



TRANSFORMING MINDSETS, POWERING CHANGE

# Advancing Equity through Postsecondary Education Policy and Practice

JANUARY 2022

EQUAL  
MEASURE

FINDING  
PROMISE  
FUELING  
CHANGE



## ABOUT LUMINA FOUNDATION

Lumina Foundation is an independent, private foundation in Indianapolis committed to making opportunities for learning beyond high school available to all and increasing the proportion of Americans with college degrees, workforce certificates, and other high-quality credentials to 60% by 2025. The Foundation envisions a system that is easy to navigate, delivers fair results, and meets the nation's need for talent through a broad range of credentials. The Foundation works in partnership with education and business leaders, civil rights organizations, policymakers, and individuals who want to reimagine how and where learning occurs. Between 2017 and 2020, Lumina Foundation launched and supported 26 communities designated as Talent Hubs for creating environments that attract, retain, and cultivate talent, particularly among today's students, many of whom are people of color, the first in their families to go to college, and from low-income households.

## ABOUT EQUAL MEASURE

Equal Measure is a Philadelphia-based nonprofit consultancy working with national and regional foundations, nonprofits, and public entities to advance social change. Equal Measure offers program design, evaluation through a wide range of methodologies, capacity building, technical assistance, and communications services to help *those who do good do even better*. For more than 30 years we've partnered with clients across the broad spectrum of content areas, sharing fresh insights and translating good ideas into meaningful change—strengthening our clients' efforts to make our communities healthier, more equitable, and more inclusive.

For more information about Equal Measure, please contact Seth Klukoff, Vice President of Thought Leadership, at [sklukoff@equalmeasure.org](mailto:sklukoff@equalmeasure.org) or visit [equalmeasure.org](http://equalmeasure.org).



## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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The individuals and organizations who forged partnerships and advanced equitable policies and practices are committed to establishing a legacy of college access and success, and we celebrate those efforts. We are also grateful for their contributions as thought partners, as their insights have helped Equal Measure shape and refine what we have learned over the course of the initiative.

### CITIES/REGIONS PARTICIPATING IN THE TALENT HUBS INITIATIVE EVALUATION





# INTRODUCTION

*“I will say that [my school is] making some change...but I won’t really give them a win for that until I start to see institutional change.”*

—STUDENT AT TALENT HUB INSTITUTION

Today there is a powerful call for American educational institutions to address systemic inequities. Students of color and adult, first-generation, and low-income students—who aspire to obtain meaningful postsecondary degrees, career success, and economic mobility—face many challenges. Local systems and institutions are not adequately designed to address or swiftly remove long-standing structural barriers for students stumbling along the unjust pathways set up in our education and career sectors.

In this report, we share an emerging picture of how postsecondary institutions and their partners are unearthing complex and entrenched barriers embedded in their systems and shifting culture, practices, and policies. Their stories illustrate how a focused approach to equity—one that attends to implicit and explicit factors—is establishing new mindsets, norms, and policies that today’s students need right now. Over the past 18 months, these efforts have been set ablaze by the pandemic lockdown in spring 2020 that forced student classes and services online—and opened a way to more rapid innovation and reform.

We also draw lessons and best practices from the learning and evaluation agenda led by Equal Measure and DVP-Praxis, as part of Lumina Foundation’s [Talent Hubs initiative](#). Our work involved interviews with 70 individuals from 13 communities across the United States (see Appendix); we also drew on survey responses from 63 individuals in communities serving in postsecondary institutions. We highlight places where partners are committed to advancing equity, removing barriers to success, and closing gaps in achievement. We identified common factors that fuel the implementation of significant policy and practice change, as well as the challenges along the way. This report focuses heavily on mindset shifts, the role of leaders, and the underrecognized experiences of students who do not fit the “traditional” mold of higher education.

The report explores the following three areas and offers implications for postsecondary institutions:



1. The role of **Core Beliefs** in shaping approaches to equity.



2. The **Fuel** that accelerates policy and practice change.



3. The **Activating Strategies** that advance equity.



This report is one in a three-part series, capturing key learnings from the Talent Hubs initiative. Together, the reports elevate the implicit and explicit factors of change that are common to institutions and community partners making progress in equity efforts. **The series is primarily written for those working in postsecondary institutions. The ideas and examples are intended to provide affirmation and inspiration for the long journey toward redressing long-standing racial and ethnic inequities and systemic barriers in communities and educational institutions across the country.** In this report, *Advancing Equity through Postsecondary Education Policy and Practice*, we examine the evolution of policy and practice change in equity-focused partnerships and postsecondary institutions.

## TRANSFORMING MINDSETS, POWERING CHANGE SERIES

### Evaluation Approach

This report is part of a series, *Transforming Mindsets, Powering Change*, in which we share learnings related to advancing equity through policy and practice change. Equal Measure served as Lumina Foundation's evaluation and learning partner for Talent Hubs from 2017 to 2021. These reports are the culmination of 70 interviews with Talent Hub partners and a survey documenting 240 policy and practice changes underway at 22 of 26 Talent Hubs. Six types of organizations were involved in interviews: postsecondary institutions (40); community organizations, including nonprofits and chambers, some serving as the Talent Hub grantee (22); government (3); philanthropy (3); and workforce/employers (2). Interviews were conducted with postsecondary institution presidents, provosts, deans, and department heads; students; and leaders from local government, business, and community-based organizations.

We invite you to read the two companion reports in this series:

- *Recognizing Catalysts for Change in Postsecondary Education*, which explores those who play an outsized role in promoting equitable change within and across partner institutions and identifies common approaches to this work.
- *Getting to the Root*, which presents four approaches to exploring the root causes of inequity and spotlights three Talent Hubs who used findings from their own explorations to drive community- and institutional-level change.



# AN EMERGING MODEL OF EQUITABLE POLICY AND PRACTICE CHANGE

This report offers no simple roadmap to or recipe for equitable policy and practice change for postsecondary institutions and their communities to follow. Instead, we offer insight into a set of emerging common elements that can steadily shift culture, practice, and policy among institutions intently focused on reducing gaps in student outcomes—especially for students of color and adult, first generation, and low-income students.

The emerging elements driving change appeared across the many policy and practices changes being pursued by the Talent Hubs. A 2020 survey indicated that 87 postsecondary institutions in the cohort were pursuing 240 distinct policy and practice changes intended better support the entire postsecondary education pathway, from enrollment to career success, of students and graduates who have not traditionally been centered by their institutions. The new and refined policies and practices are summarized in Table 1.

**TABLE 1:**  
Policies and Practices Pursued by 22 Talent Hub Institutional Partners, as of January 2020

POLICIES AND PRACTICES	NUMBER PURSUED
New or refined academic or curricular practices, such as guided pathways, stackable credentials, and co-requisite remediation reforms	97
More student supports, such as case management, advising, and re-enrollment strategies	83
Changes to credit and credential practices, such as reverse transfers, degree audits, and prior learning assessments	30
More financial support for students, such as emergency grants, scholarships, and debt forgiveness	22
Changes and enhancements to employment-related practices, such as tuition remission and apprenticeships	8

An emerging model (Figure 1) illustrates the elements commonly found across these efforts.



## Core Beliefs

The work is prefaced on a set of collective core beliefs shared among postsecondary institutions and their partners about **equity, racism, and systems change**. Their efforts help to surface beliefs and build greater understanding among stakeholders, recognizing that changing mindsets takes time and will not happen uniformly in any group, institution, or community.



## The Fuel

Three factors serve to accelerate equity efforts in the early, middle, and later stages of the work: strong **leadership** buy-in and support, **alignment** with institutional and/or community goals and priorities, and **resources** to sustain changes. The development, refinement, and implementation of equitable culture, policies, and practices depend on the ongoing presence of these three accelerators.



## Activating Strategies

Equity-focused institutions invested substantial time and energy into at least one of these actions over the course of their efforts: **engage students and communities, examine root causes of inequities, and disaggregate data**. These activities helped surface and shift core beliefs, providing stakeholders with opportunities for reflection as well as action as the picture of systemic inequities came into sharper focus.



