



Statement on
California Community Colleges Student Equity Plans
Before the
California State Assembly
Budget Subcommittee No. 2 on Education Finance
Kevin McCarty, Chair
April 8, 2015

Cheryl Ching, Research Assistant
Eric Felix, Research Assistant
Estela Mara Bensimon, Professor & Co-Director

Contact: bensimon@rossier.usc.edu

Making the Student Equity Plans an Effective Tool for Addressing Equity in the California Community Colleges

In the last decade, the economic argument for college attainment emerged with full force, in California and across the country. Within the state, various organizations and entities—including the LAO, PPIC, Little Hoover Commission, California Competes, and The Campaign for College Opportunity—have argued persuasively for increasing the number of state residents with postsecondary certificates and degrees so that California can meet future workforce needs and remain economically competitive.

This commitment to college completion and ensuring California’s economic future is manifested in (1) increased core funding for the community college system, which educates the lion’s share of state residents at the postsecondary level, and (2) increased categorical funding for student success initiatives of which the Student Equity Plan is one. The Student Equity Plans represent an opportunity, not only to address college completion priorities, but also to attend to the equally important imperative of supporting students to realize their highest aspirations and to help ensure that “equal educational opportunities” are available to all.

The spirit and ambition of the Student Equity Plans are laudable. But what remains unclear is whether, how, and to what extent the plans developed by each community college will together advance college completion and student success across the state in equitable ways. While these questions can’t be answered at this stage with certainty, we at the Center of Urban Education have identified several issues that could impact the effectiveness of the plans to address equity in California’s community colleges:

1. Although equity in college completion is a critical state concern, California does not have explicit equity targets that its public institutions of higher education can work towards.
2. Relatedly, the California Community Colleges have not established system-wide equity goals and targets based on Student Success Scorecard data.
 - ❖ Current data indicate that African American, American Indian/Alaskan Native, Latino, and Pacific Islander students are disproportionately impacted across completion indicators.
3. The design of the Student Equity Plans far from guarantees the achievement of equity and success.
4. The community colleges have to develop numerous institutional plans, making the Student Equity Plans one of many.
5. Student Equity Plan funding is based on inputs, not equity needs or outcomes.

1. Although equity in college completion is a critical state concern, California does not have explicit equity targets that its public institutions of higher education can work towards.

California should be applauded for building equity into its education code. That said, the state lacks the specific equity targets that are needed to ensure that equity is not merely a symbolic goal, but a reality. In this regard, California lags states across the country that have established state-level targets for closing equity gaps. For example:

- ❖ Texas' Higher Education Coordinating Board established in 2000 a strategic plan for increasing higher education participation and success rates and closing gaps in these areas for African American and Latino students.¹ The state's 2015 targets include 67,000 degree or certificates earned by Latino students and 24,300 degrees and certificates earned by African American students.
- ❖ Indiana's Commission for Higher Education committed in 2013 to reduce the achievement gap between underrepresented students and the overall student population by 50 percent by 2018, and to eliminate the gap by 2025.²

With the de-funding of the California Postsecondary Education Commission in 2011, no state agency exists currently to undertake this responsibility. The California Commission on Performance and Accountability, recently proposed in SB 42 (Liu) could assist in these efforts.

Recommendations

- ✓ **Establish state-level equity targets for disproportionately impacted populations.**
- ✓ **Create an annual "state of equity" report** that documents progress towards equity targets, as well as identifies emerging areas of inequity statewide that will need to be addressed by the public systems of higher education.
- ✓ **Make equity an explicit focus of the California Commission on Performance and Accountability.**

¹ See the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board's report, *Accelerated Plan for Closing the Gaps by 2015*. <http://www.thecb.state.tx.us/reports/PDF/2005.PDF?CFID=24742935&CFTOKEN=96831680>

² See the Indiana Commission for Higher Education's report, *Reaching Higher, Achieving More*. http://www.in.gov/che/files/2012_RHAM_4_26_12.pdf

2. Relatedly, the California Community Colleges have not established system-wide equity goals and targets based on Student Success Scorecard data.

