



APLU'S  
**POWERED BY PUBLICS**  
SCALING STUDENT SUCCESS

2022

# PROGRESS REPORT FOR APLU'S POWERED BY PUBLICS

BASED ON PRELIMINARY DATA (CURRENT AS OF MARCH 31, 2023)



Suggested Citation:

Michaels, J., Nadasen, D., Thornton, G., Rush-Marlowe, R., Frederick, A., Freelove-Kirk, T., and Chadwick, J. (2023). Progress report for APLU's Powered by Publics. *Association of Public and Land-grant Universities*, Washington, DC.

## Executive Summary

The Powered by Publics (PxP) initiative has been an ambitious undertaking from the beginning, aiming to produce hundreds of thousands more undergraduate degrees and halving equity gaps for low-income, minoritized, and first-generation students by 2025. APLU has collected student performance data from the 127 participating institutions over the past three years – in 2020, 2021, and 2022 – to evaluate progress toward these stretch goals. The purpose of this report is to document the network's progress and share examples of innovation emerging from cross-campus collaborations.

Key findings in this report include:

- **Six-year graduation outcomes hold steady, while equity gaps for some racial/ethnic minority groups and Pell recipients improved.** PxP institutions have begun to make promising progress toward closing equity gaps in six-year graduation outcomes for low-income and minoritized students. It will take several years, however, to see the impact of the PxP initiative (expected to be positive) as well as the pandemic (expected to be negative), as the cohorts whose performance is measured in this report began their educational journey well before both events occurred.
- **PxP universities awarded more degrees to Pell recipients, Hispanic students, and Black students, but slightly fewer degrees overall.** It is encouraging to see that more degrees are being awarded to students from these populations. While the total number of degrees is lower than hoped for, the COVID-19 pandemic is likely a contributing factor. Universities will need several years to recover from this debilitating event and regain lost ground.
- **Enrollments declined overall during the pandemic but increased for Hispanic students.** Although it is not a surprise to see that enrollments have dropped during this period, it is a sign of concern, as the number of degrees awarded is partly a function of enrollment. If enrollment continues to decline, we may expect to see fewer degrees awarded in the coming years, unless graduation rates increase.
- **Retention decreased and equity gaps widened in the first year of the pandemic.** Retention is an important leading indicator of persistence and completion. The findings suggest that changes necessitated by the pandemic, including remote learning and reduced student services, as well as broader economic, social, and health challenges, made it harder for students to stay enrolled. Groups disproportionately impacted by the pandemic, namely Black and Hispanic students, also saw the biggest drops in retention over this period.

These quantitative data provide a limited perspective into the work of the PxP network. This report details the various projects, publications, and resources created by the PxP clusters during 2022. In addition, 2022 saw the emergence of several cross-cluster collaborations, including the PxP Equity Roundtables and Data Literacy Institute, both of which added value to the network and laid the foundation for scaling successful approaches. Finally, the Intermediaries for Scale cohort of 16 institutions, which were competitively selected to receive expert capacity-building services, experienced accelerated transformation toward their campuses' strategic objectives. These outstanding collaborations are detailed in the report as well as documented on the PxP online [Learning Exchange](#) platform which launched in late 2021.

## Introduction

As public universities recover from the COVID-19 pandemic, they are grappling with the impact it has had on their students. The ripple effects of pandemic learning loss will continue for years to come, as today's K-12 students begin to arrive on college campuses. But there is a silver lining: public universities proved themselves to be both resilient and adaptable to change. The process of digital transformation in college classrooms, well underway pre-pandemic, has only accelerated. Federal pandemic relief funds aimed at students helped make college more affordable to millions. Student services are even better equipped to care for students' health and wellbeing when the next pandemic hits.

The Powered by Publics (PxP) network has weathered the pandemic as well and is now in its final year. Originally launched in November 2018, PxP is the Association of Public and Land-grant Universities' largest-ever degree completion and equity initiative, designed to help four-year public colleges and universities collaborate to boost degree completion numbers. More than 125 universities and systems from 48 states – collectively serving more than 3 million undergraduates, including 1 million Pell recipients – signed on to the five-year initiative's ambitious goals of:

1. Producing hundreds of thousands more graduates by 2025 with an emphasis on underrepresented minority, low-income, and first-generation students.
2. Cutting in half the equity gap by 2025 for underrepresented minority, low-income, and first-generation students while increasing access.
3. Sharing key data, learning, and effective practices to drive innovation and transformation across the higher education sector.

These universities began working together in “transformation clusters,” highly engaged peer learning communities focused on addressing key barriers to student persistence and completion. Cross-functional campus teams, appointed by their presidents and chancellors, examined the complex system of determinants that lead to student success, identified institutional barriers, and began testing ideas for improvement. The clusters are highly social, with members nudging each other to make policy and practice changes that lead toward transformation. Together, the 16 clusters<sup>1</sup> tackled a range of issues from affordability to student support services to teaching and learning. An equity lens and key data for assessing progress inform all focus areas.

This report documents the progress of PxP as it enters its final year. It contains the results of three years of data collected by APLU directly from institutions. Most importantly, this report provides qualitative examples of progress and innovation occurring within the clusters. The work of transforming a complex system is never straightforward, and APLU hopes that these examples will illuminate our successes and opportunities as well as ongoing challenges.

