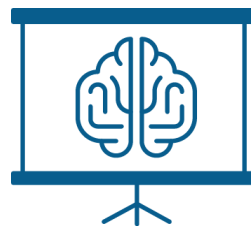


DEFINING STUDENT SUCCESS



THE ASPEN INSTITUTE
COLLEGE EXCELLENCE PROGRAM

LEADING FOR COMMUNITY COLLEGE EXCELLENCE: CURRICULAR RESOURCES

FACILITATOR'S GUIDE

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OVERVIEW



In recent years, community colleges have been called upon to improve student outcomes, and many sitting community college presidents and other leaders today embrace the concept of prioritizing student success. When they consider student success, most of these leaders focus on increasing degree and certificate completion rates. But many also recognize the limitations of using completion as the only outcome goal.

For this reason, new definitions of student success are emerging that combine a focus on graduation rates with other student outcome goals. Concerns about maintaining broad access for traditionally underserved populations are reflected in enrollment, retention, and graduation goals for students of color or those from low-income backgrounds. Conversations about what happens to students after they graduate have led some community colleges to track transfer and bachelor's degree attainment as well as employment and earning rates among students who have completed. *In short, "student success" is not a self-defining term (although we sometimes act as though it is).* To advance student outcomes, community college leaders need to develop a strong understanding of what student success means to them and how they can assess institutional progress against that definition.

This module provides a foundation for defining community college excellence in terms of student success. One of the most important roles for a community college president is to ensure that an institution embraces and works consistently toward a clear vision that includes successful student outcomes. The readings and activities in this module offer participants an opportunity to reflect upon and begin developing that vision, and to consider how to build urgency around a strategic vision and goals.

LEARNING OBJECTIVES & OUTCOMES

After completing this module, participants will be able to:

- Describe the historical and contemporary evolution of the goals of community colleges.
- Examine the Aspen Institute’s definition of student success as equity, labor market learning, and completion outcomes, and articulate the rationale for this definition.
- Analyze institutional and community demographic and outcomes data to identify critical gaps, opportunities, or unmet needs.
- Define a strategic vision for student success at their community college based on the above gap analysis.

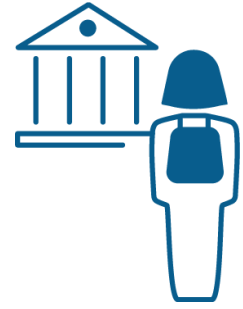
PREWORK

- Participants should locate and bring a copy of their college’s mission statement, vision statement, and strategic plan.
- Participants should complete the data templates linked on the [module homepage](#) to the best of their ability at their institutions. Make clear to participants that they may not find all of the data, or they might find some data in different formats, from different years, or with slightly different data definitions—that is okay! The goal is for participants to have access to a common body of data. Emphasize that these data will not be collected or shared with anyone outside of the group; rather, these templates will provide participants with the information they need to begin forming a strategic vision.

PRE-READING

- Aspen Institute, College Excellence Program. (2011). *The Aspen Prize for Community College Excellence*. Retrieved from <https://www.aspeninstitute.org/publications/aspen-prize-community-college-excellence/>
- Aspen Institute, College Excellence Program. (2015). *The 2015 Aspen Prize for Community College Excellence*. Retrieved from <https://www.aspeninstitute.org/publications/2015-aspen-prize-community-college-excellence-2/>
- Wyner, J. S. (2014). *Introduction*. In *What excellent community colleges do*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard Education Press.
- [NOVA Strategic Vision 2015: Gateway to the America Dream](#)

KICK-OFF ACTIVITY



KICK-OFF ACTIVITY 20 MINUTES

This activity will serve as participants' introduction to the module and will provide time for participants to begin thinking about how student success is defined through a variety of points of view.

- Participants will reflect independently on the following questions, recording their answers on Handout 1. This portion of the activity can also be done as pre-work.**
 - Think about yourself when you began college. What were your goals? Why did you want to attend college? How would you have defined success in college for yourself?
 - Imagine that you are the president of your community college and are given the opportunity to recognize a student who embodies success at your college. What would that student have done to be successful? What do you think success should look like for students at your college? How do you define student success for students enrolled in community colleges today?
 - Consider the vision and mission statement of your college. Is there a definition of student success in your college's mission statement? If so, what is it? What does the vision statement of your college say about student success?
- Allow 10 minutes for small group discussion of answers at tables. Then, watch the "Why College" videos from the Center for Community College Student Engagement.**
 - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UdhlGATopaw> (2:58)
 - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qk2aVhnWmzk> (1:41)
- Discuss as a group: What themes emerged from the student videos? How do these students define their own success? Are the students in the videos primarily focused on completing college or on their post-completion outcomes? What is the relationship between the definitions of student success from students, yourself, and your college? What threads are consistent? What tensions emerge?**
- Using the organizer on Handout 1, participants will jot down a few words, a phrase, or a short sentence that captures each of your definitions of student success. They will independently reflect on the following question: How can these different definitions of student success inform your work as a leader?**

