The Vision for Success and Guided Pathways: Responding to Change

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Julie Bruno, ASCCC President

The world as we have created it is a process of our thinking. It cannot be changed without changing our thinking. — Albert Einstein

Change. The word alone is enough to cause a collective shudder in our system. Our colleges are constantly contending with change; whether it comes from the state in the form of a new program, initiative, or legislative mandate or locally from a turnover in college leadership or shifting student demographics, some sort of change is always happening for us or to us. But although we may be used to living with frequent change, a recent confluence of forces has the potential to be a catalyst that provokes unusually profound and fundamental change at our colleges and in our system.

Changing the status quo requires a disruptive force to compel an individual or an organization to re-think processes and policies and to take action. For example, when a college hires a new president, a period of change normally occurs as the college adjusts to a new leader and as the leader adjusts to the college. This type of disruption can affect not only our colleges but also our system. A new leader frequently brings a fresh perspective and vision, which is often both exciting and challenging.

Vision for Success

At the Board of Governors’ January meeting, Chancellor Eloy Oakley announced his intention to develop a strategic vision for the system. The Foundation for California Community Colleges was asked to lead the project, which began in earnest in April by convening a virtual town hall meeting to gather information and provide community college stakeholders an opportunity to inform and shape the strategic vision. Interviews with additional stakeholders, experts, and leaders from inside and outside the system were held during the same time period, as well as a review of research and literature on community colleges. This process yielded a report titled Vision for Success: Strengthening Community Colleges to Meet California’s Needs, which was completed in June and submitted to the Board of Governors in July.

The Vision for Success contains ambitious goals for the system to achieve by 2022, including the following:

1. Increase by at least 20% the number of CCC students annually who acquire associates degrees, credentials, certificates, or specific skill sets that prepare them for in-demand jobs.

2. Increase by 35% the number of CCC students transferring annually to a UC or CSU.

3. Decrease the average number of units accumulated by CCC students earning associate’s degrees from approximately 87 total units (the most recent system-wide average) to 79 total units—the average among the quintile of colleges showing the strongest performance on this measure.
4. Increase the percent of exiting career technical education students who report being employed in their field of study from the most recent statewide average of 60% to an improved rate of 69%—the average among the quintile of colleges showing the strongest performance on this measure.

5. Reduce equity gaps across all of the above measures through faster improvements among traditionally underrepresented student groups, with the goal of cutting achievement gaps by 40% within 5 years and fully closing those achievement gaps within 10 years.

6. Reduce regional achievement gaps across all of the above measures through faster improvements among colleges located in regions with the lowest educational attainment of adults, with the ultimate goal of fully closing regional achievement gaps within 10 years.

The report also includes seven core commitments that were designed to support the colleges and the system in achieving the six goals:

1. Focus relentlessly on students’ end goals.

2. Always design and decide with the student in mind.

3. Pair high expectations with high support.

4. Foster the use of data, inquiry, and evidence.

5. Take ownership of goals and performance.

6. Enable action and thoughtful innovation.

7. Lead the work of partnering across systems.

The Board of Governors reviewed and accepted the Vision for Success at its July meeting. Discussion of the goals continued the following day during the Board’s annual retreat. In response to the report, the Board decided to take a deeper look and formed three task forces to investigate the specific goals further. The Board will take action on the report at its September meeting, when members may choose to adopt the goals as stated in the report, make modifications before adoption, or choose not to act.

CCC Guided Pathways Award Program

At the same time that the Vision for Success report was under development, the 2017-2018 California state budget was finalized. The budget included $150 million for the Guided Pathways Award Program administered by the Chancellor’s Office. As outlined in statute, this program provides grants to colleges that choose to meet specific criteria in implementing the guided pathways framework. The grant program is designed to build on the work of the American Association for Community Colleges (AACC) Pathways and the California Guided Pathways Projects with funding available for all 114 colleges.

Implementation of the guided pathways framework is recognized in the Vision for Success as a strategy to align and integrate the various initiatives and programs currently underway at our
colleges such as the Student Support and Success, Equity, and Basic Skills programs. Further, throughout the discussion of the core commitments, the evidence-based practices that anchor the guided pathway framework are called upon to support progress towards achieving the Vision goals. Ultimately, the report states that the expectation is for guided pathways framework to be adopted by the entire system.

**Responding to Change**

The *Vision for Success* goals and the implementation of the guided pathways framework are by no means the only forces driving change in our system. Other initiatives and programs, such as the College Promise and Strong Workforce Programs, and transfer initiatives including the Associate Degrees for Transfer and UC Transfer Pathways have required colleges to make significant changes in how they serve students. Extraordinary work is being accomplished at our colleges and in the system because of these programs and initiatives. With the addition of the *Vision* goals and the guided pathways framework, momentum is increasing for fundamental and transformative change at our colleges and in the system.

Change can provoke various responses. A few individuals will react by opposing the change, which may not be particularly useful in addressing the underlying issues. Others may choose to ignore change, assuming that it will pass and eventually life will return to the status quo. For many, change feels like one more thing to reckon with, and, knowing they must respond, they do so halfheartedly. Finally, some among us enthusiastically embrace change and take advantage of the momentum to create an improved experience for students and in the process better themselves, their work, and their colleges.

Ultimately, change will be what we make of it. Responding to change, no matter how exciting or disruptive, requires courage. We have the opportunity and ability to meet change with inquisitive and engaged minds, embracing the possibilities while remaining vigilant to ensure that we stay faithful to our values and principles and, most importantly, to safeguard the integrity of education for our students.

Our colleges are filled with intelligent and thoughtful colleagues who care deeply for our students. As educators, we are defined not only by the goals we adopt or the commitments we make but also by how we choose to achieve our goals and fulfill our commitments. Our choices can make all the difference. The California Community College System and our colleges are about to go through significant changes. We can never stop change, but we can always choose our response to changes and work to make them benefit our communities, our institutions, and our students.