---

<sup>1</sup> Fourteen of the clusters are actively managed and staffed by APLU. The University System of Georgia and California State University System are also affiliated with Powered by Publics as systems but were not asked to submit data.

## Progress Toward Goals

To monitor progress toward their ambitious goals, PxP institutions shared data through the Core Data Metrics (CDM) collection. A Data Advisory Group comprised of institutional research professionals from various institutions identified key performance indicators to assess progress and recommended disaggregating the data by student demographic groups. As a result, the CDM collects 8 metrics: enrollment, retention, degrees, and 6-year outcomes (completion at the home institution, completion at another institution, still enrolled at the home institution, still enrolled at another institution, or unknown). The metrics are reported at the institution level and are disaggregated for 15 subgroups: All undergraduates, first-time/full-time, transfer/full-time, male, female, Pell recipients, and all the race/ethnicity categories. This report highlights trends over three years with the last year reflecting some impacts of the pandemic on student progress and success.

Data were collected in 2020, 2021, and 2022. Equity gaps are defined as the difference between an individual subgroup and the average of all undergraduates. This new definition reflects a more inclusive population of students without holding a single group up as the standard to which all other groups must meet.

These data represent approximately 125 PxP institutions that submitted CDM data in 2020, 2021, and 2022. Not all institutions submitted data in all 3 years. All data are available in [VSA Analytics](#) exclusively to PxP institutions that are subscribers.

## 6-year Completion Rates

- Six-year graduation outcomes hold steady, while equity gaps for Black students and Pell recipients improved.

When examining the six-year outcomes for the Fall 2013, Fall 2014, and Fall 2015 entering cohorts, the percent of students who completed at home or at another institution within 6 years generally remained the same (see Figure 1 and Table 1), and equity gaps either stayed the same or got smaller (see Table 2). The equity gap for African American students reduced from 11 percentage points (reported for the Fall 2014 cohorts) to eight percentage points (for the Fall 2015 cohorts). The gap for Pell recipients reduced from seven to six percentage points over the same period. The gap for Hispanic students remained the same at four percentage points over the same period.