- ❖ **Lack of specified equity goals and targets could diffuse focus:** The Student Equity Plans are based on self-reported instances of disproportionate impact, which has the benefit of allowing community colleges to respond to local concerns and issues. There is no guarantee, however, that the work of individual campuses in this area will aggregate to actions that advance equity system-wide. Without specifying concrete goals to which all community colleges can work towards, the state runs the risk of supporting disconnected efforts that do not adequately address collective concerns for completion, success, and equity.
- ❖ **Reporting on student success is insufficient:** The California Community Colleges Chancellor’s Office (CCCCO) Student Success Scorecard is an important resource, but currently serves a reporting function and is not actively used to identify system-wide areas of disproportionate impact.
- ❖ **Outcomes of African American, American Indian/Alaskan Native, Latino, and Pacific Islander students demand particular attention:** Our analysis of Scorecard data indicate that gaps across completion indicators exist between African American, American Indian/Alaskan Native, Latino, and Pacific Islander students on the one hand, and Asian, Filipino, and white students on the other hand (see figure 1 below).
 - Asians earn a certificate or degree or transfer to a four-year institution within six-years at a rate of 66% (“completion”), African American, American Indian/Alaskan Native, and Latinos do so at rates below 40%—an over 25 percentage point spread.³
 - More than half of students across all races and ethnicities earn 30 units within six years of initial enrollment. While all percentages drop for completion, the drop is greatest for American Indian/Alaskan Natives and Latinos (24 percentage points) and the least for Asians (8 percentage points).
 - Looking specifically at transfer, African American, American Indian/Alaskan Native, and Latino students transfer at rates lower than the average (see figure 2).
 - The majority of students enrolled in Basic Skills are Latinos (over 40% in credit-bearing and over 50% in non-credit-bearing courses), yet their Basic Skills completion rates are below the average (31% for math; 44% for English; 27% for ESL).

³ Colleen Moore and Nancy Shulock report similar patterns in their 2010 report, *Divided we fail: Improving completion and closing racial gaps in California’s community colleges*.
http://www.csus.edu/ihelp/PDFs/R_Div_We_Fail_1010.pdf

- Addressing the gaps for Latino students will be especially critical given that Latinos currently comprise the majority of community college students⁴ and will soon constitute the majority in the state.⁵

The consistency with which African Americans, American Indian/Alaskan Natives, Latinos, and Pacific Islanders suffer disproportionate impact suggests that achieving equity in the community colleges means focusing in particular on these students' needs, ensuring their access to educational opportunities and supporting their timely progress from enrollment to completion.

Recommendations

- ✓ **Establish system-wide areas of disproportionate impact and equity priorities:** The CCCCO should use the Student Success Scorecard to identify significant system-wide areas of disproportionate impact on an annual basis.
- ✓ **Address these priorities:** Community colleges should be required to attend to these areas as part of their Student Equity Plans.
- ✓ **Focus on closing outcome gaps for African American, American Indian/Alaskan Native, Latino, and Pacific Islander students.**

⁴ Between fall 1995 and fall 2014, Latino student enrollment grew from 23% to 42%; white student enrollment dropped from 46% to 28%. Source: CCCCO Datamart.

⁵ California Department of Finance projections show that by the end of 2015, Latinos will overtake whites as the majority population. <http://www.dof.ca.gov/research/demographic/reports/projections/P-3/>