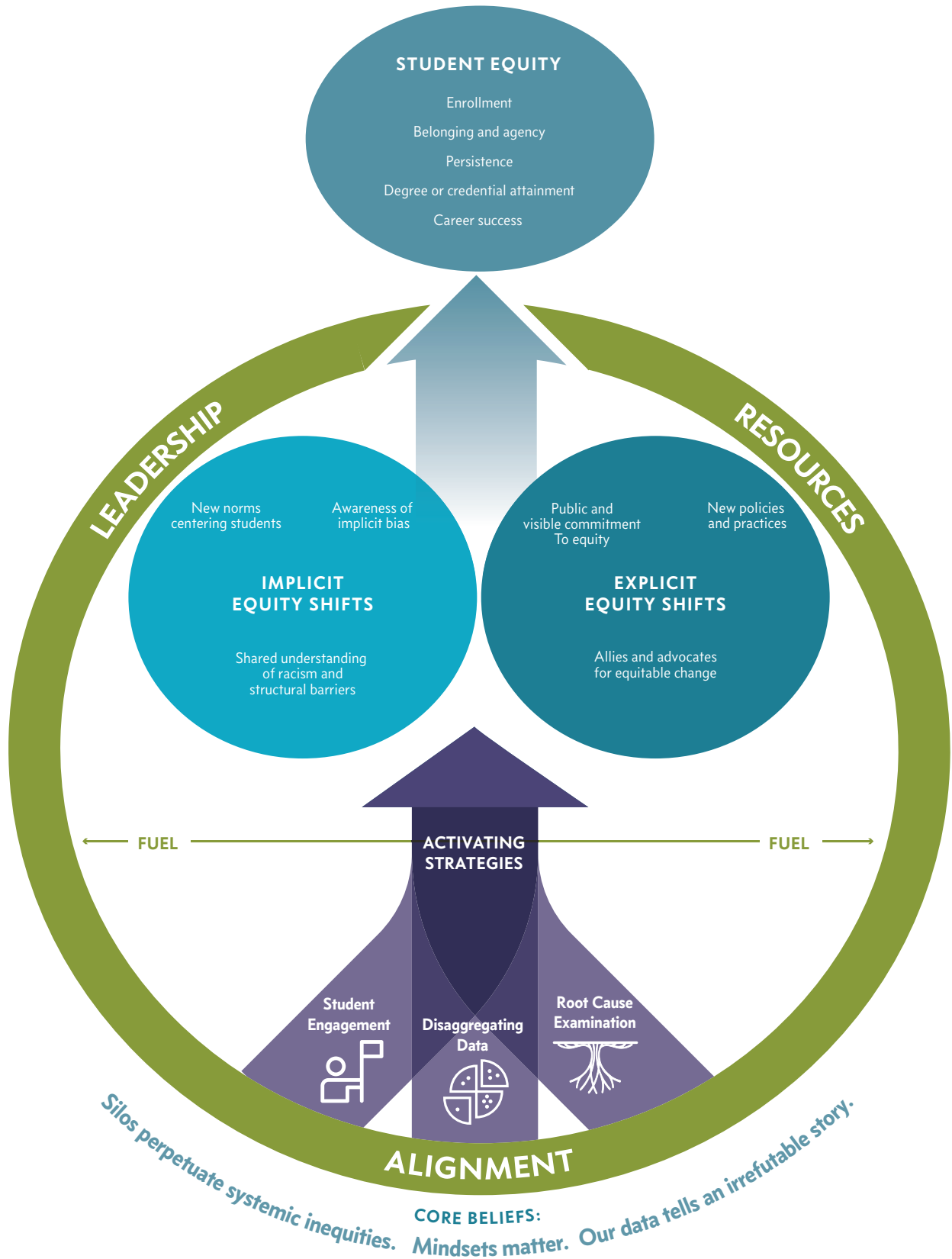
The three elements point to **ongoing efforts to lower barriers and achieve equity** in postsecondary institutions, without any defined end point. For example, there is a need to **continually attend to core beliefs** and mindsets given the passage of time, and the effect of events and turnover within institutions. The **fuel for change can ebb and flow**, depending on the composition of leaders at an institution, available resources, and changing priorities in an institution, partnership, or region. Partners, accordingly, need to adjust and respond to changing levels of fuel, which can slow or halt the work. Finally, the **actionable tactics establish new ways of knowing** that are inclusive and allow space for complexity and multiple perspectives. These ways of knowing can take time to establish—and often need to be refreshed or reiterated as people come and go from these efforts—until a strong culture is sown. As postsecondary institutions address these three elements, there are subtle and not-so-subtle shifts accompanying them. From our evaluation, we’ve observed **three types of shifts**:

**TABLE 2:**  
Types of Shifts Critical to Equitable Change

IMPLICIT SHIFTS	EXPLICIT SHIFTS	STUDENT OUTCOMES
These changes are hard to measure and observe, such as greater awareness, understanding, new norms, power sharing, and values.	Visible and observable changes such as new policies and practices; public commitments; and a vocal, action-oriented set of champions for equity.	These take longer to achieve and may be observed first in pilots or small groups: improvements in equitable enrollment, persistence, sense of belonging, degree/credential attainment, and career success.



**FIGURE 1:**  
Drivers of Equitable Change in Postsecondary Education







# THE ROLE OF CORE BELIEFS IN SHAPING APPROACHES

Truly centering equity in education requires cultivating shared beliefs among stakeholders at all levels that, in turn, build or reinforce a culture and set of practices to advance equity. Stakeholders we spoke with consistently cited the widespread adoption of “core beliefs” within their institutions as a factor that created a **growing chorus of messages** and **propelled action** to center equity in their work. It is not necessary for all leaders, staff, students, or community stakeholders to adopt the core beliefs at the same time or pace. However, those who can articulate core beliefs are often driven by passion or position to build bridges that broaden the number of people who are aware, knowledgeable, and motivated by a set of core beliefs. We summarize the more common beliefs here to illustrate their sentiment and their power.

1. The problem is documented: “Our data tells an irrefutable story of inequity.”
2. Collective action is necessary: “Silos perpetuate systemic inequities.”
3. Bias must be made visible: “Mindsets matter.”

## Core Belief 1: “Our Data Tells an Irrefutable Story of Inequity”

Sharing and analyzing disaggregated data across departments, institutions, and sectors can be an ordeal for new or under-resourced partnerships in postsecondary education. Talent Hub communities used resources from Lumina’s designation. By combining and then disaggregating data, many partners gained a new perspective on persistent disparities that span enrollment, transfer, completion, and career outcomes.

Institutional data that is particularly useful to disaggregate includes:

- **Administrative data** highlighting programmatic gaps, community needs, or barriers that disproportionately affect students of color—for example, examining the ratio of students of color and mental health counselors of color.
- **Student outcome data** on enrollment, persistence, and attainment rates that are core institutional metrics of success.
- **Cross-institutional data** that offers new understandings of where students stop their educational journeys, for instance, between high school and two-year community colleges, or between adult education programs and four-year universities.
- **Qualitative and student perspective data**, elevating lived experiences and common barriers told through stories, collected from students of color or differently abled students to augment quantitative data with examples.

*“Through case study data, once we started looking at the different resources and tools and barriers that women of color were facing, we recognized they cross different genders and ethnicities. The removal of those barriers could potentially impact not just women of color, but other populations as well. That’s when we identified that our scope was too narrow, and that the work could really scale.”*

—TALENT HUB PARTNER



For many equity-focused institutions, the interpretation of data looks quite different from past efforts. In years prior, institutions would often review their own limited data sets in closed rooms, analyze data, and devise solutions without the benefit of students' lived experiences or community partners' insights to guide them. Disparities in data could be pinned on the choices and accountability of individual students without recognizing the systemic factors at play. However, as mindsets around equity and inclusion shifted, disaggregated data became an inflection point, often whetting partners' appetites to learn more, explore the root cause of differences among student groups, and take action on the structural and systemic barriers facing students on campus or residents regionally.

**The shift from a deficit-oriented to an equitable approach can be profound and requires institutions to consider more than their data.** For instance, equity-focused institutions are simultaneously educating their staff about the values and goals guiding efforts to achieve belonging, inclusivity, and equitable outcomes among students. As a result, staff and leaders are asking different questions about the data they have, inviting those with lived experiences to help interpret and create solutions from the results, and examining disaggregated student data alongside non-institutional data. Historic, community, and cross-sector data are eye-opening for many, providing greater direction than institutional data alone for generating equity-focused solutions. The next core belief on mindsets also highlights how a multitude of efforts help bring an equitable approach to policies and daily practices across the institution.