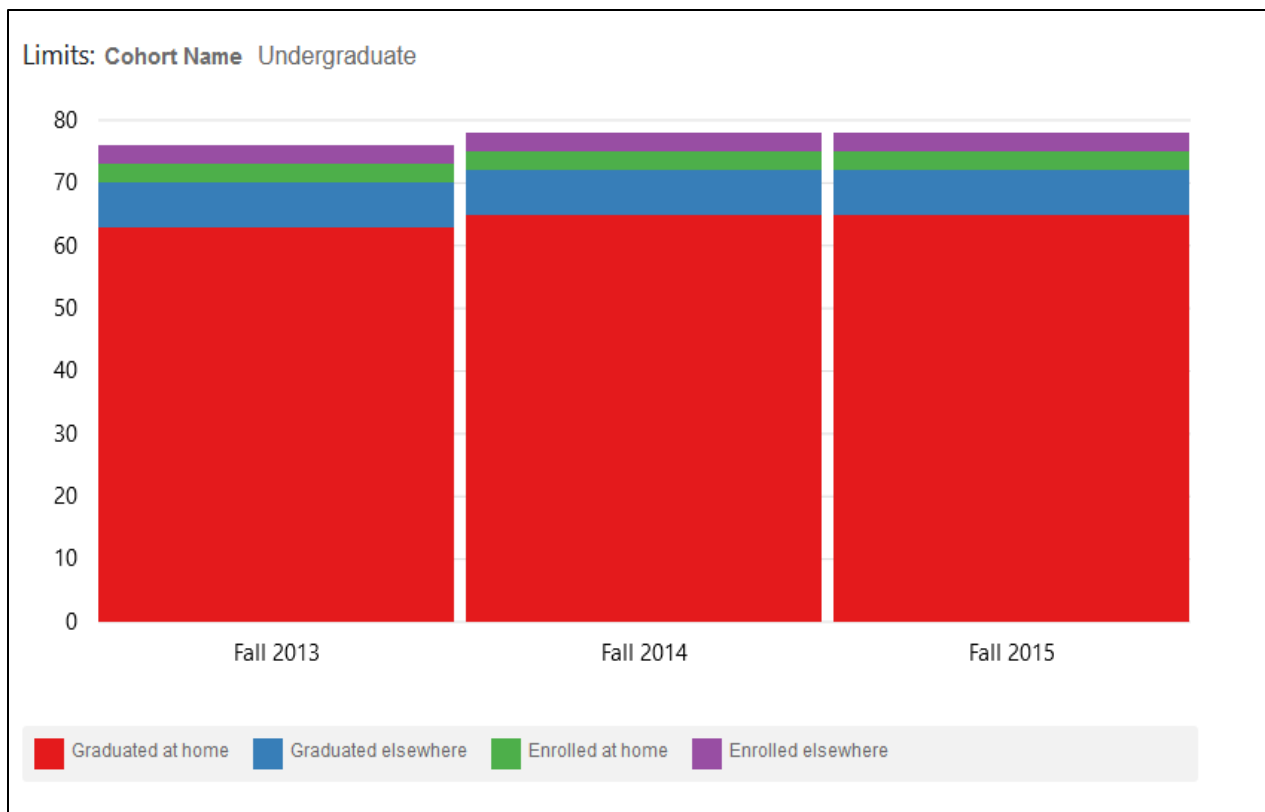


Figure 1: Six-year outcomes by year for all PxP institutions

Table 1: Six-year outcomes for all undergraduates at all PxP institutions

	Fall 2013	Fall 2014	Fall 2015	Change from 2013 to 2014	Change from 2014 to 2015
Graduated at home	63.7%	65.0%	65.2%	1.3%	0.2%
Graduated elsewhere	7.4%	7.1%	7.2%	-0.3%	0.1%
Enrolled at home	3.1%	2.9%	3.2%	-0.2%	0.3%
Enrolled elsewhere	2.9%	2.7%	2.7%	-0.2%	0%

Note: Source is the Core Data Metrics collection by Powered by Publics as reported in VSA Analytics.

**Table 2: Six-year outcomes by race/ethnicity and Pell status (includes graduated at home and graduated elsewhere).**

Subgroup	Entering Cohort <i>% graduated (home+elsewhere)</i>			Gaps			Gap Change
	Fall 2013	Fall 2014	Fall 2015	2020	2021	2022	2021 to 2022
Pell Recipients	65.2%	65.9%	66.4%	-5.9%	-6.2%	-6.0%	-0.2%
Hispanic	68.1%	67.5%	68.4%	-3.0%	-4.6%	-4.0%	-0.6%
Black or African American	61.0%	61.4%	61.7%	-10.1%	-10.7%	-10.7%	0.0%
Asian	76.4%	76.8%	78.1%	5.3%	4.7%	5.7%	-1.0%
American Indian or Alaska Native	61.1%	61.5%	64.6%	-10.0%	-10.6%	-7.8%	-2.8%
Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander	81.3%	75.2%	74.4%	10.2%	3.1%	2.0%	1.1%
Nonresident Alien	69.6%	73.0%	76.3%	-1.5%	0.9%	3.9%	-3.0%
White	73.9%	74.7%	75.3%	2.8%	2.6%	2.9%	-0.3%
2 or more races	65.9%	66.2%	67.6%	-5.2%	-5.9%	-4.8%	-1.1%
R/E Unknown	73.2%	72.3%	72.9%	2.1%	0.2%	0.5%	-0.3%
All Undergraduates	71.1%	72.1%	72.4%				

*Note: Source is the Core Data Metrics collection by Powered by Publics as reported in VSA Analytics.*

**Interpretation**

- The cohorts whose performance is measured by the 6-year outcomes began their education well before PxP was established and were upperclassmen by the time the pandemic arrived. With that in mind, these results are generally unremarkable, except to say that graduation rates were on a gradual upward trend.
- The small, positive changes to equity gaps for Pell recipients and Black, and American Indian/Alaska Native students are promising. Most of the improvement was for students who graduated at the home institution, except for African American students, who saw greater improvement after transferring to another institution and graduating. It will take several years, however, to see the impact of the pandemic on 6-year outcomes for PxP institutions.

## Degrees and Enrollments

- PxP universities awarded more degrees to Pell recipients, Hispanic students, and Black students, but slightly fewer degrees overall.

Both degrees and enrollments are measured as total numbers. To ensure consistent comparison over time, we limited the analysis to the 89 institutions that submitted data for all 3 years of the CDM collection (2020, 2021, and 2022). The number of degree recipients increased between AY 2018/2019 and 2019/2020, then decreased slightly between AY 2019/2020 and 2020/2021. The number of degrees awarded to students from the following subgroups increased over the last two years: Hispanic, Black/African American, and Asian students; students who identify as 2 or more races; students whose race is unknown, and Pell recipients (see Table 3).

**Table 3: Degrees awarded by race/ethnicity and Pell status for 89 PxP institutions that submitted data all three years**

	AY 18/19	AY 19/20	AY 20/21	Change	
				18/19 to 19/20	19/20 to 20/21
Pell Recipients	122,616	125,855	131,036	2.6%	4.1%
Hispanic	45,931	47,362	50,609	3.1%	6.9%
Black or African American	31,037	31,703	33,156	2.1%	4.6%
Asian	22,492	23,475	24,882	4.4%	6.0%
American Indian or Alaska Native	645	755	638	17.1%	-15.5%
Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander	319	481	197	50.8%	-59.0%
Nonresident Alien	18,952	19,379	18,755	2.3%	-3.2%
White	214,533	214,054	207,893	-0.2%	-2.9%
2 or more races	11,705	12,591	13,175	7.6%	4.6%
R/E Unknown	6,145	5,717	5,988	-7.0%	4.7%
All Undergraduate	354,578	355,883	355,572	0.4%	-0.1%

*Note: All undergraduates may exceed the total of the sum of the different race categories due to missing data in race categories. Source is the Core Data Metrics collection by Powered by Publics as reported in VSA Analytics.*



- Enrollments declined overall during the pandemic but increased for Hispanic students.