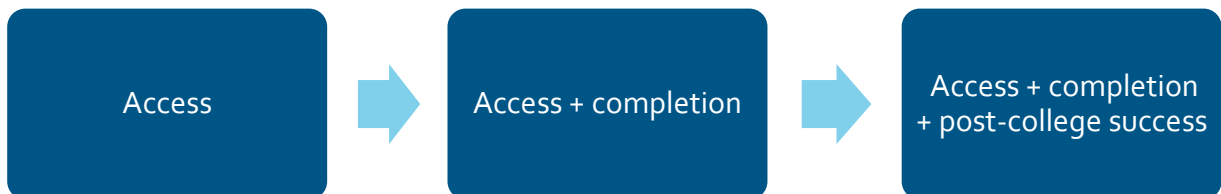
EVOLVING DEFINITIONS OF STUDENT SUCCESS



KEY LEARNING

Community colleges today face a challenge: *Can they deliver more degrees of higher quality to a more diverse population without greater public investments?* In order to meet this challenge, colleges must better align their expectations with two audiences: students and the broader public. Both of these audiences define success by what happens to students *after* college as much as they do by what happens to students *in* college.

HOW DO COMMUNITY COLLEGES DEFINE SUCCESS?

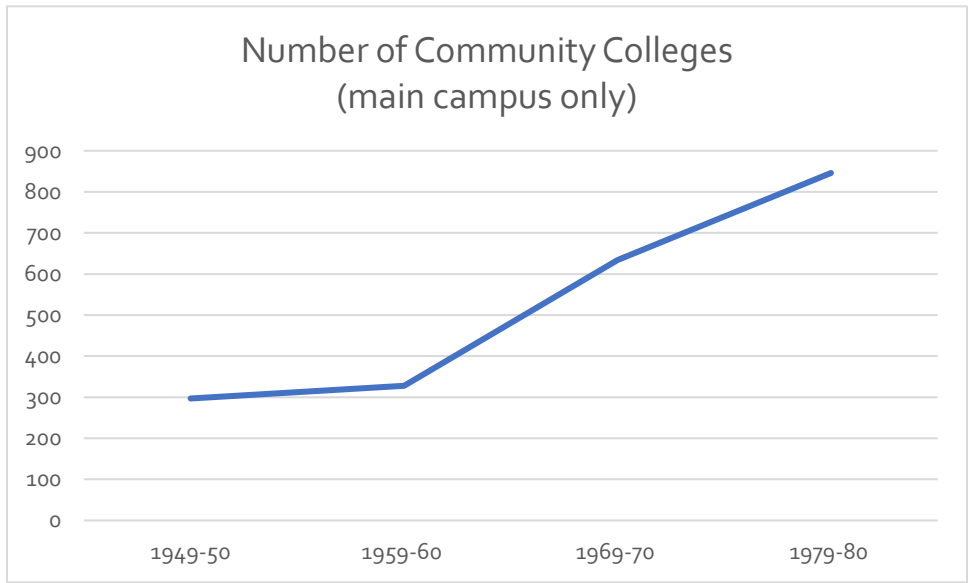


COMMUNITY COLLEGE 1.0: ACCESS

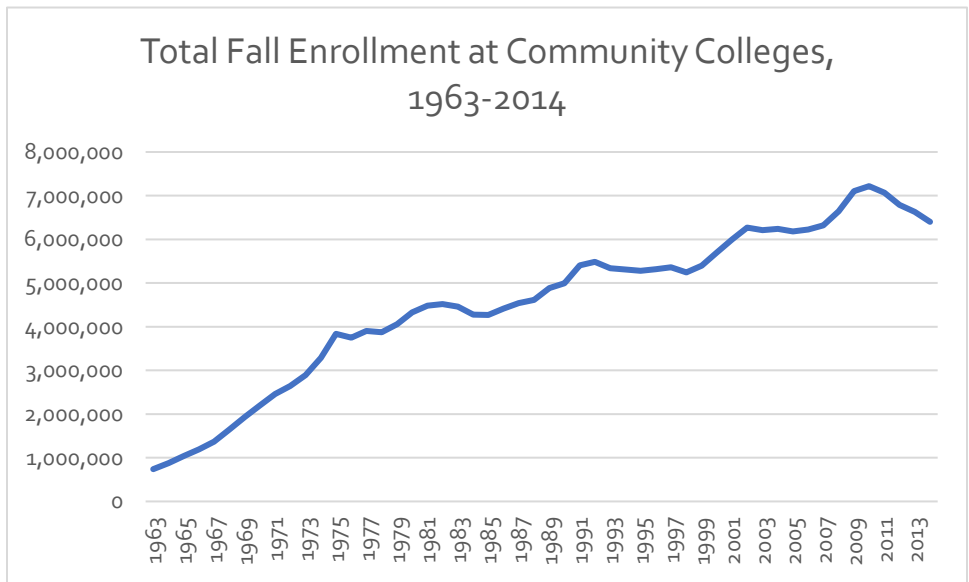
Community colleges were originally designed to serve as access institutions—institutions focused on providing a college education to students who might not otherwise be able to attend college. As access institutions, community colleges focus on enrollment: How many students can the college serve? As the institutions evolved, a few historical moments helped to shape community college enrollment.

- **Early 20th century:** Junior colleges providing post-secondary liberal arts education to prepare students for transfer.
- **Great Depression Era:** Community colleges as workforce development agents, training semi-professionals to train industrial workers.