## Core Belief 2: "Mindsets Matter"

**In most communities, establishing collective mindsets throughout all levels of the institution (and with community partners) was cited as a critical precursor to more specific changes in policy and practice.** Talent Hub partners benefited from the introduction of equity frameworks, trainings, guided conversations, and book clubs. Some institutions created opportunities to engage with students about their experiences to encourage a "student-first" culture, that focuses on the needs and aspirations of students rather than on those of the institution and its staff. These are not single offerings; as one partner reminded us: "You can't unwrap everything that has happened in a training session. You can't do that in a five- or 10-workshop format that is provided." Facilitating honest dialogue over many sessions and with time paved the way for institutions to acknowledge:

*"And what we're doing now, if I were to give you the list of things we're doing, one might say, 'Wow, this is a reactive response to what has happened over the past six months,' when the reality is we've been doing this work and this equity work and trying to create a culture that normalizes equity mindedness since about 2015."*

—TALENT HUB PARTNER

- That all staff, leaders, and partners hold implicit biases that compromise approaches to equity.
- How the experiences of faculty and staff of color differ from white faculty and staff, including the valuable role they play in supporting students of color. One partner used the term "Black tax" to refer to overwhelmed Black staff and faculty who spend evening hours talking to students who feel unsafe or unwelcome on campuses.
- The true diversity of their student body— understanding that students come from communities and public-school systems that face long-time disinvestment; and students themselves must manage a compounding set of pressures as working adults and parents, the first in their family to attend college, English-language learners, and those reconnecting to their education.



To better align the mental models of those working with diverse students, Talent Hub partners often relied on guides, protocols, and curricula. For instance:

- Tulsa’s Chamber of Commerce created a racial equity [discussion guide](#) for partners to align agendas and actions with equity goals. The guide ensures partners’ efforts are collaborative, comprehensive, and contextualized.
- Columbus, Indiana’s EcO Network engaged the [National Equity Project](#) over three years to conduct trainings that helped partners from mostly white communities become more aware and committed to issues of equity and the diversity within their communities and surrounding region. Local partners—McDowell Education Center, Su Casa Columbus, and The Latino Education Group—have been instrumental in helping partners understand the needs of the Latinx community and shape strategies including continued equity trainings and the addition of a bilingual student success coach.
- Fresno partners adopted Estela Mara Bensimon’s [Equity-Minded Framework](#) to create a common lens for their goals, decisions, and actions. Its influence spans departments and campuses in the Fresno region, helping to build more inclusive classrooms, foster equitable financial policies, and modify curricula and academic programs.

### Core Belief 3: “Silos Perpetuate Systemic Inequities”

The challenges many students face off campus affect their success on campus. The individual challenges are further compounded when postsecondary institutions present an additional layer of barriers and difficult pathways that students of color and adult, first generation, and low-income students need to navigate. Fragmented resources, conditions, and services in postsecondary institutions and throughout communities create structural inequities for students that no one entity can resolve alone. This core belief develops as postsecondary institutions realize the limitations of their ability to devise effective and sustainable solutions.

**When postsecondary institutions are networked with other community agencies, they can better address the compounding and complex needs of students.** Students who are caregivers, parents, and working full or part time need services aligned with their schedules. They often struggle with childcare and after care programs that cannot accommodate evening class schedules. Transit and bus services may not connect to campuses and their satellite locations, which may be located across jurisdictional lines or outside of a transit agency’s range. Equity-focused institutions are positioned to recognize the barriers facing students and can occasionally offer programs or supports to address them; however, they cannot resolve ongoing systemic barriers in the community without local partners who hold power, authority, and resources over local systems. Resolving systemic inequities requires partnerships with organizations and agencies that serve a wider geographic footprint than their campuses. Below are examples of two communities with systems that did not accommodate students, and how postsecondary institutions and their partners developed collaborative solutions.



- Students in the Cincinnati Talent Hub are situated along three state lines—Ohio, Kentucky, and Indiana—each with their own educational, civic, and service systems. Naturally, there is duplication across states that can be difficult for students, especially those navigating a transition from two to four-year schools, or from college to career. In some cases, students lost credits when they transferred across state lines from one postsecondary institution to another. Managing transportation and childcare across state lines was also complicated. Talent Hub partners recognized the importance of coordination across the tri-state system to reduce barriers for students. As an example of success, partners are scaling the [Scholar House](#) model—residential housing for low-income students who are mostly single, female parents. The model provides high quality childcare on site as well as other supports, thus reducing the historic divides—both environmental and racial—posed by the Ohio River.
- In the Las Vegas region, low-income students and students of color were disproportionately leaving their education before earning credentials or degrees. Focus groups with both students who dropped out early and those who successfully completed a degree program helped Las Vegas’ Talent Hub partners identify barriers to success. They learned that the incredibly important supports for housing and transportation during childhood were cut off after high school graduation and were compromising postsecondary students’ success. Partners reached out for local and national supports to advance their understanding of students’ basic needs, create new pathways to degrees and credentials, and garner philanthropic contributions to create a safety net. Students can now apply for emergency aid and receive a decision within hours, with funds to apply to their basic needs available within a day.



# THE FUEL THAT ACCELERATES POLICY AND PRACTICE CHANGE

Equity-focused institutions cite three factors fueling change: **leadership support, alignment with broader institutional or governmental priorities, and sustaining resources.** In this section of the report, we define and explore the factors that are critical throughout an institution’s equity journey. Within each factor is a “journey map” of three Talent Hubs—Fresno, Los Angeles, and Detroit—illustrating the fuel supporting new strategies and approaches that advance equitable student outcomes in key indicators of transfers, enrollment, and attainment.

## BY THE NUMBERS: WHAT DOES LEADERSHIP SUPPORT MEAN?

Out of 240 policy and practices changes underway at Talent Hubs, of those midway or fully implemented:



# 93%

have support from executive management

# 77%

have support from front-line staff (including faculty)

## Leadership Support

For equity-focused change to take hold, postsecondary institutions need individuals with the vision, power, and agency to raise issues of equity and encourage sustainable approaches that address longstanding inequities. There is a natural tendency to look toward college presidents, provosts, and boards of directors to set the vision, decide priorities, and provide direction and resources for any institutional change effort. Equity efforts, however, hinge on sharing power and bringing new voices to bear alongside the decisions and resources brought by executive-level leaders. Leaders are situated throughout postsecondary institutions and in community organizations to foster change.

- **Student-facing staff** refers to those in postsecondary institutions that interact directly with students, typically through services and supports such as financial aid, advising, or student affairs. They help define students’ daily experiences in postsecondary education outside of the classroom. Many have lived experiences in common with students from local communities that inform their demeanor and approach. Equity-focused institutions involve student-facing staff and department heads in committees and task forces. This involvement puts them in decision-making roles alongside departmental managers, executive-level leaders, and staff from other departments—helping to distribute power and elevate the ideas of those who hold operational responsibility for equitable policies and practices.



- **Departmental leaders and managers** can support and lead equity efforts within their own offices. They have power to provide trainings, convene, and set policies and practices that address structural inequities in their work. Equity-focused departmental leaders recognize the systemic nature of inequities and barriers to students. Therefore, they work with other departments to ensure a consistent student experience that fosters belonging, agency, and pathways to success.
- **Executive level leaders, chancellors, and board members** hold positional power to set institutional vision and strategy around resolving inequities and instituting changes at high levels. While a few Talent Hub institutions have presidents who set the course for more equitable policies and practices, more often leaders journey alongside other staff—for instance, serving on committees together—to more deeply understand and shift the institution toward equity. Institutional leaders are critical for efforts to move beyond individual departments or singular policies. They can create Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion offices with oversight responsibilities throughout the school; set equity goals or benchmarks that all departments must meet; and reallocate resources to remove barriers facing students—all essential elements of institutionalizing new policies and practices. Crucially, many equity-focused leaders model and emphasize power sharing—ensuring staff and faculty have autonomy to design or co-design equitable policies and practices, plan implementation, and carry out their work in new and flexible ways.

Leadership in these efforts can come from individuals with positional power, as well as those with the drive, passion, and personal power to advance equity. In interviews with Talent Hub stakeholders, we heard often about individuals who play an outsized role in catalyzing equitable change within and across partner organizations. Their contributions can be hard to see or recognize without a deep understanding of the complexity of institutional change efforts. We highlight three individuals in the accompanying report, *Recognizing Catalysts for Change in Postsecondary Education*.