Success Indicators for 2007-2008 Cohort

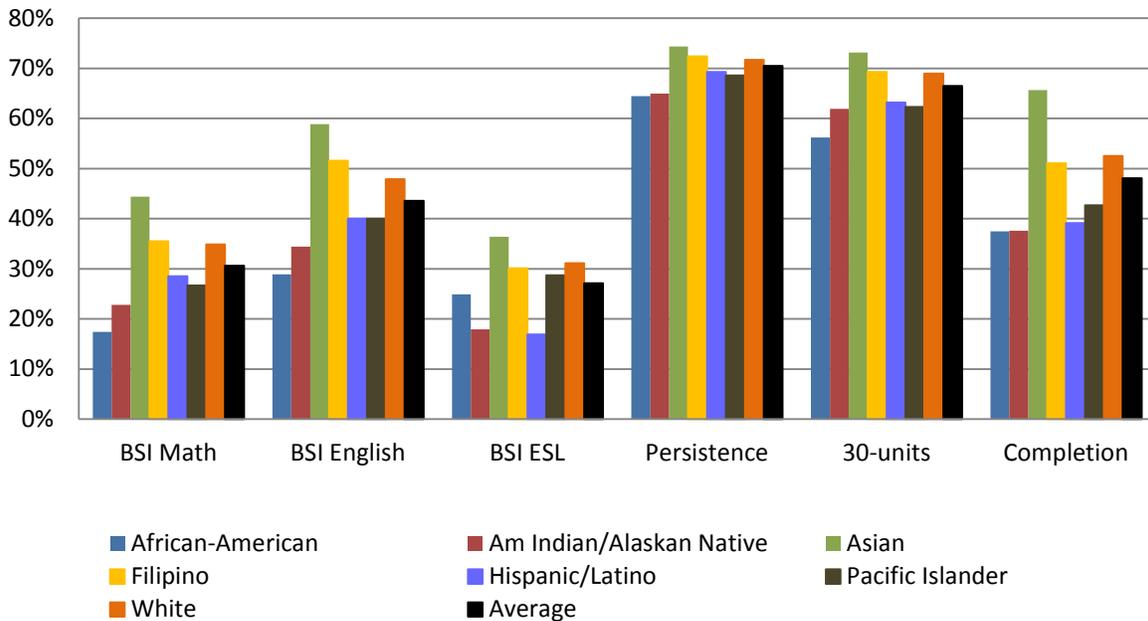


Figure 1. Source: CCCC Scorecard. BSI completion: Percentage of credit students who completed a college-level course in the same discipline within six-years. Persistence: Percentage of degree, certificate, and/or transfer-seeking students who enrolled for the first three consecutive terms. 30-units: Percentage of degree, certificate, and/or transfer-seeking students who earned at least 30 units within six years. Completion: Percentage of degree, certificate, and/or transfer-seeking students who earned a degree or certificate, or who transferred within six years.

Percentage of 2007-2008 Cohort that Transferred (Cumulative)