Enrollments increased in Fall 2020, then decreased in Fall 2021. Enrollments for Hispanic students increased over time for a cumulative increase of 12%. Enrollments for Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander students also increased a cumulative 16% over the same period Asian students and students whose race/ethnicity is unknown saw a cumulative increase of 9%. (See Table 4). The subgroup with the largest enrollment decline was Nonresident Alien students, likely attributable to travel restrictions during the pandemic.

Table 4: Undergraduate enrollment at 89 PxP institutions that submitted data all three years.

Subgroup	Fall 2019	Fall 2020	Fall 2021	Increase/Decrease		
				2019-2020	2020-2021	2019-2021
Pell Recipients	457,907	475,345	470,698	4%	-1%	3%
Hispanic	203,438	223,238	227,074	10%	2%	12%
Black or African American	152,858	156,948	155,738	3%	-1%	2%
Asian	100,743	108,815	110,246	8%	1%	9%
American Indian or Alaska Native	3,872	4,188	3,963	8%	-5%	2%
Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander	1,564	1,498	1,817	-4%	21%	16%
Nonresident Alien	68,258	57,925	53,408	-15%	-8%	-22%
White	848,067	870,854	837,052	3%	-4%	-1%
2 or more races	58,556	62,169	62,255	6%	0%	6%
R/E Unknown	24,688	25,139	26,908	2%	7%	9%
All Undergraduates	1,481,729	1,512,578	1,496,545	2%	-1%	1%

*Note: Source is the Core Data Metrics collection by Powered by Publics as reported in VSA Analytics.*

### **Interpretation**

- It is encouraging to see an increase in the number of degrees awarded to Black, Hispanic, and Pell students.
- Degrees awarded is partly a function of enrollment. If enrollments decline, we might expect to see a corresponding decline in the number of degrees awarded in subsequent years unless graduation rates increase.
- The number of degrees awarded is below expected targets for PxP and may reflect effects from the pandemic. With focus on providing additional services to these students, we may see a recovery in the next few years.
- The decline in enrollment may also reflect broader national trends which include declining high school graduates and public trust in higher education. The increase in Hispanic student enrollment is most likely correlated with demographic changes in the broader population.

## Retention

- Retention decreased and equity gaps widened in the first year of the pandemic.

The retention rate for Fall 2018 entering undergraduate students was 80%. It increased one percentage point to 81% for the Fall 2019 entering cohort. For the Fall 2020 entering cohorts, the retention rate dropped two percentage points to 79%. A similar trend appears for several subgroups. Table 5 shows the retention rates as well as the calculated gaps for each cohort, year, and racial/ethnic subgroup compared to all undergraduates.

Table 5: Retention rates and equity gaps by race/ethnicity and Pell status, compared to all undergraduates

Subgroup	Fall 2018	Fall 2019	Fall 2020	Gap Fall 18 cohort	Gap Fall 19 cohort	Gap Fall 20 cohort	Change in gap: 19 to 20
Pell Recipients	77%	80%	76%	-3%	-1%	-3%	-2%
Hispanic	77%	80%	76%	-3%	-1%	-3%	-2%
Black or African American	74%	78%	73%	-6%	-3%	-6%	-3%
Asian	82%	85%	83%	-2%	4%	4%	0%
American Indian or Alaska Native	73%	73%	72%	-7%	-8%	-7%	1%
Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander	80%	79%	81%	0%	-2%	2%	4%
Nonresident Alien	82%	81%	78%	-2%	0%	-1%	-1%
White	80%	81%	79%	0%	0%	0%	0%
2 or more races	77%	80%	76%	-3%	-2%	-3%	-1%
R/E Unknown	77%	80%	79%	-3%	-1%	0%	1%
All Undergraduate	80%	81%	79%				

Source is the Core Data Metrics collection by Powered by Publics as reported in VSA Analytics.

### Interpretation

- The findings suggest that the disruptions of the pandemic in 2020 (including an abrupt transition to online learning, a loss of in-person student supports, and economic, social, and health challenges faced by students) made it difficult for universities to retain students.

- Retention was even more difficult for students from minoritized groups who, research suggests<sup>2,3</sup>, were disproportionately impacted by the pandemic.
- African American students saw the greatest drop (a loss of 5 percentage points) in retention rates between the Fall 2019 and Fall 2020 cohorts.
- Black/African American and American Indian/Alaska Native students saw the greatest increases in the retention gaps, with Hispanic students and Pell recipients following close behind.
- It will likely take intentional programming and at least two more years for retention rates to recover from the impact of the pandemic before resuming an upward trajectory again.

*Please note that previous Core Data Metrics publications may have reported slightly different numbers than what is reported here because some institutions submitted data after the collection closed or made corrections to historical data.*

---

<sup>2</sup> Fairlie, R.W., Couch, K., and Xu, H. (May 2020). The impacts of COVID-19 on minority unemployment: first evidence from April 2020 CPS microdata. Working Paper. *National Bureau of Economic Research*, <https://www.nber.org/papers/w27246>

<sup>3</sup> Benitez, J.A., Courtemanche, C.J., and Yelowitz, A. (July 2020). Racial and ethnic disparities in COVID-19: evidence from six large cities. Working Paper. *National Bureau of Economic Research*. <http://www.nber.org/papers/w27592>

## Key Accomplishments from the Powered by Publics Clusters

The following are selected highlights from the work of the PxP clusters, organized by elements of our conceptual framework (Figure 2). PxP clusters are working within the areas of Teaching and Learning, Holistic Student Supports, and Affordability. This framework encompasses many of the key determinants of degree completion as well as critical strategic priorities and capacities institutions must build to deliver student success at scale. Commitments to equity and data-informed decision making are cross-cutting enablers of student success and, ideally, should be embedded into all policies, processes, and programs at the university.