### **Leadership Support Challenges**

There are challenges to gaining and maintaining leadership support for equitable policy and practice changes, for example:

- Major leadership changes at the institution or partner organizations can slow momentum or introduce new priorities.
- Closure of partner organizations, especially prevalent during the COVID-19 pandemic, can leave gaps in cross-sector partnerships and inhibit connections to communities most affected by inequities.
- Leaders who are siloed and with awareness of just a small “slice” of an issue can make it difficult to enact policy and practice changes that will be experienced equitably and consistently by students.

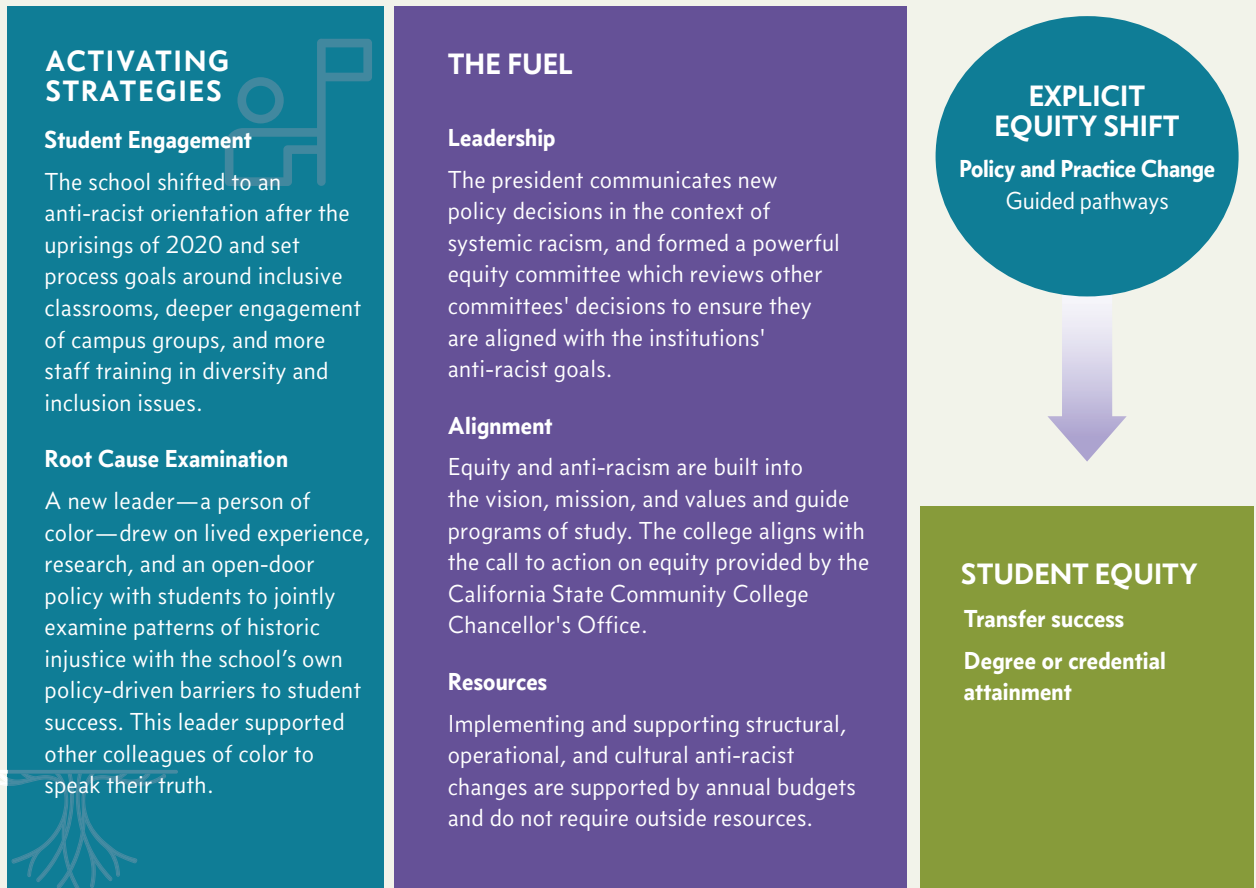


## LEADERSHIP SUPPORT IN FRESNO

### Embedding Equity and Anti-racism

When Madera Community College achieved full college status in the Fresno/Madera region in 2020, the president’s first goal was to harness his positional and personal power to open conversations and champion the hard work needed to center equity in the school’s mission, vision, and values. One of the school’s core policy aims is to develop guided pathways that can help students navigate the barriers and challenges they encounter in pursuing transfer and other completion goals. The influential equity committee has oversight of the committee responsible for designing the pathways. It also has oversight of several other important committees and is charged with ensuring the college’s equity goals are met in institutional operations, structures, and procedures.

**FIGURE 2:**  
The Elements Driving Equity in Fresno





## Alignment

Equitable policy and practice changes can be challenging to institutionalize if they are approached as discrete actions. Progress depends on strategically aligning change with institutional or regional goals, priorities, and/or strategies. Alignment of equitable policy and practice efforts can happen at four levels, as described below.

- **Institutional:** Work that serves or contributes to goals in a strategic plan, equity plan, or student success benchmarks. More than three-fourths of policies and practices that Talent Hub partners pursued align with their institution’s strategic plan or departmental goals.
- **Local or regional:** Partnerships that support mayoral priorities, cross-sector partnership goals, or regional plans (in education, workforce, community development, or economic mobility).
- **Educational system:** Coordination with K-12 public schools that fulfill mandates; can also be accomplished through grants offered by a state agency or statewide public/higher education systems.
- **Legislative:** Responsive to bills or performance-based funding formulas passed by state senates or other elected officials to reach state-wide goals.

### BY THE NUMBERS: WHAT DOES ALIGNMENT MEAN?

Out of 240 policy and practices changes underway at Talent Hubs, of those midway or fully implemented:



# 80%

are aligned with strategic plans and department goals

# 73%

have staff accountable for implementation

### Alignment Challenges

- Lack of clarity about who owns the work, where the work “lives,” and how to align it with other efforts and partnerships.
- Transforming partner organizations’ relationships from competitive to cooperative to identify common areas of alignment.
- Navigating many partners in regional efforts, which may include other postsecondary institutions, multiple school districts, and hundreds of community-based organizations working in a similar space each with their own aims, cultures, and strategies.

*“We have planted alignment on a lot of our leaders, where we’ve got a lot of people who are committed to this work. A lot of superintendents—who don’t think of themselves as managers, but as instructional leaders—how do they make sure that the most kids possible graduate career- and college-ready?”*