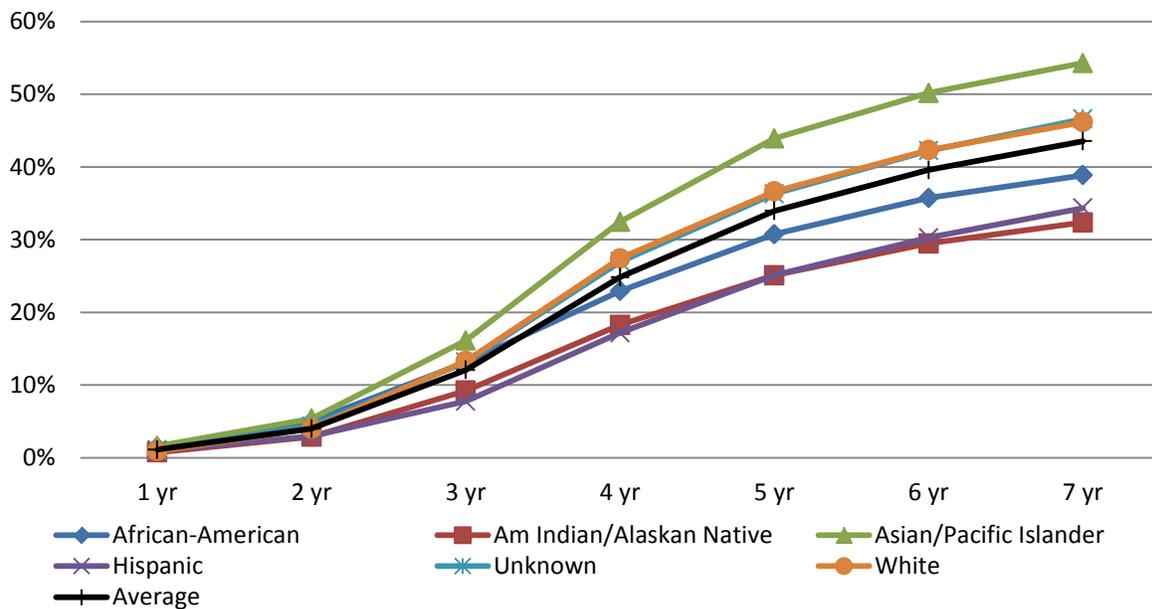


Figure 2. Source CCCC Datamart.

3. The design of the Student Equity Plan far from guarantees the achievement of student equity and success.

- ❖ **This could all amount to a compliance exercise:** Equity is a complex phenomenon that not only requires rational, solution-based approaches, but a deep engagement with (1) the different meaning(s) equity can take,(2) the institutional and potentially discriminatory policies and practices that contributed to the inequities described in the campus data, and (3) the broader socio-historical factors that have and continue to shape the educational outcomes and experiences of students traditionally underrepresented in American higher education. For the Student Equity Plans to achieve the goal of eliminating “disproportionate impact” and for equity to be sustained, community colleges will need to approach their plans as more than a bureaucratic, check-the-box exercise, *even though the system in place allows them to simply go through the motions.*
- ❖ **Limited “success” measures:** The guidelines focus on five “success” indicators—access, retention, BSI course completion, degree and certificate attainment, and transfer—but leave out other critical measures. For example, missing are measures that attend to persistent and well-documented issues in community colleges, such as excessive time-to-degree and credit accumulation.⁶ Also missing are measures of excellence such as student participation in honors programs or high-demand fields (e.g. STEM); attainment of high-value certificates and degrees; and transfer to more selective public and private institutions. Finally, missing are measures on the effectiveness of existing programs designed to improve the educational outcomes and experiences of low-income, first-generation, and racial and ethnic minority students (e.g. CalWORKs, EOPs, Puente, Umoja).
- ❖ **No explicit requirement to establish numeric equity goals:** Establishing numeric equity goals helps keep the focus on closing the gaps identified. While the Student Equity Plan guidelines state that “performance measures”⁷ should be included, we found in our review of the plans that goals centered primarily on process improvements (e.g. “Students will have increased reading comprehension and vocabulary skills”); few plans included numeric goals that campuses can use to benchmark progress toward equity.
- ❖ **Limited attention to factors contributing to disproportionate impact:** While some plans indicate that further research will be conducted into possible reasons for disproportionate impact, others do not, jumping from the numeric data that determines

⁶ See the Campaign for College Opportunity’s (2014) report, *The real cost of college: Time and credits to degree at California community colleges*. http://realcostofcollegeinca.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/06/Real-Cost-of-College_Full-Report_CCC-1.pdf

⁷ From the CCCCO’s March 11, 2014 memo on the updated Student Equity Plan. http://extranet.cccco.edu/Portals/1/SSSP/StudentEquity/Student_Equity_Plan_final.doc

whether inequities are present to potential solutions to mitigate the identified gaps. In our work with campuses across the country, we have found that inequities are more effectively addressed when practitioners examine critically policies and practices—their own as well as those of their institution—that could be serving as barriers to student success. Conducting research into policies and practices helps determine what institutions can do to reduce equity gaps and where they should concentrate their efforts (e.g. instruction, advising, student services). Furthermore, such research could help justify the reason for undertaking particular solutions, strategies, or initiatives, as well as offer insight into the likelihood that these efforts will be successful in mitigating disproportionate impact. Finally, this research guards against the possibility that institutions are putting more resources into efforts that are contributing to, or are ineffective in addressing, disproportionate impact.