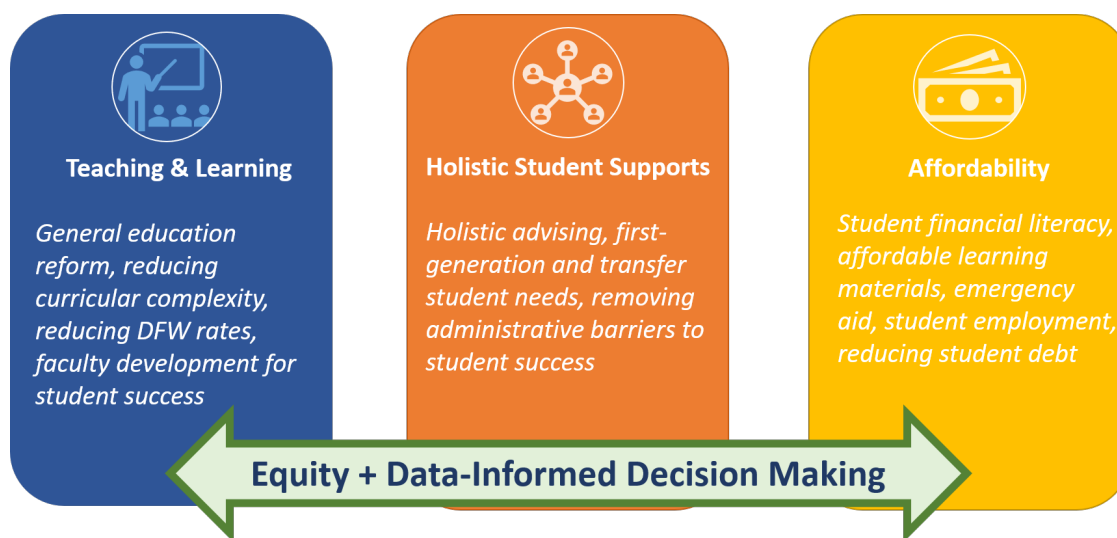


Fig 2. Conceptual framework with important determinants of student success

### Affordability

*Powered by Publics members are working to lower college costs for students, shorten time to graduation, help students reduce their debt, and ensure graduates are prepared with skills needed to succeed in the workforce. Combined, these efforts help ensure equitable access to higher education and contribute toward more equitable student outcomes.*

The **High-Pell Cluster** (led by Rutgers University-Newark) has produced a short report on the use of Open Educational Resources (OER) and other affordable learning materials. The report is grounded in a survey of faculty across the cluster and contains links to evidence and additional resources to support universities' adoption of OER. Publication is expected by the end of March 2023 on the PxP Learning Exchange.

The **Metropolitan Cluster** (led by the University of Texas at Arlington) published a website of resources for universities seeking to strengthen on-campus student employment: [Powered by Publics Student Employment Resources for Practitioners](#). On-campus employment can be considered a "high-impact" practice, as it is associated with greater academic persistence and success compared to off-campus

employment practices. Although the data on student employment are limited, the website shares data collected by cluster members and makes recommendations for metrics that universities should consider tracking. This website is intended to be a living resource and the cluster welcomes any suggestions for additions and changes to the content, which may be submitted through [an online form](#).

### Holistic Student Supports

*Holistic, wraparound services designed to meet the diversity of students' non-academic needs are essential for advancing degree completion and eliminating equity gaps. Powered by Publics members are implementing supports grounded in evidence and explicitly targeted toward those who need them most – students who are low-income, minoritized, first-generation, or transfer students.*

In November, the **Southeastern Cluster** (led by Clemson University) published [A Focus on Transfer Student Success Programs and Best Practices](#), a detailed examination of transfer-specific state policies, institutional partnerships and practices, and key metrics for assessment, all with a focus on equitable outcomes. The cluster focused on the challenges faced by transfer students in the four states their institutions call home—Florida, North Carolina, South Carolina, and Virginia. Four themes emerged as important lessons learned: (1) invest and reinvest in establishing trust and clearly communicating needs, positions, and expectations, (2) remember that we measure what we value, and we fund what we measure, (3) keep where your organization is and where you're going in mind when you evaluate other models and programs, and (4) explore with curiosity and openness. The report concludes with an overview of transfer policies and initiatives in each state, as well as highlighting some of the successful programs and initiatives that have been implemented. Findings suggest that institutions should focus on providing pathways and guidelines for transfer credit, as well as individualized advising and support to improve the success of transfer students.