—TALENT HUB PARTNER



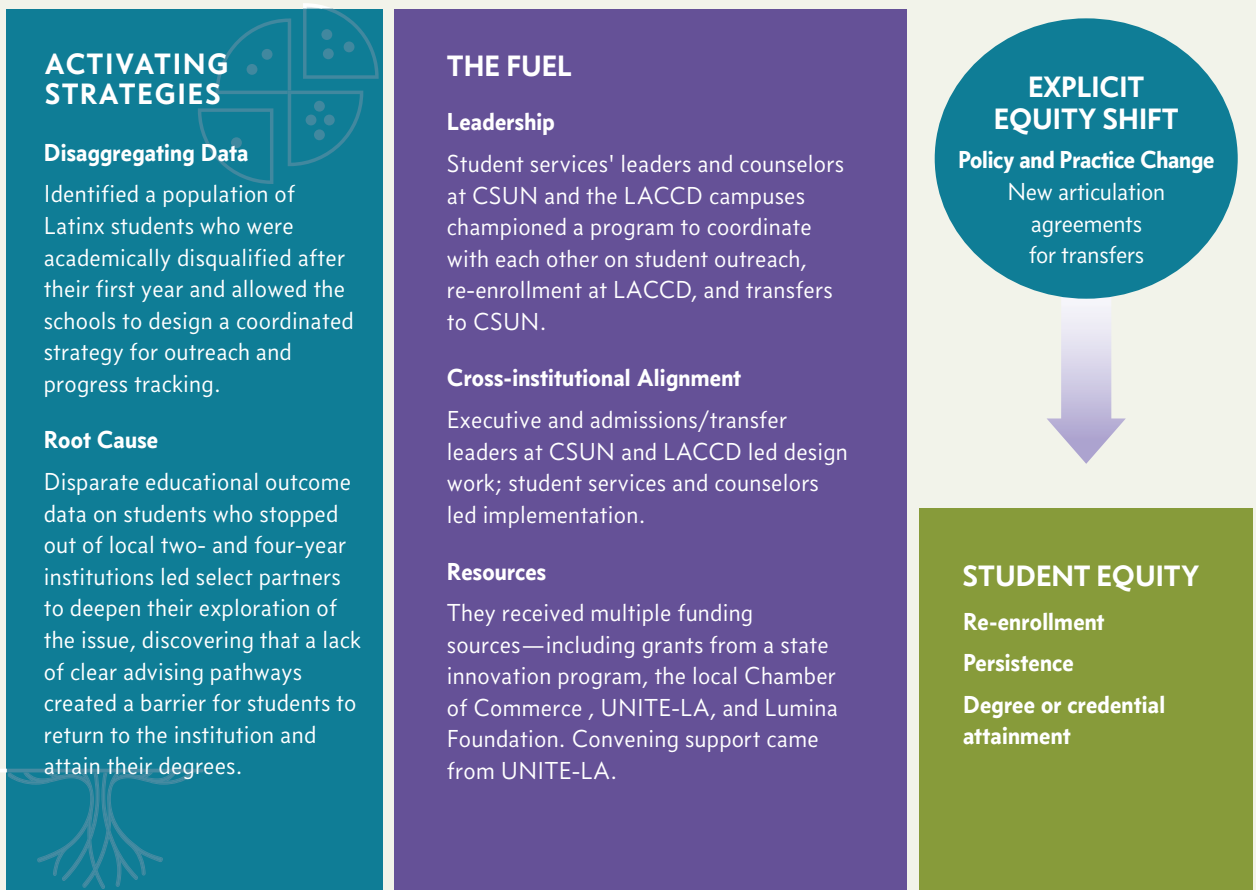


## ALIGNMENT IN LOS ANGELES

# Re-enrollment Through Close Collaboration

In Los Angeles, three LA Community College District (LACCD) campuses and California State University Northridge (CSUN) engaged in a cross-institutional, **alignment** effort focused on re-enrolling a specific population: Latinx students who left CSUN because they were academically disqualified after their first year. LACCD and CSUN counselors and advisors conducted outreach to those students, encouraging enrollment at one of the three LACCD campuses. Upon completing a transfer course of study at the community college, students were automatically re-admitted at CSUN.

**FIGURE 3:**  
The Elements Driving Equity in Los Angeles





## Sustainable Resources

Dedicated time, staff, and budget lines are critical to the success of new or refined policies and practices. Of the three accelerants, designating financial and staffing resources for changes and refinements to policies and practices are the most challenging to achieve in practice—but resources are also key to successful implementation. At an institution, this may include:

- **Grants or budget lines** for staff to pilot, implement, and institutionalize a policy.
- Revising **job responsibilities** to fulfill policy and practice changes.
- Allocations from the school's **general fund**.
- **Braiding resources** from multiple sources—e.g., departmental budgets, philanthropy, and state grants.

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### BY THE NUMBERS: WHAT DOES SUSTAINABLE RESOURCES MEAN?

Out of 240 policy and practice changes underway at Talent Hubs, those midway or fully implemented were:



# 30%

more likely to have sustainable resources supporting them

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### Sustainable Resource Challenges

- Fewer resources are available, and the COVID-19 pandemic caused severe enrollment challenges at some schools.
- Resources are often tied up in existing policies and practices that are intended to serve all students and are not tailored to the needs of students of color.
- There is a lack of resources to support students of color, adult, first generation, and low-income students holistically and equitably.

*“In terms of budget, well, we know that COVID hit, and so nobody has any budget anymore. I’d have probably said a different answer a year ago: ‘yes, the resources are in place, and we’re going to be doing this.’ Today, I would say, ‘it’ll be a struggle, but it’s still a priority.’”*

—TALENT HUB PARTNER



## SUSTAINABILITY IN DETROIT

### Debt-forgiveness to Re-enroll Students

Wayne State University and Oakland University in the Detroit Metropolitan Area recognized the need to build a skilled workforce that would help attract businesses to the region. They first identified students who dropped out and could return to finish their degrees. Then, administrators designed a debt-forgiveness program with focused counseling programs to eliminate financial barriers and outline a course and credit pathway for students to complete their degrees. Institutionally, there is a budgetary **return on investment** in forgiving debt through future tuition fees. Along with explicit policy, budgetary, and practice shifts, new knowledge and norms were established among senior leaders and staff in enrollment and financial aid; they became more aware of systemic issues that adult students face related to employment, transportation issues, and childcare. The awareness-building success led to programmatic, resources, and scheduling changes to accommodate the needs of adult students, while shifting to more efficient administrative processes for students to apply, choose courses, and obtain financial aid.

**FIGURE 4:**  
The Elements Driving Equity in Detroit





# ACTIVATING STRATEGIES

In this section, we highlight three activities equity-focused postsecondary institutions undertake in their journey towards creating more equitable outcomes. The three activities emerged from our data as particularly helpful in surfacing issues of equity and devising solutions that respond to racist, historic, and structural inequities. The tactics here are part of a broader set of activities (including establishing shared goals, building relationships with partners, and using data for continuous improvement) that postsecondary institutions and community partners employ in their cross-sector, systems change work.

*“You can tell your instructors that you’re struggling and things like that, but they will never be able to see your side of it because they don’t have training in how to deal with people like you...or an understanding that it’s very difficult to be a student of color in school. So, I feel like it makes it ten times harder once you do speak up.”*

—STUDENT IN TALENT HUB

## Student and Community Engagement

Traditionally, postsecondary partnerships are composed of people with power in their institutions to set priorities, make decisions, and identify policy and practice solutions. Certainly, partnerships benefit when decision makers are at the table, ensuring the ideas and strategies make their way back to institutions for implementation. In working to advance equity, however, institutional leaders may need guidance to understand their privilege and recognize the limits of their knowledge. Many do not have lived and professional experiences that lend themselves to a full understanding of the implications of the policy or practice on students of color, or adult, first generation, or low-income students. Engaging students and community members is critical to creating actions that meet the needs of students they are intended to support. Equity-focused institutions are shifting the mechanisms by which decisions are made, strengthened by partners and leaders curbing traditional forms of power and privilege.

Equity-focused institutions engage students, residents, and local leaders in programmatic and institutional change efforts—but sharing or ceding the power to prioritize their viewpoints or decide on policy changes is challenging. Sharing power means groups of students, staff, or residents—who have been underserved, underrecognized, and harmed by institutions or systems—are integral to decisions on practices, policies, and resource allocation. When institutions voluntarily share power, students can contribute to meaningful and effective solutions rooted in their lived experiences.



**Sharing power with community leaders.** In most Talent Hubs, the lead grantee is from a large community-based organization (CBO) or regional entity, such as a Chamber of Commerce, providing a degree of power and additional resources that ground the work in the community or region. Institutional partners in Talent Hubs had valuable access to information, strategies, and perspectives outside the higher education field. Equity-focused institutions often sought additional community-based partners working at a more local or grassroots level than the Talent Hub intermediary. Relationships with grassroots organizations often began because institutional leaders sought feedback or insights into the student populations they serve, and in many cases they resulted in smaller CBOs invited into the partnership and into decision-making.

- In Columbus, Indiana, three local organizations serving the Latinx community are partnered with local institutions to build understanding of the unique culture of their constituents. Latinx adult learners, for example, prefer to learn in person. They may have limited digital skills, and find it easier to establish relationships with teachers, ask questions, and access supports in person. In addition, partners learned that the pathways between adult education credentials and career-boosting college degrees are misunderstood by students and misaligned among local institutions, contributing to low degree-attainment rates. These insights led partners to dedicate hundreds of hours to developing clear pathways between adult education courses and local colleges and technical schools, ensuring credentials for in-demand jobs count toward college credit, increasing availability of English Language Learning courses, and creating clear visuals for students to plan their educational and career journeys.
- In Shasta County California, a Talent Hub partner connected with a leader at the Local Indians for Education (LIFE) Center and other tribal leadership to learn more about how Native students felt about the county's existing educational system. LIFE shared insights from tutoring programs and listening circles about how students feel disconnected from schools in the K-12 systems. This was echoed by other tribal partners. Following were a series of conversations and programs that positioned tribal leaders and organizations to amend the local K-12 curricula to better reflect historical narratives shared by Native residents. High school and college curricula will be the next area of reforms. Representatives from tribal communities are now included in each county-based collective-impact partnership, along with representatives from the K-12 system, supporting improvements in transitions from high school to postsecondary education.

