experiences with managing such large-scale reforms offer lessons for other colleges seeking to transform how students enter, move through, and complete programs of study.

As the examples in this report and the accompanying case studies demonstrate, whole-college change requires leadership from all levels of the organization, from presidents and vice presidents to deans, chairs, faculty, advisors, and other staff. Moreover, a key component of leadership is understanding and acknowledging the institution's role in creating and maintaining barriers to student success—and then generating the will and energy to change longstanding practices and policies in ways that help students choose and complete programs that will enable them to achieve their goals for employment and further education.

Whole-college change requires leadership from all levels of the organization, from presidents and vice presidents to deans, chairs, faculty, advisors, and other staff.

The colleges profiled in this study are at the leading edge of guided pathways reforms and have made remarkable changes in their approaches to student success despite limited resources and many other pressures. What is more, they are continuing to rethink their practices to further improve success for all students and achieve greater equity in outcomes. We expect they will therefore have even more to teach us about leading whole-college reforms to support student success in the future.

References

- Bailey, T. R., Jaggars, S. S., & Jenkins, D. (2015). *Redesigning America's community colleges: A clearer path to student success*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Community College of Philadelphia. (n.d.). Guided pathways: The city's college: Impact 2025. Retrieved from <https://www.ccp.edu/guided-pathways>
- Ginsberg, T. (2015). *Assessing Community College of Philadelphia: Student outcomes and improvement strategies*. Philadelphia, PA: Pew Charitable Trusts.
- Jackson College. (2019). Performance monitoring. Retrieved from <https://www.jccmi.edu/institutional-research/performance-monitoring/>
- Jenkins, D., Lahr, H., & Fink, J. (2017). *Implementing guided pathways: Early insights from the AACCC Pathways colleges*. New York, NY: Columbia University, Teachers College, Community College Research Center.
- Jenkins, D., Lahr, H., Fink, J., & Ganga, E. (2018). *What we are learning about guided pathways*. New York, NY: Columbia University, Teachers College, Community College Research Center.
- Johnstone, R. (2015). *Guided pathways demystified: Exploring ten commonly asked questions about implementing pathways*. Retrieved from <http://ncii-improve.com/wp-content/uploads/2017/06/PWs-Demystified-Johnstone-111615.pdf>
- Kotter International. (n.d.). 8-step process. Retrieved from <https://www.kotterinc.com/8-steps-process-for-leading-change/>
- McChesney, C., Covey, S., & Huling, J. (2012). *The 4 disciplines of execution: Achieving your wildly important goals*. New York, NY: Free Press.

CCRC COMMUNITY COLLEGE
RESEARCH CENTER

TEACHERS COLLEGE, COLUMBIA UNIVERSITY

Community College Research Center

Teachers College, Columbia University

525 West 120th Street, Box 174

New York, New York 10027

212.678.3091

ccrc@columbia.edu

[@CommunityCCRC](https://twitter.com/CommunityCCRC)

ccrc.tc.columbia.edu