- **Post-WWII:** GI Bill leads to expansion of community college enrollments.
- **1960s-1970s:** Pell Grant program for low-income students leads to enrollment boom.



Source: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics. *Digest of education statistics, 2016*. Table 317.10.



Source: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics. *Digest of education statistics, 2015*. Table 303.25.; 2011, Table 199.

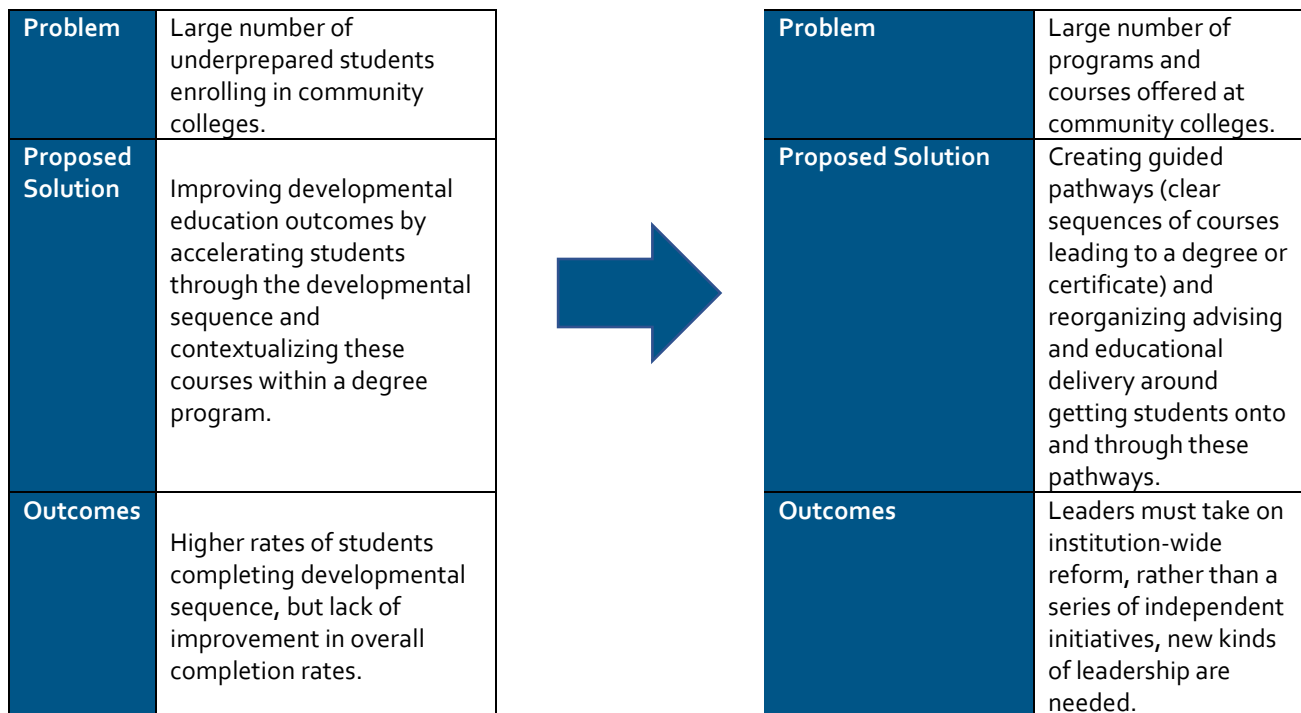
Increasing access for a growing number of students, at a low cost, was the goal. Three particular legacies from the expansion of community college access came to define the sector in subsequent decades:

- Colleges increased course and program offerings to meet the increased demand associated with expanded enrollment.
- Community colleges became magnets for underprepared students due to the colleges' low cost and lack of admissions standards. This led colleges to develop robust remedial education programs, adult basic education programs, and English-as-a-second-language programs.
- Young leaders moved into president and provost positions. Many of these leaders are now retiring.

COMMUNITY COLLEGE 2.0: ACCESS + COMPLETION

In the early 2000s, a group of individuals and organizations began to shift toward the idea that colleges must focus not only on access but also on completion. Soon, a full-fledged completion movement emerged: Research efforts were expanded, state and national goals were set for degree and credential completion, and nonprofit organizations were founded to help colleges develop practices to move toward higher completion rates.

The completion movement put forth several solutions intended to solve the challenges caused by the legacies of Community College 1.0:



COMMUNITY COLLEGE 3.0: ACCESS + COMPLETION + POST-COLLEGE SUCCESS

Student success at the community college must go beyond completion or transfer to define success with the end in mind—employment with family-sustaining wages or attainment of the baccalaureate.