- ❖ **No focus on what community colleges are doing right:** Nowhere in the Student Equity Plans are community colleges asked to document exemplary efforts that have mitigated disproportionate impact on their campuses and that have helped ensure the achievement of equitable outcomes for students. That is, there is no attention to what community colleges are doing right, only what they might be doing wrong. Taking stock of and celebrating successful practices could help energize and create buy-in among the faculty, staff, and administrators who bear primary responsibility for improving student success.

Recommendations

- ✓ **Include campus-specific measures:** Have community colleges include additional measures based on their own priorities and existing efforts to support low-income, first-generation, and racial and ethnic minority students. These may include those articulated in other campus plans (e.g. Educational Master plan, BSI plan).
- ✓ **Set numeric equity goals:** Require community colleges to set numeric equity goals for each indicator and disproportionately impacted student populations.
- ✓ **Support professional development:** Provide funding for professional development with student equity coordinators, institutional researchers, and other members of student equity committees on how to assess their policies and practices from an equity perspective.
- ✓ **Include research into factors contributing to inequitable outcomes:** Require community colleges to include plans for conducting research into factors contributing to disproportionate impact. If community colleges have already conducted such research, have them present their findings and connect these findings to the proposed activities.

- ✓ **Describe and communicate promising practices:** Have community colleges include in their plans promising work, initiatives, or strategies being undertaken to reduce inequities for student populations that consistently suffer from disproportionate impact system-wide (e.g. African American and Latino students). Communicate these practices to student equity coordinators at all community colleges.

4. The community colleges have to develop numerous institutional plans, making the Student Equity Plans one of many.

Community colleges are required to develop several campus plans, undertake the work described in those plans, and pursue numerous projects and initiatives to improve students' academic performance, outcomes, and experiences.

Coordinating and aligning these efforts so that they reinforce each other and together advance community colleges' work towards achieving equitable outcomes is easier said than done, and likely requires additional capacity to *manage* their implementation.

Community colleges risk becoming what Anthony Bryk and colleagues called "Christmas tree schools,"⁸ which shine brightly because of the many improvement initiatives they take on, but in so doing, have little time reserved for looking closely at the quality and effect of these initiatives.

Recommendations

- ✓ **Support professional development:** Provide funding for professional development with senior administrators (e.g. chief instructional and student services officers) and program coordinators (i.e. staff who manage the daily operations of the SEP, SSSP, BSI plan) on creating a comprehensive strategy for aligning and managing the implementation of all student success and improvement initiatives.

⁸ See Bryk and colleagues' (1993) report, *A view from elementary schools: The state of report in Chicago*. https://ccsr.uchicago.edu/sites/default/files/publications/AViewFromTheElementarySchools_TheStateOfReformInChicago.pdf

5. Student Equity Plan funding is based on inputs, not equity needs or outcomes.

The current funding formula is based on annual FTEs (40%); high-needs students (Pell-grant recipients) (25%); educational attainment in service area (10%); participation rate (student enrollment between ages 18 and 24) (5%); poverty rate (18%); and unemployment rate (2%). While these criteria take into account a range of factors that could be associated with the persistence of inequities at community colleges, none are directly linked to the primary focus of the SEPs: equity.

Now that colleges have completed their studies of disproportionate impact (as reported in their SEPs), it may be possible allocate funds based on the greatest equity needs. Furthermore, mandating colleges to report on whether and to what extent they are eliminating disproportionate impact could increase the accountability that they have towards achieving equity.

Recommendations

- ✓ **Include criteria based on need:** Revise the funding formula such that allocation criteria also account for the extent of disproportionate impact and progress toward mitigating it.
- ✓ **Include criteria based on performance:** Require the receipt of state funding to be contingent on colleges' progress in implementing SEPs and progress toward achieving equity goals.

