

## Porterville College Case Statement for Guided Pathways

Question: **What evidence and experience convince us that it is both important and urgent to commit to the research, planning, and other work necessary to implement Guided Pathways at Porterville College?**

### *The Problem*

More than four in five incoming students at Porterville College do not achieve an Associate's degree, certificate, or transfer to a four-year college within three years.

Students come to Porterville College with many goals, to get an Associate's degree, to prepare to transfer to a four-year college, or to train for a career. Some come with no goal in mind or without a clear understanding of their plans for the future.

In addition, a majority, more than 60 percent, of Porterville College students are first generation college students, defined as those whose parents had no education beyond high school. For many, their parents had no schooling beyond ninth grade. First generation students are less likely to be aware of the variety of educational and career options available to them and less likely to be proficient in academic culture, aspects of which are crucial to success in college.

[Only 18 percent](#) of three recent incoming cohorts of students completed within three years, defined as achieving an Associate's degree, a certificate, or transferring to a four-year college. Along the way, our data have shown that key momentum points, such as completing transfer-level English and math, persisting from one term to the next, and completing unit thresholds, were not being achieved by many students. And many students who do complete finish with an excessive number of units. PC Students who complete an Associate's degree do so with an average of 88 units, while only 60 are necessary for many degrees.

This lack of success is broad, but not uniform. Some demographic groups are more likely to succeed than others, creating an equity concern that we have a moral imperative to address. Barriers the college places in front of students also impact their success rates. Students who take more units in a term, who are placed immediately into college-level work, who enroll in math and English early, and who participate in programs that track their progress, such as EOP&S and athletics, are more likely to complete.

But more than four in five students not completing is not acceptable.

### *Progress Made*

Yet, we have learned and made progress. [Student Support \(Re\)defined](#), an RP Group research project in which the college was involved, showed that students are more likely to be successful if they are:

- Directed
- Focused
- Nurtured
- Engaged

- Connected
- Valued

This study, along with our participation in the Achieving the Dream network of colleges, and the findings and recommendations of our own Data Team, has led us to begin the difficult work of removing barriers to student access and success and encouraging behaviors that promote both. In recent years, student achievements have improved on a variety of measures:

- Although we've only begun our "15 to finish" campaign, the percentage of incoming students taking 15 or more units in their first term has gone from 10 to 17%.
- The percentage of students taking English in their first semester has gone from 54 to 78%. For math, it has increased from 30 to 53%
- This, combined with multiple measures assessment, has resulted in improvements in English and math completion. The percentage of students completing transfer-level English in their first year has gone from 16 to 38%. For math, the increase is from 19 to 26%
- Completion is key and that is improving incrementally. Our most recent three cohorts have had 3-year completion rates of 15.2%, 17.1%, and 21.5%. We expect upcoming cohorts to continue this trend.

### ***Next Step: Guided Pathways***

But, we can do better.

We can help students understand their options and navigate the academic world.

Guided Pathways is an approach to focusing and integrating the community college experience. It has four key components:

- *Clarifying paths:* By making each program, and course sequences within programs, clear to students, we will help them understand what they need to do and how to do it to accomplish their goals.
- *Helping students get on a path:* This involves improving the assessment and placement process, working with students to help them understand academic and career options and choose a goal, and planning programs so that coursework can be completed within a reasonable time period.
- *Helping students stay on a path:* This includes ongoing, intrusive advising and other student services to ensure students remain focused toward achieving their goals, procedures to target support for those who need it, and systems to allow for the tracking of progress and the removal of barriers to completion.
- *Ensuring learning:* This involves learning outcomes, specific to each program and to the college as a whole that are identified and regularly measured, and continual, faculty-led improvement of the teaching and learning processes.

Guided Pathways is both a philosophy and a process that has shown promising results at colleges throughout the country. This philosophy has contributed to some of the changes we have recently made.

We now must act to take this to scale throughout the college. In so doing, we must ensure that there is broad input from all campus communities so that the process is adapted to work with the Porterville College's distinctive environment.

The Guided Pathways process fits well with the college's recent [Strategic Plan](#), and its [2019 Addendum](#), both of which focus on student success and equity, and is a process that fits with the [Vision for Success](#) of the California Community Colleges. The goals in that Strategic Plan Addendum include the following:

Goal 1A: Porterville College will increase among all students, the number who earn an associate degree or associate degree for transfer from 396 in 2016-17 to 455 in 2021-22 an increase of 15 percent.

Goal 1B: Porterville College will increase among all students, the number who earn a Chancellor's Office approved certificate from 65 in 2016-17 to 88 in 2021-22, an increase of 35 percent.

Goal 2A: Porterville College will increase among all students, the number who earn associate degree for transfer degrees from 115 in 2016-17 to 144 in 2021-22, an increase of 25 percent.

Goal 2B: Porterville College will increase among all students, the number who transfer to a four-year institution from 193 in 2016-17 to 232 in 2021-22, an increase of 20 percent.

Goal 3: Porterville College will decrease the average units earned per completed associate degree from 88 in 2016-17 to 79 in 2021-22, a decrease of 10 percent.

Goal 4C: Porterville College will increase among all students who responded to the CTE Outcomes Survey and did not transfer, the proportion who reported that they are working in a job very closely or closely related to their field of study from 55 percent in 2016-17 to 69 percent in 2021-22, an increase of 25 percent.

The challenges we face are significant, but not unique. The progress we have made is promising, but not sufficient. Our students deserve a maximal opportunity to determine their goals and succeed in achieving them.

## **Resources**

Implementing Guided Pathways: Tips and Tools, (2015). Community College Research Center.

Baily, T., Jagers, S.S., & Jenkins, D. (2015) *Redesigning America's Community Colleges: A clearer path to student success*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Booth, K., Cooper, D., Karandieff,, K, Large, M., Pellegrin, N., Purnell, R., Rodriguez-Kiino, D., Schiorring, E., and Willett, T. (2013). Student Support (Re)defined: Using student voices to redefine support. Retrieved from the Research and Planning Group for California Community Colleges:  
<http://archive.rpgroup.org/sites/default/files/StudentPerspectivesResearchReportJan2013.pdf>

Johnstone, R. (2015). Guided Pathways Demystified: Exploring Ten Commonly Asked Questions about Implementing Pathways, National Center for Inquiry and Improvement.