A focus on completion is not enough, for a number of reasons:

- **Students don't aim to complete.** Student surveys have shown that students are motivated by the fact that attending college will help them to have a better life—in effect, a job with good wages. Colleges can help students choose a pathway early in their college career by showing them labor market data and helping them to choose not just a pathway but a job after they complete.
- **Not all degrees are created equal.** Community colleges need to consider post-graduation outcomes when determining which degrees and programs to offer. A college that does not consider post-college outcomes might eliminate or reduce programs based on cost, potentially eliminating programs—middle-skill STEM or allied health programs, for instance—that may in fact offer the greatest value to students.
- **Some degrees don't have independent value.** Research by Marc Schneider¹ has shown that many associate's degrees do not have labor market value unless paired with a bachelor's degree. By focusing on completion only, colleges may neglect to support those students who need an additional degree to reap the benefits of their associate's degree—students who need support in the form of transfer advising around course choice and financial aid.
- **Opportunities at the program level are inequitable.** At many community colleges, not all programs of study are low-cost or open-access. Low-income and minority students are often underrepresented in the more expensive or highly selective programs, which tend to have better labor market outcomes for students.

Thus, community colleges are challenged to look beyond completion and increase the focus on post-completion outcomes, looking explicitly at ways to support students to transfer and go on to complete a bachelor's degree, or gain employment with family-sustaining wages. Examples from leading community colleges—including institutions that have won or been finalists for the Aspen Prize for Community College Excellence—provide some strategies that colleges can draw from as they make the shift to focusing on post-completion success.

¹ Schneider, M. (2015, December). *Higher education pays: Measuring the economic security of Florida's post-secondary graduates*. Retrieved from <http://www.collegemeasures.org/post/2014/01/Higher-Education-Pays.aspx>

1. Redefine student success on campus.

Example: Having achieved 75 percent completion rates, President Michael Cartney of Lake Area Technical Institute (LATI), a four-time finalist college for the Aspen Prize, worked with his senior team to re-envision success as employment in a good job after graduation. Among other things, the college made it a priority to track post-completion wage and employment data, as well as students' performance in the workplace. LATI also changed its mission statement to reflect this new definition, including the phrase "changing lives and launching careers."

2. Engage four-year colleges and universities in improving transfer and bachelor's attainment.

Example: In Florida, Miami Dade College (MDC) and Broward College have both worked with four-year partner Florida International University (FIU) to establish a process for faculty and staff from across the institutions to meet annually to review transfer student outcomes data, discuss curricula and course outcomes, and share teaching methods. At these meetings, faculty are able to work collaboratively to identify strengths and gaps in their existing program maps. In one instance, FIU found that MDC students were underperforming in algebra, and faculty from the two schools were able to use these preexisting relationships to better align their instruction and update relevant program maps.²

3. Engage employers in defining common goals for talent development.

Example: At Indian River State College in Port St. Lucie, Florida, college faculty and staff review and evaluate programs in advanced manufacturing, nursing, utility maintenance, and other fields through a rigorous analysis of employment and earnings data. The college also works closely with employers to develop and improve programs. A close partnership with Florida Power and Light supports the Electrical Power technology program, relationships with local police and fire departments have helped to build and staff an impressive Public Safety complex, and the college has worked closely with the local hospital system, yielding strong employment opportunities for nursing graduates.

4. Align student advising systems to post-graduation goals, including enrollment, program choice, credential maps, and financial aid.

Example: LATI's Cartney shared the change he saw when his college began defining success not as completion but as employment with good wages: "You change the entire conversation...from the time you sit down with a potential applicant. The question isn't, 'What classes do you want?' It's 'What do you want to be after you graduate?' It really pushes the concept that college is a pathway, not a destination."³ Today, all advising discussions are focused on choosing a program designed to achieve a student's career goals, with subsequent decisions on program structure defined by the school.

² Aspen Institute, College Excellence Program. (2016). The transfer playbook: Essential practices for two- and four-year colleges.

³ Aspen Institute, College Excellence Program. (2016, June). *Structural equity: Big-picture thinking & partnerships that improve community college student outcomes*. Retrieved from <https://www.aspeninstitute.org/publications/structural-equity/>

GROUP DISCUSSION: CASES FOR GOING BEYOND COMPLETION.....25 MINUTES

1. Show all three of the following videos to the group:

- **Defining Student Success 1 (2:05):** Davis Jenkins of CCRC discusses choice and guided pathways
- **Defining Student Success 2 (2:10):** Bob Templin, former president of Northern Virginia Community College, discusses transfer and baccalaureate completion
- **Defining Student Success 3 (4:00):** Sheila Quirk-Bailey, president of Illinois Central College, discussing partnerships with employers at Harper College

2. Then, participants should discuss the following questions in small groups:

- Each speaker is talking about a different dimension of the student experience. How is each one making a case for moving beyond completion and considering post-college outcomes as a definition of student success?
- Each video references a different topic: guided pathways, transfer, and partnering with employers. What specific strategies does each speaker mention that allow a college to focus on improving post-completion outcomes?
- What role, if any, do external partnerships play in each example? How can your college best leverage its existing partnerships to refocus on post-completion outcomes?
- What specific actions can a president take to shift the focus of a college to looking at post-completion outcomes as a vitally important measure of student success?

3. Bring the group back together and collect both key takeaways and lingering questions.

DEFINING AND ARTICULATING A NEW VISION OF STUDENT SUCCESS



KEY LEARNING

Delivering more credentials that connect students to *their* goals requires that community colleges conceptualize excellence in student success in four key areas. These four areas compose the definition of excellence used to select finalists for the Aspen Prize, which identifies community colleges nationally that have demonstrated the ability to achieve extraordinary outcomes for students while maintaining a deep commitment to open access.