The **Evidence Improvement Cluster** (led by the University of Texas at Austin) focused on improving retention for students by ensuring first-year programs build strong campus relationships and advising practices provide effective, student-centered supports. A working group of first-year experience subject matter experts conducted a cross-cluster examination of curricular-based first-year programs to understand variations in models, participation, resources allocated, and outcomes to equip campus leaders with necessary knowledge for proposing campus-level program improvements. Advising leaders shared change ideas being tested on campuses to build respect for the advising profession, align advisor roles and responsibilities across the institution, and identify/target underserved students through coordinated sharing of disaggregated student data.

### Teaching and Learning

*Several clusters are working to develop and scale innovative programs, practices, and policies that improve teaching practices and foster an inclusive learning environment for students. Doing so will increase a sense of belonging at the university, contribute to academic success, and ultimately degree completion, particularly for first-generation students and those from underrepresented backgrounds.*

The **Big Ten Cluster** (led by the University of Illinois-Urbana Champaign) leveraged findings from a previous examination of student course data and the practices and policies affecting success rates in entry-level courses to drive toward a cluster-wide improvement aim. The aim is to improve persistence and address academic disparities for students by eliminating equity gaps in grade patterns in target

gateway courses. By collectively brainstorming causal factors that contribute to students enrolled in these courses earning a D, F, or withdrawing from classes and answering key framing questions, the cluster created a logic model “roadmap for change.” The roadmap includes activities to inform, engage, and empower teaching faculty and all campus stakeholders to improve. This roadmap will be shared in 2023.

The **Western Land-grant Cluster** (led by Colorado State University) continues to use [Curricular Analytics](#) as a tool for optimizing degree programs and closing equity gaps, particularly in high-demand fields that lack representation from minoritized and low-income students. Institutions in the cluster are beginning to engage their department chairs around curricular data to build consensus for program improvement. This work was supported by a seed funding grant from APLU. A final report and webinar presentation are expected in Spring 2023.

### Equity and Data-Informed Decision Making

*All clusters strive to be equity-minded and data-driven, as evidenced by their focus on student groups experiencing institutional barriers to success and their collection of disaggregated data. The following projects provide additional leadership and capacity-building support to the Powered by Publics network.*

The **Tech Cluster** (led by the New Jersey Institute of Technology) continues its work toward the **Winner-Take-All Equity Challenge**, with members aiming to make as much progress as possible toward retention and 4-year graduation rates for underrepresented minority and Pell students by the end of 2023. A \$30,000 prize awaits the winning institution that makes the most visible progress. Each university will build on its existing programmatic efforts to achieve the goal, which include expanded use of advising systems, supportive services, and peer mentoring. Additionally, the cluster will capture lessons learned as they seek to improve in the context of a global pandemic and accelerating disruption of higher education. This effort was supported with competitive seed funding from APLU.

The **Data Integration Cluster** (led by Texas Tech University) is focused on building institutional capacity for data-informed decision making. The cluster has developed a [Data Maturity Index](#) tool to support campuses in integrating data across programs, strengthening data governance and policies, and fostering data literacy at all levels of staff, faculty, and university leadership. The self-assessment tool helps campuses understand where they are in their journey toward becoming a data-informed campus and makes suggestions for further improvement. In addition, the cluster examined barriers to data literacy and is completing a playbook on good practices for institutions to build and maintain an effective data culture on campus. The playbook will be made available to all PxP universities in late spring.

### Cross-Cluster Collaborations

*In several cases, multiple clusters joined together to collaborate toward one or more of the focus areas*

### Powered by Publics Equity Roundtables

PxP partnered with 20 institutions as a cross-cluster effort to convene students, administrators, and alumni to identify barriers to college access, success, and career pathways that students from underrepresented backgrounds face. Utilizing our equity framework and the principles of conversational leadership, the roundtables were designed to provide member institutions a collaborative space and

place to center student voices in their efforts to advance student success. The roundtable format provided a creative, conversational architecture by: asking critical questions, using trauma-informed facilitation to maintain psychological and emotional safety, building trust, equalizing power dynamics, and utilizing student-led reflections to capture the collective wisdom of the students and alumni within and across member institutions.

Hosted by the **University of Arkansas at Pine Bluff** (Cluster 4), the **University of Colorado Denver** (Cluster 6), the **University of Nebraska—Lincoln** (Cluster 8), and the **University of Texas at Arlington** (Cluster 7), and engaging students, administrators, and alumni from 20 additional institutions, the roundtables provided critical insights into the student experience and how institutions can better address students' needs through institutional policies. Some key student-identified insights from the [full report](#) include:

- Institutions had resources for students to take advantage of, but those students felt they bore most of the responsibility for finding these resources and establishing a comprehensive support system for themselves.
- Students felt traditional hours of operation for student support services create barriers to access for non-traditional students who may commute, be enrolled part-time, and take evening classes.
- Finances continue to be a significant barrier to college access and student success.
- Students said orientation and transition programs did not sufficiently reach every type of student, suggesting a need for more targeted supports.
- Students reported experiencing student support services as siloed.
- Career services often focuses attention on traditional and STEM students, which may disadvantage non-traditional students as well as those studying social sciences and the humanities.