**Sharing power with students and residents.** Students, advocates, and community leaders have long encouraged postsecondary education institutions to address racism and barriers to success. Organized student groups and communities have spent decades urging institutions to recognize, acknowledge, and remedy their exclusionary, racist, and inequitable systems. Students and residents have always participated in policy and practice change efforts; equity-focused institutions prioritize their engagement, influence, and power in ways that go beyond tokenism.

*“It was an opportunity that not many students get. The chance to voice their opinions and speak their minds about certain...inequities, and certain mishaps that happen with our school and with our higher education.”*

—STUDENT IN TALENT HUB



In Table 3, we share three forms of engagement used by equity-focused institutions.<sup>1</sup> Most institutions have experience with the first level: input, intentional efforts to gather perspectives of students. At this level, institutions are not necessarily shifting power but seeking to understand students’ experiences of their education or of a particular program. In the early stages of policy and practice change work, the input level can be adequate and even quite informative—learning about how current policies and practices are received. However, this form of engagement has limitations, especially when an institution begins and ends engagement at the first level. Deeper levels of engagement, through co-creation and leadership, are often most possible and impactful when institutional leaders are intentional about shifting power and recognize their personal and professional limitations.

**TABLE 3:**  
Three Forms of Student/Resident Engagement in Equity-focused Institutions

LEVELS	DESCRIPTION	EXAMPLES	BEST FOR...	LIMITATIONS	POWER SHARING IDEAS
<b>Input</b>	Perspectives of students or residents are collected and considered	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Student surveys</li> <li>• Interviews and focus groups</li> <li>• Local leaders or students as featured speakers</li> <li>• Listening tours</li> </ul>	Informing early-stage change efforts	Students or residents are not involved in shaping policy	After data is collected, share findings and next steps with students and residents
<b>Active Co-creation</b>	Students or residents are invited into a process or development	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ongoing student involvement to draft policies or procedures</li> <li>• Resident advisory committees</li> </ul>	Testing, refining, and grounding mid-stage change efforts	Students or residents are not making decisions	Design human-centered, inclusive spaces with students or residents
<b>Leadership</b>	Students incorporated into decision-making structures	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Residents serve on boards or committees with institutional and cross-sector partners</li> <li>• Student organizations integrated into institutional committees</li> <li>• Resources dedicated to student-led campaigns, programs, and advocacy</li> </ul>	Creating policies that address long-standing inequities	Requires ongoing commitment and new practices for genuine inclusion	Make compensation and accommodations available for students and residents to participate fully



## Disaggregating Data

While not a new strategy, disaggregating and examining trends by various student groupings is an effective approach to identify policies that are not serving all students equitably and consider redesign or co-creation of new policies and practices. Disaggregating data can be a powerful step for institutions and partners who have been aggregating student outcome data (e.g., enrollment, transfers, persistence, and attainment) or administrative data (e.g., utilization rates of advising, mental health counseling, and financial aid supports) without understanding differences among student groups. Disaggregating data can become a more powerful tool when combined with other forms of data and knowledge generation that get at the root causes of educational inequities.

The disaggregation process—when paired with equity-focused agendas, discussion guides, and shared interpretation—allows institutions and their partners to:

**Acknowledge and identify inequities.** Disaggregated data helps institutions and partners understand that students affected by geographic segregation and intergenerational poverty do not have the same opportunities as others to successfully transition from K-12 systems to postsecondary education. Those impacts can be seen in outcomes related to successful enrollment, completion, career, and wages.

**Develop shared goals.** Disaggregated data can be used to create a common understanding and vision across partners to close equity-related gaps.

**Empathize with students.** Disaggregated data may lead to further data collection, listening tours, or student story collections to help partners more deeply understand their educational aspirations and lived experiences.

**Target strategies.** These data can help institutions consider targeted strategies to serve specific populations and direct resources away from generalized approaches meant to serve all.

**Encourage innovation.** Data can be used to test new ideas and pilots, documenting progress and effectiveness with disparities before scaling up.

As illustrated in Table 4, Talent Hub partners are disaggregating data in various ways, using administrative records, student surveys, and economic indicators to shape strategies toward equitable policy change.

In the next section, we describe how disaggregated data are often the first step in deepening an understanding of the need for more equitable policies.



## STUDENT LEADERSHIP IN ST. LOUIS

The Postsecondary Education Network (PEN), convened by St. Louis Graduates, aims to advance racial and socioeconomic equity in higher education. The network includes leaders and students from 16 colleges and universities across Missouri who also may be part of on-campus committees. Students are involved in prioritizing issues, identifying action, and advocating for policies on campus as well as public policies. They are paid for their time and expertise. Only Black students and low-income (Pell-eligible) students are invited to participate in PEN. Students are excited to become involved alongside other students of color to ensure the diversity of their experiences is represented. As one student said: “We have student athletes, Black student athletes, students that are part of the conservatory, students that come from upper-, middle-, and lower-class communities. Not all Black people have the same story.”

Walking away from PEN meetings with actions that support change is important to students and leaders alike. Having many students of color in the network offers opportunities for different roles; they are not confined to solely acting as the “representative” of students of color. One student attends to “succession” planning to ensure a smooth transition for new members of the network; another coaches students to meet with their local representatives in the legislature; another documents PEN meetings to ensure there is follow-up from the discussion. That student shared:

*“Justice without substantive change is not effective whatsoever; it’s honestly a waste of time. My goal, and my role in these meetings, is to make sure that things are actually being done; that those steps are actually being taken, because diversity and inclusion chats, they don’t really do anything unless we’re actually taking the action.”*

—STUDENT IN TALENT HUB





**TABLE 4:**  
Examples of Disaggregated Data in Talent Hubs

DATA TYPE	WAYS OF DISAGGREGATING
<b>Admission, Enrollment, and Recruitment Data</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Income: Pell grant recipients, free and reduced lunch in high school</li> <li>• Geography: School district, census tracts, Promise Zones, or zip code</li> <li>• Demographics: Race, ethnicity, gender, and socioeconomic status</li> </ul>
 <b>Shasta County School District</b>	<p>When the California School Dashboard began to include chronic absenteeism data in 2016, partners learned 12.4% of Shasta County students and 20.4% of Native American students are chronically absent, the largest gap identified through disaggregated data. The Shasta County Superintendent raised concern and flagged the findings, which prompted conversations about policies and practices that might disproportionately affect Native American students. She convened the tribal communities, including tribal leaders and students, to learn more about barriers impacting indigenous students at every level. This resulted in changes to local curricula, a yearlong series for teachers and counselors on implicit bias, and a successful lobbying effort with the state legislature to change its policy to allow students to be excused for tribal rituals, ceremonies, and holidays. These changes demonstrate renewed focus and awareness to cultural mistreatment that contributed to poor academic attendance and engagement; and to the power of raising voices to impact and enact new policy that influences positive outcomes.</p>
<b>Transfer Data</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Successful transfers between high schools, two-year, and four-year institutions broken down by individual school</li> <li>• Credits earned and transferred to two- or four-year schools, broken down by individual school</li> </ul>
 <b>Central Valley Region, CA</b>	<p>Data showed only 10-50 community college students each year successfully transfer from the region’s community colleges to the University of California’s newest campus located in the Central Valley, the University of California Merced—15-20% points lower than transfers to other UC schools. UC Merced was established to serve the very students in the region who were not transferring to a state institution. An examination of the data led to a partnership between the Central Valley Higher Education Consortium, the UC system, and UC Merced’s Chancellor’s office to improve transfer rates, with a focus on underrepresented students. Course waivers and regional transfer agreements are in the works to recognize courses and ease transfers from 15 local community colleges to UC Merced.</p>
<b>Retention and Persistence Data</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Demographics of students leaving school with less than 15 credits to their degree</li> <li>• Debt level of students leaving school</li> <li>• Demographics of credits, grades, and time to completion</li> </ul>
 <b>Tulsa Technical College</b>	<p>After disaggregating data, Tulsa Technical College was surprised to find Black students had lower retention, lower three-year graduation rates, and were more likely to leave school without a degree or credential fairly early in their programs of study compared to other student groups. The college responded with new instruction, engagement approaches, and mentoring support for students of color, LGBTQ students, and women in traditionally male programs.</p> <p style="text-align: right;"><i>“Because we’ve put the data in front of people... because we have made equity a huge part of our strategic plan... we raise those points up all the time when we’re talking about instruction or campus activities, we try to look at it through an equity lens and with inclusiveness.”</i></p> <p style="text-align: right;">—POSTSECONDARY PARTNER</p>
<b>Student Perspective Data</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Qualitative and survey data about student needs and experiences</li> </ul>
 <b>Las Vegas</b>	<p>The College of Southern Nevada listened to Black men after disaggregated data revealed lower attainment rates compared to other student groups. The school held focus groups to learn about their experiences with an emphasis on barriers. Students identified challenges with the College’s advising, catalogs, and core sequencing requirements. A new mandatory orientation session addressing these issues did not resolve the academic disparities alone—but, combined with a new peer mentoring program, achievement gaps are closing.</p>