These four measures of excellence are not stand-alone metrics of performance; rather, they are interdependent parts of a definition of community college excellence that is student-centered and that reflects the reality that community college is not a final destination for students but a springboard to a wide array of opportunities after they transfer or graduate. Student success as defined by the Aspen Institute’s College Excellence Program moves beyond access and completion to include post-college outcomes.

Definitions of the Four Measures of Excellence

Completion and transfer with baccalaureate attainment	Ensuring that students earn associate’s degrees and other meaningful credentials, as well as bachelor’s degrees after they transfer.
Learning	Setting high expectations for what students should learn, measuring whether they are doing so, and using that information to engage faculty in improving teaching and curricula.
Labor market outcomes	Ensuring that graduates find and maintain employment that provides a family-sustaining wage after completion of a degree or credential, and using labor market outcomes to improve programs.
Equity	Ensuring equity in access and in learning, completion, and labor market success for minority, low-income, and other historically underserved students.

The following excellent community colleges, recognized by the College Excellence Program through the Aspen Prize, have made striking progress in these areas of student success. By examining these models, participants can begin to consider what transformational change in student success might look like at their own institutions.

Completion and Transfer with Baccalaureate Attainment: Santa Fe College. At Santa Fe College in Gainesville, Florida, students use an online program called My Academic Plan to build guided pathways based on their career goals and configured around their schedules outside of the classroom—work and child care schedules, for example. If students choose a course off of their degree path, they are alerted. Students can see at any point if the classes they are registering for will count toward transfer to dozens of four-year colleges, removing reliance on face-to-face advising and helping students chart out a clear path to transfer. Faculty and staff at the college also worked collaboratively to create an early alert system that would flag students for support if they “fell off” their pathways; the college laid out clear expectations for what kinds of issues would be flagged, when issues should be flagged, and who should intervene. In 2015, 62 percent of Santa Fe’s first-time, full-time students graduated or transferred in three years, compared to a national average of 40 percent.⁴

Learning: Valencia College. Faculty at Valencia built and implemented the Teaching and Learning Academy, a high-quality center for professional development that helps faculty improve their teaching, both for the purpose of continuous improvement and as part of the college’s tenure process. To achieve tenure at Valencia, faculty must complete an “action research project” in which they take a new approach to teaching, measure student outcomes, and present their results to colleagues. They must also reflect on their own teaching and areas of growth through an “individual learning plan” and participate in 50 hours of professional development seminars. There is a college-wide culture of improvement in teaching and learning. As a result, graduation/transfer rates at Valencia are nearly double those of peer institutions, and the college has strong transfer and bachelor’s completion rates for students.

Labor Market Outcomes: Walla Walla Community College. In 1999, Walla Walla, Washington, was a rural community in economic distress. In the wake of NAFTA, agricultural production was down and the number of jobs was shrinking. Looking at labor market data, then-president Steven VanAusdler and his team capitalized on the projected growth in nursing and made the case for a state investment in the nursing program, enabling it to quickly double in size. Later, labor market analyses were used to make the case for new programs in clean energy, water management, and hybrid car repair. Speaking to employers, VanAusdler recognized the potential for winemaking to drive economic growth and raised \$5 million to start an enology and viticulture program, fueling a jump in the number of wineries, from 7 in the late 1990s to over 200 in 2016. The results of these programs are striking: in 2011, graduates of Walla Walla earned an average of \$44,548, nearly 80 percent more than the average salary of all new hires in the area; and within three years of entering the college, 54 percent of full-time students graduated or transferred, significantly above the 40 percent nationwide average.⁵

Equity: Santa Barbara City College. Santa Barbara City College (SBCC) has developed a model relationship with its primary K-12 feeder system in order to ensure broad access, prepare students for the rigors of college, and help them develop a 10-year plan to complete college. As part of the program—called Get Focused, Stay Focused—the college helps deliver and regularly refines a college-prep program for high school students, a collaborative effort between high school teachers and college faculty. Additionally, students participate in career exploration, learn about financial aid, and discuss internships and summer jobs to support their goals. As a result, among students who participated in the

⁴ Aspen Institute, College Excellence Program. (2015). *The 2015 Aspen Prize for Community College Excellence*. Retrieved from <https://www.aspeninstitute.org/publications/2015-aspen-prize-community-college-excellence-2/>

⁵ Aspen Institute, College Excellence Program. (2015). *The 2015 Aspen Prize for Community College Excellence*. Retrieved from <https://www.aspeninstitute.org/publications/2015-aspen-prize-community-college-excellence-2/>

program and enrolled at SBCC in 2015, 79 percent were proficient in reading and math; among Latino students, who make up 40 percent of the student population, 72 percent were proficient in reading and math.⁶