### Data Literacy Institute

In partnership with the [Association for Institutional Research \(AIR\)](#) and with funding from [Ascendium Education Group](#), PxP developed a Data Literacy Institute to support institutions in the **Northern Cluster** (led by the University of Maine) and the **Data Integration Cluster** (led by Texas Tech University). The first cohort of five institutions received professional development for staff, faculty, and leaders from across campus to create a community of practice and to build knowledge and skills in the use of data for decision making. Participants applied their knowledge through a hands-on data project, which was presented to senior leaders in Spring 2022.

A second cohort of five institutions launched in Fall 2022. A virtual convening will take place in May 2023 bringing the two cohorts together to showcase their capstone projects, share learning, and celebrate their communities of practice around data literacy.

Topics addressed by both cohorts include:

- Success of male students of color
- Equity gaps for Pell recipients and students of color
- First gen students, support services, and student success
- Gateway course success for marginalized students



- Early alert programs
- Student engagement
- Gap in degree maps and actual degree completion
- The impact of major changers on completion and time to degree
- Retention
- Persistence barriers from sophomore to junior year
- Curriculum barriers
- Student debt and financial need
- Differential support needs for commuter and residential student

An external evaluation of the DLI revealed that while the program was time-consuming and demanding, 80% of participants would recommend the program to their colleagues. Click here to see the full evaluation: [ASA APLU DLI Evaluation Final Report.pdf](#)

Accelerating Transformation with the Intermediaries for Scale Cohort  
*Services to help transforming institutions go further, faster*

### Intermediaries for Scale Demonstration Project

The APLU [Intermediaries for Scale](#) (IFS) initiative is a demonstration project funded by the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation to provide support and resources to 16 transformation-ready institutions in the PxP network that were selected due to their interest in improving student outcomes, increasing degree completion rates, and reducing equity gaps. The project aims to help institutions to develop a culture of data-informed decision making, improve the advising process for their students, redesign gateway courses to be more inclusive, engaging, and effective and help institutions to move successfully toward sustainable approaches to resource allocation in a shifting economic landscape. While 2021 was dedicated to engaging in various activities as part of fostering the peer learning community, 2022 was focused on the design and delivery of a portfolio of services (described below) intended to meet specific needs identified during the comprehensive needs assessment. Institutions are provided with technical assistance, expert guidance, and support throughout the service engagement. The services offerings are described as follows:

- **Advising Success Network (NACADA):** Provides training on best practices in advising and focuses on creating a more inclusive and equitable advising process. Institutions completed in the first two tracks of a three-track program, which included modules on best practices in advising, creating a more inclusive and equitable advising process, and strategies for improving student outcomes. The monthly modules will conclude in April 2023. The service also includes follow-up technical assistance sessions, as needed.
- **Every Learner Everywhere (WICHE):** Focuses on redesigning gateway courses to be more inclusive, engaging, and effective. Institutions participated in a five-phase program, which includes training on inclusive course design, creating engaging and effective course materials, and strategies for improving student outcomes. Institutions are also provided with coaching and technical assistance to help them implement the changes they've made to their courses.

- **Strategic Higher Education Finance (rpk GROUP):** Aims to help institutions shift from traditional budget models to an innovative Return on Investment (ROI)-based lens. The service consists of two workshops, offered in November and December 2022, that introduced the shift to ROI and dove deeper into the ROI approach with best practices. Also included are several technical assistance (TA) sessions in 2023 to allow institutions to delve deeper into their specific challenges and receive additional consulting services to support their individual action plan.
- **Equitable Problem Design (Equity Meets Design):** On October 19, teams from 10 PxP institutions, including three members of the IFS cohort, participated in the [Equity Meets Design](#)-led “[7 Problems with Problems](#)” workshop. The objective was to improve and deepen the framing and articulation of a problematic priority area by utilizing design thinking in a way that prioritizes equity. The “7 Problems with Problems” framework emphasized the importance of considering the needs and perspectives of all stakeholders when designing problems and encouraged the use of inclusive and participatory approaches. It also focused on identifying and addressing common pitfalls in problem design that can perpetuate inequality and injustice, such as failing to recognize power dynamics and privilege, focusing on symptoms instead of root causes, and ignoring the diversity of experiences and perspectives. By recognizing and addressing these problems, organizations and individuals can work towards designing more equitable and inclusive problems that lead to more equitable and inclusive solutions. Attendees were led through challenging and thought-provoking discussions. By the end of the workshop, each team had a shared, deeper, and more nuanced understanding of the problem, an understanding of what is unknown or yet to-do to fully understand the problem, and some ideas of how and where they might use the tools introduced during the day.
- **Incorporating the Student Voice to Support Student Success (Center for Community College Student Engagement):** The *Incorporating the Student Voice to Support Student Success* webinar series was a collaboration between [Jobs for the Future](#), APLU, and the [Center for Community College Student Engagement](#) to identify ways to incorporate student perspectives and lived experiences into decision-making. From March to June, monthly webinars featured keynote speakers, panel discussions, and interactive sessions covering topics such as the impact of COVID-19 on student success, the role of technology in enhancing student engagement and outcomes, and strategies for creating inclusive learning environments. The series also focused on mental health and well-being, and ways to support students from historically underrepresented populations. Each webinar provided valuable insights, emphasized the importance of integrating student voice, and provided practical strategies to support student success. Resources from the individual webinars are available [here](#).
- **Data Literacy Institute ‘Lite’ (Association for Institutional Research):** Launching in early 2023, The Data Literacy Institute Lite (DLite) is a condensed 12-week version of the 26-week Data Literacy Institute experience. DLite is designed to help higher education professionals enhance their knowledge and skills in data and decision making, within a single academic term, to improve student success. Each week, participants will engage in virtual discussions, tutorials, independent work, and group projects. The Institute aims to build networks of data-literate colleagues and promote a culture of data-informed decision making. Participants will also learn to identify equity gaps in education and use analytics to address them, understand the ethical