## Examination of Root Causes

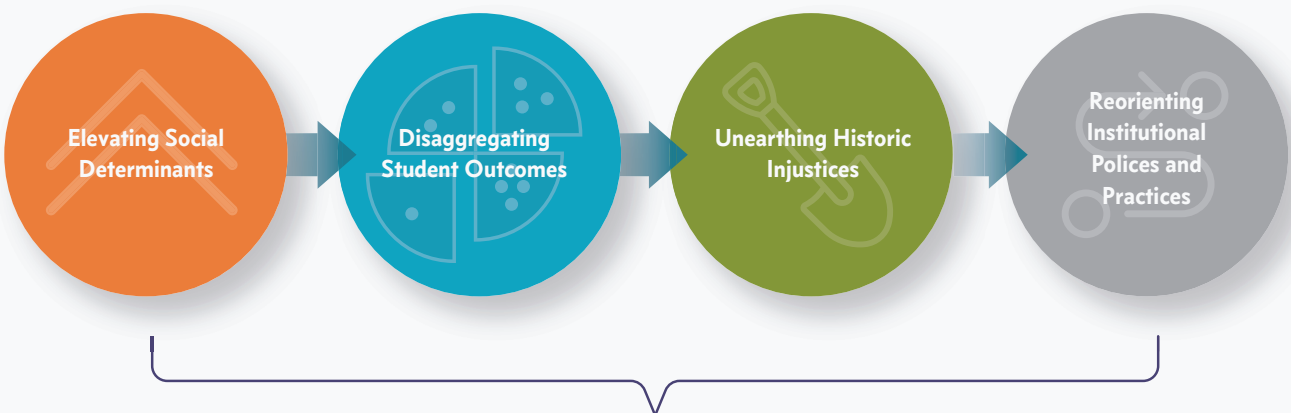
In the last section of the report, we described how Talent Hub partners deepen their understanding and create more effective solutions by disaggregating data. Equity-focused institutions go further—they seek to expand their knowledge and solutions with community partners by learning about the structural and historic roots of educational disparities. Educational disparities can be understood more deeply by analyzing past and present-day factors evident in certain communities and institutions (e.g., underfunded schools, poverty, and pollution). The public health field offers a useful [parable](#) that illustrates how finding the origin—the root—of a problem can be essential to defining sustainable solutions. Similarly, the issues underlying achievement gaps are more profound than they appear on the surface and their resolution depends on greater understanding and knowledge. Across America’s communities, regardless of geographic location, systems have been built that reinforce racism, sexism, and xenophobia. At the same time, our interviews revealed how these “isms” manifest uniquely in each community, undermining local school systems, segregating neighborhoods, steering commercial investment, and restraining entrepreneurialism in each context. Naming and understanding the historic roots of inequity are important to the policy and practice changes that postsecondary institutions are considering to close education gaps.

*“When we have so many initiatives and so many partners that are working on things that have been on agendas for the last 10-15 years, we shouldn’t still be dealing with those things. That tells us that something else is beneath the surface.”*

—TALENT HUB PARTNER

Figure 5 represents four approaches that postsecondary institutions can use to unearth and address the underlying causes of student outcome disparities. Each approach used alone has some value as well as limitations. Using two or more approaches will deepen understanding among decision makers who seek to mend equity gaps. In addition, using more approaches encourages postsecondary institutions to partner with community-based organizations and local agencies to create system-level, sustainable solutions and engage and share power with students and residents with relevant lived experiences and expertise.

**FIGURE 5:**  
Four Approaches for Getting to Root Causes



### EARLY SIGNS OF CHANGE

New Knowledge • New Mindsets • Small Wins • Shared Power • Policy and Practice Shifts



How are equity-focused postsecondary institutions and their partners using the four approaches? While meaningful change can occur when focusing on just one level, more comprehensive and sustainable change can occur when focusing on multiple levels. Here we describe each level of examination; our companion piece, *Getting to the Root*, provides a sharper picture of why these approaches matter and the changes they have facilitated in three communities.



### Elevating Social Determinants

- **What is this approach?** Social determinants refer to off-campus factors in the daily lives of students and the conditions of their neighborhoods that affect their education. These factors often are symptomatic of structural inequities facing low-income areas and communities of color. Social determinants may include access to affordable food, reliable transportation, and affordable, culturally responsive childcare.
- **Where does data come from?** Social determinants are identified by engaging students and by encouraging students to share their lived experiences and describe the compounding nature and stress of these factors on their educational pursuits.
- **How is the approach used?** Institutions can partner with community-based organizations or other sectors, such as transit agencies, to refer students to resources they need or consider how to bring resources on campus, such as a childcare center or food pantry.
- **What are the limitations to the approach?** Working alone, institutions may create short-term programmatic “band aids” for students who lack access to adequate childcare, transportation, and other community resources. Short-term responses could include gift cards for ride-sharing services, but these responses will not address the underlying problems in the region’s transit system that can hinder generations of students from accessing and attaining a postsecondary education.



### Disaggregating Student Outcomes

- **What is this approach?** Disaggregated student outcomes data is the most visible and easiest to measure of the four approaches. It involves data on race, ethnicity, gender, age, and other demographic characteristics to understand differences among student groups that are masked by aggregated data.
- **Where does data come from?** Postsecondary institutions regularly record and track rates of enrollment, transfers, persistence, completion, stop outs, and career outcomes to assess internal goals and report to government entities, funders, and stakeholders.
- **How is the approach used?** This data is useful to track trends over time, report to decision makers/funders, and create institutional dashboards—recognizing that aggregated data paints too broad a picture to be useful in equity work.
- **What are the limitations to the approach?** Disaggregated data has limitations: this data highlights disparities in outcomes, but not their underlying causes. For those with limited understanding of structural inequities, using disaggregated student data alone risks leading to generalizations about populations or blaming individual students for equity gaps.



### Unearthing Historic Injustices

- **What is this approach?** Unearthing historic injustices refers to the underpinnings of inequities, such as racism, sexism, and xenophobia, which continuously manifest in specific communities, systems, and geographic regions. For example, unearthing injustice means learning about how racist policies contributed to geographic segregation, or how racial disparities in policies accelerate and hinder generational wealth. Unearthing historic injustices is important to decisions made today as well; there are lessons learned from the past about the long-term impact of dominant industries, job availability, responses to environmental or natural disasters, and zero-sum politics.
- **Where does data come from?** Public and academic efforts to document history through new lenses (equity, race, gender) are increasingly available to educate the public. Community-based organizations and advocates are also knowledgeable sources about local conditions facing residents. Individuals can learn by getting involved in advocacy, protests, and justice movements, or through formal trainings on structural inequity, community-centeredness, implicit bias, mindfulness, and whiteness.
- **How is the approach used?** Unearthing historic injustices helps partners develop shared mindsets and priorities; it serves as a bridge for institutional partners between understanding social determinants and root causes. Public or institutional education campaigns, trainings, and discussions about racism and bias may begin to shift the mindsets and behaviors of leaders, staff, and faculty and in turn change the student experience at their institution.
- **What are the limitations to the approach?** Postsecondary staff and partners can grow weary of ongoing trainings and awareness-building activities if they do not lead to resources and autonomy to make changes in individual, departmental, and institution-wide policies and practices.



### Reorienting Institutional Policies and Practices

- **What is this approach?** Institutional policies and practices are often well documented and visible. Historically they've been structured in ways that benefit white, affluent students and disadvantage low-income and first-generation college students and students of color.
- **Where does data come from?** Policies and practices can be reviewed for bias using an equity lens by an equity committee or external consultant. Students, faculty, and staff can be surveyed or interviewed to learn more about implementation and impact.
- **How is the approach used?** A review of policy or practice language and implementation can lead to refinements, new policies, or shedding policies that reinforce bias and harm. These may include biased admissions standards, preventing low-income students from returning to school because of debt, and excessive administrative processes for students.
- **What are the limitations to the approach?** There may be gaps between a policy's language, intent, implementation, and impact, so attention is needed at all levels and over time. In addition, when the community or systemic barriers facing students are not well understood, institutions will be less equipped to accurately assess the impact of its policies and practices and effectively refine them.