GROUP APPLICATION ACTIVITY: ARTICULATING A RATIONALE FOR NEW DEFINITIONS OF STUDENT SUCCESS.....60 MINUTES

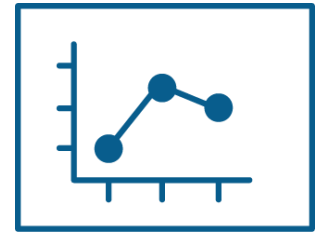
- 1. Invite participants to consider what arguments various groups on campus might make against measuring community college outcomes in some of these terms (or perhaps participants feel some resistance themselves). Here are some examples:**
 - Completion outcomes are not valid measures of success because so many students don't come to college to complete a degree.
 - Assessment of learning is the domain of faculty and should not be subject to intrusion by administrators.
 - Community colleges should not be judged based on labor market outcomes because of the wide array of factors outside the college's control that impact students' job placement and earnings.
 - The college's mission as an open-access institution is to provide equal opportunity to all students, not to target improvement in outcomes for certain groups (or even that such "targeting" is prohibited by law or policy).
- 2. After each statement, discuss the following questions in table groups or as a whole group, depending upon group size:**
 - What is legitimate about this objection?
 - How might this objection be used to impede progress?
 - What is the best counterpoint to this objection?
 - How could you respond to someone making this objection in a way that could limit opposition to change?
- 3. Have participants try to articulate a clear statement that they might make in a presentation to their campus community about why, under their leadership, the college will focus on improving each of the outcomes listed in the chart below. Each participant will choose one of the student outcome areas on Handout 2 and spend 15 minutes writing an individual statement. They should get as far as they can and not worry if the statement feels incomplete.**
- 4. Have participants raise their hands to signal which of the five categories they chose, and then have them organize in groups of five or six at a table, by category. After 20 minutes of discussion, reconvene as a class. Each group will share their statements, choosing a spokesperson to make the case for the group.**
- 5. Provide each group with three to five minutes to report out and ask questions.**
- 6. Invite participant responses or questions to each statement.**

⁶ Aspen Institute, College Excellence Program. (2016, June). *Structural equity: Big-picture thinking & partnerships that improve community college student outcomes*. Retrieved from <https://www.aspeninstitute.org/publications/structural-equity/>

GROUP APPLICATION ACTIVITY: IDENTIFYING THE KEY ACTORS.....15 MINUTES

1. Participants will work in table groups to examine who in their colleges has responsibility for ensuring successful outcomes in each of the areas of student success defined by the College Excellence Program. Tell participants that the answers to these questions might not be clear. Give participants 10 minutes in table groups to discuss the following prompt: **What groups of individuals in your college have primary responsibility for the following outcomes? Participants can record their thoughts on Handout 3.**
 - **Completion:** Building/maintaining clear pathways to degrees and other credentials? Monitoring student progress toward a credential? Intervening when students are off-track? Ensuring that students whose goal is transfer are enrolled in courses that will prepare them to transfer with junior status to a four-year institution and to complete their bachelor's degrees?
 - **Transfer with baccalaureate attainment:** Ensuring that students whose goal is transfer are enrolled in courses that will prepare them to transfer with junior status to a four-year institution and to complete their bachelor's degrees? Choosing a transfer destination early and with career goals in mind?
 - **Labor market outcomes:** Guiding students in the selection of appropriate programs of study (or transfer) that will lead to well-paying jobs? Ensuring strong relationships with employers to ensure alignment between instruction and changing workplace demands?
 - **Learning:** Making certain that students learn and that learning outcomes and assessments at the program level and college-wide are used to improve teaching and the transfer readiness and labor market preparedness of students?
 - **Equity:** Assessing whether enrollment at the institution reflects the demographics of the community? Monitoring and closing student success gaps by race, ethnicity, Pell status, and so on?
2. The answers to these questions may be clear in some cases and, in others, quite difficult to answer. Sometimes the ownership of specific student outcomes is diffuse and broadly shared; no single person or unit owns them. This isn't always a bad thing—shared ownership for student success is ideal. But there's a difference between shared ownership and no ownership. Given participants' assessment of who owns these outcomes, ask them to consider the following questions:
 - Where is accountability for these outcomes clearest?
 - Where is it least clear? Why?
 - What can be done to give greater ownership of student outcomes to specific individuals or groups in the college?

ANALYZING DATA TO DEFINE A STRATEGIC LEADERSHIP VISION FOR STUDENT SUCCESS



WARM-UP DISCUSSION: VISION AS A BUZZWORD.....10 MINUTES

1. Acknowledge before beginning this portion of the session that the term “vision” can be a buzzword. Participants have likely been a part of many “vision-setting” workshops. Discuss the following questions as a group:
 - What do you think of when you hear the term “vision” in the context of community college leadership?
 - What are your gut reactions to the term?
 - How can we reframe or redefine the word “vision” to make it a meaningful concept instead of a buzzword?
2. Explain that during the next several activities participants will be working on creating not a one-sentence “vision statement” for a website but rather a clearly defined “strategic leadership vision” that seeks to address critical gaps, unmet needs, or opportunities.

INQUIRY ACTIVITY: STRATEGIC LEADERSHIP VISION.....30 MINUTES

1. Explain to participants that they will begin the process of creating a strategic leadership vision for where they think their institution should head, in regards to some definition of student success. They will seek to answer the following questions: Given what you have learned about your institution and community, where do you see critical gaps, opportunities, or unmet needs that you – as a president – believe must be addressed in order to improve student success? How will you lead the institution (and the community) to address them? Participants will have 15 minutes to review the strategic leadership vision included in the pre-reading: [NOVA Strategic Vision 2015: Gateway to the American Dream](#). Participants will consider the following questions and jot down answers on Handout 4.
 - What gaps, opportunities, or unmet needs does this strategic vision address?
 - What resources are required to meet these needs or close gaps? How will the college access these resources? What partners are involved?
 - How would you describe this president’s theory of change?
 - What language does this president use to create urgency?