use of data, and incorporate the student voice in student success research, assessment, and continuous quality improvement. The DLI follows a flipped-classroom model with a weekly time commitment of approximately 4 hours, including recorded tutorials and a discussion board, 1-hour live lectures, and weekly individual and group assignments. Additional technical assistance in the form of “Office Hours” will be held twice weekly by AIR staff to provide support and answer questions. Each institutional team will complete, and present, Capstone Project that provides the opportunity to put the Institute content into practice. By the end of the program, participants will have a solid understanding of the foundations of analytics, effective reporting, decision making, and change management.

The 16 participating institutions are: University of Arkansas at Pine Bluff, Clemson University, Illinois State University, Middle Tennessee State University, Montana State University, New Jersey Institute of Technology, New Mexico State University, University of New Orleans, University of Ohio, Rutgers University at Newark, University of South Alabama, Texas Tech University, Tuskegee University, Virginia Commonwealth University, Western Michigan University, and University of Wyoming.

## Network Resources

### Online Learning Exchange

The [Learning Exchange](#) was launched in December 2021 as a platform for sharing knowledge and creating a virtual community to connect with peers across clusters. In its first full year, it saw 77 members from 53 institutions or organizations participating, posting 86 blogs and discussions, 24 tools and resources, and 88 events. The platform saw moderate growth in 2022, with a steady increase in content being shared in the second half of the year. Our most viewed content included reports on [transfer credit efficiency](#) and [transfer student success](#), the [2021 PxP Progress Report](#), and a blog on how some members are [cultivating student belonging to increase retention](#). Moving forward, we plan to expand the use of the Learning Exchange and make it the central platform for collaboration among participants. Though much of the content will be publicly available, [sign up](#) to stay informed about upcoming blogs, discussion forums, events, and resources.

### VSA Analytics

Designed by institutions, for institutions, [VSA Analytics](#) allows users to create and save multiple peer groups and build graphical benchmarking reports in minutes. The custom platform offers more than 25 benchmarking reports based on a national dataset containing about 400 variables from roughly 4,400 institutions. PxP members can access and manipulate Core Data Metrics data (which is viewable only by members of the network) on VSA Analytics if the institution is a subscriber. For more information, contact [cdm@aplu.org](mailto:cdm@aplu.org).

## On the Horizon

As the 5-year PxP initiative draws to a close, APLU is reflecting on the value of this effort to its members. PxP has enhanced broader culture change at universities, centering equity and student success while promoting adoption of evidence-based practices. The initiative has also produced new knowledge that will be valuable to the field. Most importantly, it has fostered collaboration among peers across institutions, creating deep learning communities and strengthening interpersonal trust.

To evaluate the success of PxP, APLU worked with independent firm MAYA Consulting, which reviewed previous feedback surveys, evaluations, and program reports to learn about the initial design, goals, and outcomes of the initiative. In addition, they conducted focus group interviews with cluster managers and surveys of program participants to identify key areas for improvement of future APLU student success projects.

The findings from this evaluation have helped APLU understand how to better meet the unique needs of its member institutions. Four key conclusions emerged:

- 1. PxP has fostered a strong sense of community among members:** Participants greatly valued the opportunity to connect with peers from similarly situated institutions in a non-competitive space where they could discuss equity in postsecondary retention and completion. Participants expressed a desire for regularly scheduled convenings across the PxP network and access to lessons learned that they could bring back to their institutions.
- 2. Better utilization of program tools will drive greater impact:** The Core Data Metrics (CDM) and the [Learning Exchange](#) were designed to support the PxP program by providing a platform for measuring effectiveness and sharing strategies. With thoughtful integration into the program design and training, these resources could provide the data and opportunities for collaboration that participants are requesting.
- 3. Clarify and streamline program goals for future engagement:** Participants agreed that the goals of PxP were ambitious, and a revised theory of action with shorter sightlines for participating institutions can provide the structure and vision needed to better align efforts and increase buy-in at the institutions.
- 4. Strengthen collaboration around equity:** Participants agreed that PxP successfully centers equitable outcomes for students and expressed the need for more opportunities for collaboration around these goals. A revised theory of action that incorporates student voice and more concise and measurable outcomes can provide clarity and support institutions in centering equity.

With these conclusions in mind, and with a new president at the helm, APLU hopes to continue working with members to achieve equitable student outcomes at public universities. APLU convenings will provide participants with opportunities to connect with peers outside their established networks and share promising practices. The Core Data Metrics and the Learning Exchange will be integrated into future program designs and offered with training, so that participants can effectively measure the impact of their strategies and share lessons learned. Future projects will incorporate a clearly defined theory of action for participating institutions, as well as concise and measurable outcomes.