Appendix

Model for Presenting Key Elements of Student Equity Plans

STUDENT EQUITY PLAN SUMMARY (EXAMPLE)

INDICATOR: ESL AND BASIC SKILLS COMPLETION

STUDENTS WHO STARTED BELOW TRANSFER LEVEL IN ENGLISH, MATHEMATICS, AND/OR ESL AND COMPLETED A COLLEGE-LEVEL COURSE IN THE SAME DISCIPLINE. (FOR THIS EXAMPLE, WE ARE FOCUSING ON BASICS SKILLS MATH COURSES.)

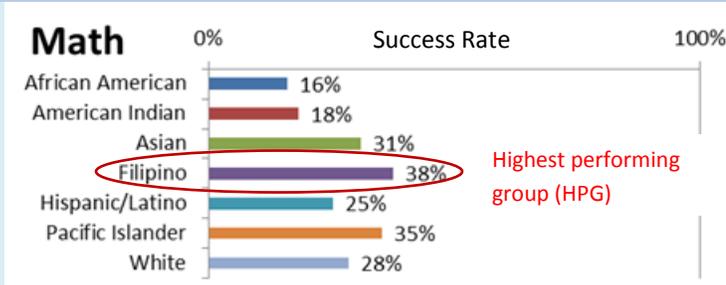
SUMMARY OF DATA ANALYSIS

DISPROPORTIONATE IMPACT:

The data below indicate that African American students, who have a 16% success rate in Basic Skills Math, experience the greatest adverse impact, when compared with the 38% success rate of Filipino students, the group selected as the benchmark because it is the highest performing group (HPG).

Source: 2012 Data, CCCC DataMart

SCORECARD DATA IN FOCUS



Racial/Ethnic Group	Group Success Rate/HPG Rate	80% Rule Comparison Value*
African American	16%/38%	0.42
American Indian	18%/38%	0.49
Asian	31%/38%	0.82
Filipino	38%/38%	1.00
Hispanic/Latino	25%/38%	0.67
Pacific Islander	35%/38%	0.94
White	28%/38%	0.76

*If the comparison value is less than 0.80, by the 80% rule, adverse impact is implied.

RESOURCES REVIEWED

Educational Practices

- Early Warning System
- Faculty Development

Policies

- Course Scheduling
- Faculty Assignments
- Assessment Placement

Special Programs

- STEM Orientation
- UMOJA

Organizational Structures

- Academic Support Services
- Faculty Composition (e.g. by ethnicity, gender)

ACTIVITIES PLANNED

Curriculum Map (Inventory)

Create a map that depicts the steps a student follows from assessment to Basic Skills to college-level Math courses.

Course Inventory of Basic Skills Math courses

Get course information: 1) how many sections of courses offered; 2) how many full and part-time faculty teach these courses; 3) diversity of faculty teaching courses; 4) professional development offered on the teaching of courses.

Observations of Basic Skills Math classes

First day of class observation of how syllabus is presented to students.

Conversations with Identified Resource Offices

Advising Center, Academic Support Services, Registrar, UMOJA Program, Assessment Center. Seeking to understand how these resource offices meet Student Success Initiatives (SSI), e.g. SSI 2.4 - Require students showing a lack of college readiness to participate in support resources.

Observation of Math Support Center

Seek to understand how students in Basic Skills Math courses utilize academic support services for Math. Identify ways to develop a plan for more targeted outreach and workshops specifically addressing student resource needs

Data Analysis

Analyze Basic Skills Math student achievement and performance data by race and ethnicity. Use findings to inform the development of curriculum, materials, labs, and dept.-wide assessments.

GOALS

Increase African American student success rates in the next four years to 38%, the success rate of Filipino students, the highest performing group (HPG).

Fall 2012	Fall 2015	Fall 2016	Fall 2017	Fall 2018
16%	22%	27%	33%	38%

OBJECTIVES

- To identify barriers that affect how African American students experience resources related to Basic Skills Math.
- To continue to provide adequate course offerings and support services for Basic Skills Math students.

FUNDING

- Release time for faculty to participate in a retention committee.
- Staff time to conduct analysis of course offerings, observations, and interviews.