2. After reading and answering questions, participants will spend 15 minutes discussing the strategic vision in table groups, focusing on the last two questions on the organizer.

KEY LEARNING

Presidents can begin to create a leadership vision for where they think their institutions should head in regards to student success by seeking to answer the following questions: **Given what you have learned about your institution and community, where do you see critical gaps, opportunities, or unmet needs that you – as a president – believe must be addressed in order to improve student success? How will you lead the institution (and the community) to address them?** A strategic leadership vision is **not** a strategic plan; nor is it a rationale for a specific solution or reform, although it may help point to some potential avenues for reform. A strategic leadership vision is a call to action, a compelling statement of what about the current state of affairs is not acceptable, and why it matters.

This work is a reframing of how many people have thought about the creation of a strategic leadership vision in the past. Too often, people start out by thinking: How much money does the college have, and what can we do with it? Or, how has our mission historically been defined and how can we maximize success within that definition? Instead, highly effective college leaders need to be asking different questions: Where are there critical gaps, unmet needs, or opportunities reflected in student success data? How do these gaps stand in the way of delivering what students and the community around the college need to thrive? How can I close those gaps or meet those needs? What resources are required to do that? And how can the college acquire or access those resources?

- **Identify gaps, opportunities, or unmet needs.** What are these data telling you about needs, gaps, or opportunities? Out of these gaps—given your leadership style and what the data are telling you—what dimension of student success do you think you might gravitate toward?
- **Imagine success.** What would it look like if the college closed the student success gap you've identified? In one year? Three years? Five years? What specific outcomes would change, and by how much?
- **Create a hypothesis.** Once you've identified a gap or opportunity, what will you do to close or meet it? Create a hypothesis—what strategy could you implement to close this gap or meet this need? This is the beginning of your theory of change.
- **Verify your hypothesis.** What questions will you ask, and what data will you need to collect, to test this hypothesis? Whom will you need to talk to? You cannot remain only within your organization.
- **Identify resource needs.** What resources will you need to carry out this strategy? What money will you need? What equipment? What facilities? What people?
- **Identify partners to provide resources.** What other people and organizations share your desire to close the identified gaps? How can they help you to get the resources that you need to make change happen? Note to facilitators: This topic is covered in much more depth in the module Leading Highly Effective External Strategic Partnerships.

The eventual outcomes will be a vision, a theory of change, and a call to action. But before presidents begin to make a call to action, they must start at the beginning by identifying gaps, needs, or opportunities. This is different from the strategic planning process: It is a leadership vision that will *lead to* a strategic plan. This is the *presidential* vision; the president will then present it to other leaders and stakeholders within the college who will modify it, push back on it, and help with it. Presidents must do this *first*, before engaging others. Successful candidates for a college presidency may have completed part of this process as they prepared for the interview. Understanding the need and opportunity at a college, and envisioning what can be done during a presidency before being hired, can help avoid a mismatch between a new president and the college.

Things to consider in crafting the vision:

- What will things look like after significant changes are implemented?
- Can you describe in a motivational way—to multiple audiences, including faculty and staff, board members, employers, and students—what new opportunities will become available once the change is complete?
- Can you explain the reasons why it is important to make these changes now?
- Can you make clear the theory of change—that is, how the proposed strategies align to the current needs and challenges?⁷

When moving from problem to vision, presidents should be careful **not** to:

- Settle on the problem before they have determined and can make clear why it matters.
- Jump to the solution before defining the problem.
- Think only about the role of the college and the need for change inside the college.

Instead, presidents should:

- Anchor the problem statement and goals in evidence.
- Elevate the student experience.
- Think about solutions and impacts within and outside the institution.
- Remember their unique role as president.

INDIVIDUAL APPLICATION ACTIVITY: CREATING A STRATEGIC LEADERSHIP VISION.....90-120 MINUTES

This section of the module can be approached in two different ways, depending on the audience. For participants who are currently working as community college leaders (new presidents, or aspiring presidents who currently hold senior leadership positions at their colleges), this section can function as an extended workshop during which the participants will analyze data from their own institutions in order to begin creating a strategic leadership vision. To work through this part of the module, those participants must have completed the data templates assigned for pre-work to the best of their ability. If presenting this module as part of a longer-term fellowship or class, it may be worth acquiring access to outside data sources for participants to use as they work through the creation of a strategic vision and goals. Some examples of data sources are:

- Transfer and baccalaureate completion data from the National Student Clearinghouse
- Real-time labor market data from Emsi or Burning Glass Technologies

For participants who are not currently working as a leader in a community college (e.g., graduate students), this section of the module can be viewed as a case study exercise. In that situation, the facilitator can adjust activity directions to

⁷ Adapted from Kotter, J. (2011). *How to create a powerful vision for change*. Retrieved from <http://www.forbes.com/sites/johnkotter/2011/06/07/how-to-create-a-powerful-vision-for-change/>

indicate that participants will be working to create a strategic leadership vision for the case study college, using the sample data sets linked on the module homepage.

