The Education Trust–West

THINK EQUITABLY, ACT LOCALLY: ENSURING EQUITY AND COLLECTIVE ADVOCACY IN CALIFORNIA COMMUNITY COLLEGES

LOCAL VISION GOALS

As of 2019, each of California's community colleges were required to draft and submit "Local Vision Goals" as part of the Student Centered Funding Formula (SCFF) implementation[1]. Many advocates up and down the state have anticipated the submission of these Local Goals as an opportunity to learn more about how community college leaders intend to achieve the SCFF's goals of improving student success and closing equity gaps.

Our review of the community colleges' Local Goal submissions suggests they fall short in several ways – the goals are limited in detail about how targets were established, offer little attention to devising actionable plans for meeting stated goals, and lack meaningful integration of student, faculty, advocate, and industry voices. We also do not see sufficient attention to identifying specific strategies for aligning educational and budget planning to better serve students of color and low-income students.

In this Equity Alert, we discuss why goal setting matters for improving how colleges serve students of color and low-income students, and share guiding principles advocates can use to help ensure each college's goals: 1) are accessible and transparent to all stakeholders, 2) focus on closing equity gaps, 3) have engaged their community and stakeholders as partners, and 4) are intentional about internal and external accountability. We also provide guiding questions for student and community advocates to consider when reviewing their college's Local Goals and offer suggestions for how to improve the goals in partnership with their local board of trustees.

WHY DOES GOAL SETTING MATTER FOR CLOSING EQUITY GAPS?

As the Vision for Success outlines, there are persistent and urgent disparities in certificate and degree attainment and transfer success across California's community college system. According to the Vision for Success, the percentage of associate degrees, transfer and certificates awarded to Black students (36%) American Indian/Alaskan (38%) Latino (41%) and Pacific Islander students (43%) are lower than those awarded to Asian (65%) Filipino (57%) and White (54%) community college students[2]. If done well, campus-level goal setting that is informed by local needs and opportunities can position colleges to effectively improve student success, outcomes, and close attainment gaps.

Setting goals can facilitate several important functions to help community colleges better support students' academic and professional aspirations. The process itself can also be a tool to facilitate cross-campus conversations, communicate a coordinated vision, and shift campus culture. Established goals can and should also guide, strengthen, and align decision-making, planning, and budgeting processes. Campus leaders should integrate equity goals within institutional planning as a roadmap to coordinate and leverage campus resources, policies, programs and practices in ways that best position colleges to meet their objectives – chief among them, improving student success and closing equity gaps[3]. Clearly articulated goals also allow advocates and stakeholders to understand what success looks like for colleges and identify opportunities for bolstering support to campus leaders so that colleges can continue to assist students in meeting their educational objectives[4].

A FRAMEWORK FOR ENSURING GOALS ARE COMMUNITY-BASED & EQUITY-MINDED

Now that each of the colleges have submitted a local plan, it is important for advocates to take a close look at their college's goals to assess whether they are community-based and equity-minded. To facilitate this engagement, we identified key principles to support and guide advocates' review of their college's Local Goals. We invite advocates to locate and review the submitted goals with these principles in mind and, if unsatisfied, to engage in the suggested actions outlined in the worksheet accompanying this Equity Alert. The Education Trust–West believes that a goal setting process that is community-based and equity-minded should reflect the principles outlined in Table 1.

CONCLUSION

The momentum of recent community college funding reforms presents colleges and communities with the opportunity to refine their focus, reaffirm their commitment, and carefully think through how to most effectively eliminate inequities and serve their students through solidifying campus-wide goals. We encourage advocates to contribute their expertise and support college leaders in prioritizing the four principles discussed above as part of any ongoing "Local Vision Goals" phases, and to apply them during

other institutional goal-setting processes, such as the Student Equity & Achievement (SEA) Planning, Institutional Effectiveness Partnership Initiative (IEPI) and forthcoming Comprehensive plans.

By embracing the principles described in this Equity Alert, advocates can support campuses in moving toward achieving goals that serve the community college system's original purpose: working with and for communities to support student success for the betterment of all Californians.