In our companion report, *Getting to the Root*, we share vignettes from three Talent Hub communities that explored multiple approaches to understanding educational disparities in their communities, and developed their solutions shaped by a deeper exploration of student outcomes.



# IMPLICATIONS FOR POSTSECONDARY INSTITUTIONS

Advancing equitable policies and practices—in service of equitable student outcomes—will require new ways of working and thinking for many institutions. In our exploration in this report of equity-focused policies and practices across Talent Hub institutions, we highlighted bright spots for institutions, partners, and other stakeholders involved in postsecondary education. Organizational practices, and specifically those of postsecondary institutions, often default to the comfortable and ingrained ways of operating that perpetuate inequity by reinforcing harmful biases—excluding student and community perspectives and downplaying the importance of their experiences in decision-making.

As in the Talent Hubs initiative, postsecondary institutions and their community partners play an important role in advancing equitable postsecondary outcomes and are uniquely positioned to establish new ways of working that promote such outcomes. Below, we offer considerations to create the space and structures for working differently.

## Considerations for Institutional Change

Postsecondary institutions, particularly public universities and community colleges, have an obligation to ensure equitable access to and benefit from the educational opportunities they provide. Lessons from Talent Hubs' institutions point to a layered system of mindsets, conditions, and actions necessary to advance equity. Each is necessary, but none is solely sufficient for creating environments where students of all backgrounds, identities, and lived experiences can succeed. Too often, the needed beliefs and conditions are not in place, and people most familiar with barriers to education are not involved in shaping or implementing changes that advance equity. Postsecondary institutions looking to start, re-ignite, or continue their internal journeys towards equitable practice can begin with the steps below.

**Explore core beliefs.** Institutional change cannot take place without a foundation of core beliefs, and an understanding of student success and institutional responsibility in advancing that success. Explore the extent that the three “core beliefs” are embraced across your institution, and how conversations about student enrollment, persistence, and completion are framed. *Are they grounded in a commitment to equitable outcomes and understanding of inequitable systems conditions, or do they perpetuate a narrative of biased assumptions about what makes students “successful” and ignore the unique needs, challenges, and strengths of community members and the student body?*

**Assess institutional conditions.** Becoming an equity-focused institution requires “fuel” to ignite policy and practice change driven toward equity. Even the strongest equity-minded efforts can fail to take root if the accelerating factors for organizational change aren't in place. *To what extent is the “fuel”—distributed leadership, alignment, and sustainable resources—present in your institution? How are internal resources being committed to activating organizational change? Do these resources signal deep institutional commitment to equity?*



**Activate equity-focused work.** With a foundation of core beliefs and the right institutional conditions, postsecondary institutions can use student voice, data, and shared learning experiences to bring inequity to light—sparking attention and a call to action to revisit policies and practices. To do so, however, institutions must be willing to acknowledge data and experiences that challenge comfortable narratives about their own work. They must recognize the critical role and perspectives of staff and faculty who share lived experiences with students of color, as well as adult, first generation, English language learners, and low-income students. It means asking to what extent are students and community members involved in decision-making, and how they influence decision-making. [How are student perspectives received by institutional decision makers, and do they seek to understand, de-emphasize, or dismiss viewpoints or experiences that don't align with their own?](#)

## Considerations for Working in Community Partnerships

Community partners are uniquely positioned to expand the relevance and effectiveness of equity efforts at postsecondary institutions. Talent Hubs across the country were led by community-based organizations, including Chambers of Commerce and trusted intermediaries. The partnerships relied upon other local nonprofits, government agencies, and faith-based groups to help shape the work and leverage existing resources and supports in the community. Below, we offer considerations for postsecondary institutions engaging with community partners to advance equitable postsecondary attainment.

**Acknowledge cultural expertise.** Community-based partners, especially grassroots and service delivery nonprofits, help ground institutions in the conditions, cultures, and history of the residents they serve. These partners can offer trainings to staff in postsecondary institutions that convey the educational journeys of community members and help establish the shared mindsets and beliefs so critical to advancing equity. Similarly, community-based organizations are often connected to formal and informal networks that can help postsecondary students with culturally relevant, trusted services and supports. [How can institutions marry their growing understanding of the social determinants of education with the experience and resources of community partners?](#)

**Identify common pain points.** Without space for cross-sector collaboration, postsecondary institutions remain siloed; as do the solutions they generate to address barriers and inequities facing students. The blockages facing many students—in enrollment, persistence, attainment, and career—stem from ineffective postsecondary institutional policies and practices as well as conditions in the community, their homes, and their workplaces. Talent Hubs are engaging partners to identify common challenges and gaps that require cross-sector solutions and to help connect siloed sectors—especially between educational systems, and between educational systems and employers. [How can the fuel of aligning postsecondary and community systems help ignite collaboration and resolve issues at a systemic level?](#)

**Measure changing conditions.** Changes in institutional metrics—as well as regional indicators in economic, workforce, and education—take time. Evaluating early systemic changes may reveal promising—or ineffective—efforts, well before broader indicators of success can be achieved. In this report, we offered a view of progress that moves beyond student outcomes to understand institutional and community conditions. Evaluating and measuring these changing conditions help postsecondary partners make mid-course adjustments; and provide an opportunity to ensure that the underlying structures and partnerships necessary for sustainable student outcomes are in place. [How are partners using evaluation to understand systemic shifts within postsecondary institutions and in the community? Are the real, sustainable changes needed to achieve equity being overlooked in evaluation in favor of traditional metrics?](#)



# APPENDIX

Thirteen Talent Hubs were engaged in qualitative interviews in 2020. We thank the participants for their time, reflections, and insights that informed this report from the following institutions (in sequence of interview).

TALENT HUB	POSTSECONDARY INSTITUTION OR COMMUNITY ORGANIZATION
Cincinnati	Strive Together Partnership
Cincinnati	Brighton Center
Cincinnati	Northern Kentucky Chamber of Commerce
Cincinnati	The Health Collaborative
Cincinnati	Students
Columbus	Eco Attainment Network
Columbus	IUPUC
Columbus	River Valley Resources
Columbus	McDowell Education Center
Columbus	Ivy Tech Community College, Madison Campus
Dayton	Learn to Earn Dayton
Dayton	National Conference for Community and Justice of Greater Dayton
Dayton	Montgomery County Educational Service Center
Dayton	University of Dayton
Dayton	Sinclair Community College
Dayton	Dayton Foundation
Elkhart	Goshen College
Elkhart	Ivy Tech Community College
Elkhart	Wieland Design
Fresno	Central Valley Higher Education Consortium
Fresno	Fresno K16 collaborative
Fresno	Fresno City College
Fresno	Madera Community College
Fresno	Clovis College



Las Vegas	United Way of Southern Nevada
Las Vegas	Nevada System of Higher Education
Las Vegas	College of Southern Nevada
Las Vegas	Workforce Connections
Los Angeles	Los Angeles Community College District
Los Angeles	Los Angeles Pierce College
Los Angeles	California State University, Northridge
Mobile	Coastal Alabama Community College
Nashville	Nashville State Community College
New York	CUNY
Shasta	College of the Siskiyous
Shasta	Shasta College
St. Louis	St. Louis Community Foundation
St. Louis	Missouri Scholarship and Loan Foundation
St. Louis	Southeast Missouri State University
St. Louis	The Scholarship Foundation of St. Louis
St. Louis	University of Central Missouri
St. Louis	University of Missouri-St. Louis
St. Louis	Students
Tulsa	Tulsa Regional Chamber
Tulsa	Tulsa Community College
Tulsa	Tulsa Tech
Tulsa	Tulsa Community WorkAdvance
Tulsa	City of Tulsa

## ENDNOTES

<sup>i</sup>For a more detailed approach to engagement, we recommend the IAP2 Federation's Spectrum of Public Participation: [https://cdn.ymaws.com/sites/iap2.site-ym.com/resource/resmgr/files/IAP2\\_Federation\\_-\\_P2\\_Pillars.pdf](https://cdn.ymaws.com/sites/iap2.site-ym.com/resource/resmgr/files/IAP2_Federation_-_P2_Pillars.pdf)



**EQUAL**  
**MEASURE**

FINDING  
PROMISE  
FUELING  
CHANGE