3. **Break participants up into small groups. All participants will be working independently to examine their own college's data to identify gaps and create a hypothesis for a theory of change. However, participants should be placed in small groups so that they can use one another as resources during the process: to ask one another for feedback, to get a second pair of eyes on some data, and so on.**
4. **During this work time, participants will begin to work through the following areas:**
 - **Comprehensive Data Analysis:** How well is my institution performing across the key dimensions of student access and success? Where do I need to conduct additional inquiry to better understand students' experiences? What external data do I need to examine?
 - **Prioritizing a Student Success Challenge:** Where is there urgency to improve student outcomes? Where is the college falling short of its mission to advance access and success for students and impact the community? Where the greatest disparities among racial/ethnic, gender, socioeconomic, age, or other groups?
 - **Building a Plan:** What is my vision for student success at the college? What should be the institutions goals for improving student outcomes? What internal strategies can be developed to address prioritized goals? What external partnerships are required? How will we measure success?
 - **Anticipating Challenges:** What might keep the institution from being successful? What actions can I take as president to help mitigate potential risks and lower obstacles?
5. **Remind participants that they must identify problems, not immediately jump to strategies. Before jumping into a problem that they think they already know about, participants should first take a long, close look at the data. Participants should avoid missing gaps or opportunities because they've jumped into a problem that they already know exists.**
6. **Participants should use the guiding questions and templates on Handout 5, *Strategic Vision Planning Template*, to analyze their data, prioritize a student success challenge, build a plan, and anticipate challenges. Acknowledge that participants do not need to finish their planning template in the session; participants should complete as much as they can with the support of their groups, with the expectation that they will continue to work through this plan once they return to their colleges.**
7. **The facilitator should circulate throughout groups and support participants as they are working to analyze their data and create their strategic leadership vision. At the end of the work time, bring the group back together. Gather any key takeaways and reflections from the group: What was this experience like for you? How did it differ from how you've thought about creating a vision in the past? What surprised you about the data?**
8. **Explain that the next step is to generate a plan for verifying the hypothesis.**

GROUP APPLICATION ACTIVITY: HYPOTHESES FOR A STRATEGIC LEADERSHIP VISION.....70 MINUTES

1. **Touch back to the framework from the Key Learning:** So far, participants have identified gaps, needs, or opportunities, and have created a hypothesis to think about how the college can close those gaps or meet those needs. Now, participants will use one another as resources as they think about how to test and verify these hypotheses when they've returned to their colleges. What questions will they need to ask? What else will they need to know? How will student voices be involved? Whom will they need to reach out to? They should remember to think about going beyond their college.
2. **Split the group up into small groups of around four people—mix up the groups from the previous activity so that participants can have the advantage of fresh sets of eyes.** Each participant will have 15 minutes to share his or her identified gaps or needs as well as the hypothesis for closing those gaps. The role of the group is to ask questions that will help participants to create next steps for testing this hypothesis: questions are on Handout 6, but participants should think about how they can push beyond the provided questions to help their peers refine their hypotheses.
 - What else do you need to know in order to verify this hypothesis? What lingering questions do you have?
 - Who else do you need to engage within your college in validating this hypothesis?
 - Who else do you need to engage outside your college?
 - For labor market questions: What do your labor market data suggest? How can you validate this? What industry leaders do you need to talk to? How will you determine what the details of labor market needs actually are?
 - For transfer and baccalaureate completion questions: What do your transfer and completion data seem to be suggesting? How can you validate this? Whom do you need to talk to at your college? At four-year colleges? What questions will you ask students?
 - Have you looked at your data with equity between student populations in mind? What did you discover? What further questions will you need to answer?
 - What are the implications for student learning?
 - Think about what you heard from the students we watched on video at the beginning of this module. How relevant is this opportunity or gap to what students need, or to how students define their own success? How important is this issue to students?
3. **Bring the group back together. Ask people to share any key takeaways or aha moments with the group. Explain that the next step is to take the hypothesis back to the college and verify it—then to begin thinking about the strategic vision.**

ON-CAMPUS ACTIVITY: VERIFYING THE HYPOTHESIS AND WRITING A STRATEGIC LEADERSHIP VISION

Now that participants have identified gaps or needs and have begun to think about a hypothesis to close those gaps, they can begin thinking about their strategic leadership vision. Provide participants with the following directions to guide their work once they return to their campuses.

1. **Based on your group discussion, return to your campus and begin the process of verifying your hypothesis. Talk to people inside and outside of the college to begin trying to figure out if your proposed solution is verifiable.**

2. **If you find that your hypothesis is not tenable, go back to the drawing board. Otherwise, attempt to write the first draft of a strategic vision based on your hypothesis. Use the example we looked at in class for inspiration. What is your vision for where the college should go? What will the change look like? Include:**
 - A data-driven explanation of the gaps, opportunities, or unmet needs that you found.
 - A vision for closing those gaps or meeting those needs.
 - A set of strategic goals aligned to this vision.
3. **Keep in mind that this is just a first draft—participants who work on the Leading Internal Transformational Change module will have the opportunity to refine these ideas further and think about how to effectively communicate them in a way that builds urgency.**