TABLE 1:

PRINCIPLE	DEFINITION/RATIONALE	WHAT ADVOCATES SHOULD DO TO ASSESS:
ACCESSIBILITY & TRANSPARENCY	For advocates and interested stakeholders to review their college's Local Vision Goals, they must first be able to find them. Equally important, goals should be written clearly and use language that is accessible to all members of the community.	• Check the college's board meeting agendas and website to assess how easy or difficult it is to locate Local Goal documents[5]. • Assess whether notes or reports about how the goals were determined are available.
RACIAL EQUITY	Closing long-standing racial equity gaps requires each college to identify their underserved populations and keep equity at the forefront when setting goals. Unique targets should be set for each student group. Additionally, colleges should outline targeted activities and interventions to support advancing the performance of individual student communities[6]. When campuses work collaboratively, embrace innovation, and have strong support systems in place, students are more likely to have what they need to meet high academic expectations.	• Review to see if equity was clearly defined and whether a "racial equity" goal was identified. • Identify whether the college set goals for specific, underserved student groups and if it outlined tailored activities and interventions to serve those students. • Take notice of the beliefs communicated about students' abilities. Are the goals asset-based (i.e., demonstrating a belief that students can succeed) or deficit-oriented (i.e., reflect low expectations)?
STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT	Each college's ecosystem of stakeholders carries a wealth of expertise for how to improve institutional practices and policies. For example, students are experts of their particular needs, industry partners know firsthand what occupational skills are in-demand, and community advocates hold a detailed understanding of the external services—academic and nonacademic—available to support student success.	• Determine if stakeholders were invited to contribute their perspectives and if/how their viewpoints were integrated in goal documents. • Check if goal documents reference how the community was informed about Local Goal setting. Were inclusive practices of engagement offered (i.e., forums, surveys, focus groups and other methods to allow for flexible feedback)?
ACCOUNTABILITY	For Local Goal setting to be an effective and useful tool, the process must be paired with opportunities to track progress. Along with publicly reporting progress, colleges should evaluate and describe the strategies and activities implemented. Scheduling review milestones can help colleges revise their targets, shift strategy, learn or share best practices, and demonstrate concrete plans for meeting the objectives they set out to achieve.	• Scan document(s) to find if the college committed to a reporting schedule and/or publicly sharing findings via a dashboard, landing pages, or some other method.

ENDNOTES

[1] Referred to interchangeably throughout this Equity Alert as "Local Vision Goals" or "Local Goals"

[2] Foundation for California Community Colleges. (2017). *California Community College Vision for Success.* Retrieved from Foundation for California Community Colleges: https://foundationccc.org/Portals/0/Documents/Vision/VisionForSuccess_web_2019.pdf.

[3] Harris III, F., Felix, E. R., Bensimon, E. M., Wood, J. L., Mercado, A., Monge, O., & Falcon, V. (2017). *"Supporting men of color in community colleges: An examination of promising practices and California student equity plans".* Retrieved from San Diego State University, Community College Equity Assessment Lab (CCEAL) and University of Southern California, Center for Urban Education (CUE), Rossier School of Education: https://cue.usc.edu/files/2017/05/Report_Supporting_Men_of_Color_in_Community_Colleges.pdf

[4] C., Pisacreta, E. D., Ward, J. D., & Margolis, J. (2019). *Setting a North Star: Motivations, Implications, and Approaches to State Postsecondary Attainment Goals.* Retrieved from Ithaka S+R: https://doi.org/10.18665/sr.311539 * https://asccc.org/sites/default/files/Local_Goal_Setting_Guidance_Memo.pdf

[5] Hope, L. L. (2018, November 5). *Local Goal Setting Guidance Memo.* Retrieved from Academic Senate for California Community Colleges: https://asccc.org/sites/default/files/Local_Goal_Setting_Guidance_Memo.pdf

[6] Programs like Umoja (a Kiswahili word meaning unity) that serve African and African American Diaspora students, or Mathematics, Engineering & Science Achievement (MESA) which promote the success of underserved and underrepresented students in STEM--are programs that provide culturally specific academic and social supports to bolster students' educational success.