

# Advancing Equitable Placement and Completion:

## *Learnings From the 2024-2025 Community of Practice*

Over the course of the 2024-2025 academic year, EdTrust-West convened eight California community colleges in a community of practice focused on advancing equitable placement and completion policy implementation. Participating colleges included Citrus College, Fullerton College, Golden West College, Imperial Valley College, Long Beach City College, Norco College, Santa Ana College, and Santa Rosa Junior College. Cross-functional college teams, comprising faculty, administrators, researchers, and counselors, came together to identify problems of practice and to develop an action plan to support disproportionately affected students in transfer-level English and math courses.



### Program Structure

Colleges engaged in deep inquiry, collaborative learning, and iterative strategizing through sessions facilitated by EdTrust-West, including:

- ▶ **One Kickoff Session:** Participants came together to initiate the community of practice, set expectations, and begin networking with peer institutions.
- ▶ **Three Virtual Sessions:** Virtual sessions focused on sharing promising practices, learning from guest speakers, and developing an action plan. Sessions were designed to foster collaboration through structured team time, peer consultancies, and guided planning.
- ▶ **Two Implementation Institutes:** In-person institutes provided an opportunity for teams to share progress on their action plans. Institutes focused on peer learning, sharing strategies, and receiving feedback from experts and fellow participants.
- ▶ **Program Support:** Between facilitated sessions, facilitators offered office hours and held college team meetings to provide additional support to participants.



## Participation Outcomes

Participation in the community of practice generated meaningful experiential outcomes at both the individual and team levels, as evidenced by a final program survey. The program structure offered space for reflection, dialogue, and peer learning, helping participants thoughtfully identify and address core problems of practice. College teams valued the opportunity for in-person engagement, dedicated team time, cross-college learning, peer consultancies, and expert speakers.

*“Given shared understanding of the problem and how to fix it, we have a work plan and are executing it.”*

— Community of Practice Participant

**Structured Support for Plan Development and Implementation.** Being exposed to peer strategies and statewide research, engaging with activities such as root cause analysis, and having structured time for planning helped teams reflect on local growth areas, identify a right-sized problem of practice, and develop an action plan to address it. In a final program survey, 90% of responding participants indicated satisfaction with the resources and support provided during the community of practice.

*“Thanks to this community of practice opportunity, we improved the comfort with and dialogue about equitable placement and completion.”*

— Community of Practice Participant

### Strengthened Cross-Functional Collaboration and Systems Thinking.

Participants deepened their understanding of the impactful and systemic nature of equitable placement and completion. Individuals and teams alike affirmed that sustainable change requires intentional coordination, collective effort, and alignment across roles, departments, and disciplines. In a final program survey, 95% of responding participants indicated that in-person institutes, in particular, furthered their college team's planning and implementation efforts.

### Elevated the Role of Culture and Communication.

Participants identified institutional culture as a critical component of equitable reform. The community of practice offered tools and space for more honest conversations about equity, student support, and instructional change. In a final program survey, 90% of responding participants indicated that their team developed a shared understanding of the need for and value of equitable placement to improve student outcomes. Some participating colleges expanded conversations and culture shifts on their campus by incorporating mindset-shift professional learning into their action plans.



## Program Outcomes

During the community of practice, colleges identified problems of practice and worked to address barriers to equitable placement and completion in their action plans. Their work remains in progress, with some efforts focusing on targeted interventions and others centering on broader institutional transformation. Several themes emerged across a dynamic range of community of practice outcomes, shedding light on what enables or impedes progress in campus-level implementation.

### 1 Leveraging Faculty Engagement.

Sustained faculty engagement remains a crucial yet difficult element of equitable placement reform. Some colleges face faculty fatigue, skepticism, or departmental tensions that stall progress. Limited institutional capacity marked by heavy workloads, turnover, and insufficient infrastructure often delay and scale back efforts. Colleges motivate cohorts of faculty through compensated or low-lift professional development models, often through communities of practice or institutes.

#### Problems of Practice:

- ▶ How can we embed first-year student support into math and English courses, especially amid faculty resistance, staffing changes, and shifts caused by AB 1705?
- ▶ How can we foster equity-minded teaching across a large English department, with limited open collaboration and shared learning?

#### Actions and Progress:

- ▶ Expanded first-year experience programming into English and non-STEM math courses through common assignments, onboarding support, and a Canvas resource shell designed by faculty compensated for their efforts. All math faculty have been onboarded into the first-year experience cohort, and early feedback highlights the low-lift, high-impact model.
- ▶ Built an engaged cohort of part-time English faculty through structured group discussions, individual data consultations, and guest equity speakers to explore grading, curriculum, and engagement strategies. Next steps include scaling the model using a more flexible, resource-efficient format.



**2 Shifting Mindsets.** Some colleges wrestle with deep-seated beliefs about who is “ready” for transfer-level coursework and what supports students need to succeed. Mindset shifts often seem to be isolated to small groups and vulnerable to setbacks. Positive shifts in instructional and counseling faculty beliefs include moving from deficit-based assumptions about student readiness toward more asset-based, equity-minded approaches. Colleges consider how to engage in sustained support and reinforcement of asset-based mindsets.

**Problems of Practice:**

- ▶ How can we shift faculty mindsets, particularly in math, away from deficit-based beliefs about student readiness for transfer-level courses?
- ▶ How can we support math faculty in learning about and applying equitable teaching and community-building practices in the classroom?

**Actions and Progress:**

- ▶ Increased touchpoints between math and counseling departments, including updated placement charts and collaboration with counseling at feeder high schools, to improve early student advising and placement guidance.
- ▶ Surveyed math faculty with high course success rates and their students to identify high-impact equity practices, particularly in community building, growth mindset, and humanization. Facilitated a series of professional workshops that helped secure funding to run a community of practice in the coming spring for math faculty to discuss teaching practices.

**3 Contending With Data Access and Use.**

Some colleges face institutional reluctance to release data at the course or instructor level because of privacy concerns or fears of misuse. This reluctance stalls progress on equity conversations. The ability to access, disaggregate, and apply this data is a critical driver of honest faculty reflection and instructional change.

**Problems of Practice:**

- ▶ How can we make a case to the institutional research office to provide instructor-level/course-level data in the spirit of advancing honest conversations among faculty?
- ▶ How can we convince senior leadership to institutionalize the use of individualized faculty data for equity-focused improvement?

**Actions and Progress:**

- ▶ Held a transformative teaching institute anchored in equity, data, and culturally sustaining pedagogy. The summer institute leveraged password-protected, disaggregated course outcome data for faculty. The college seeks to maintain and expand access to individual faculty data through a dashboard developed within the community of practice, though resistance to these efforts persists.
- ▶ Confirmed an equity coordinator role for the coming year, indicating the college’s continued support for equity efforts. However, access to course- and instructor-level data remains limited due to concerns about faculty trust.





## 4

### Aligning and Designing Intentional

**Systems.** Some colleges move beyond isolated interventions and instead tackle the underlying systems and institutional misalignments that shape student experiences. These efforts involve rethinking how departments collaborate, how tools and messaging are integrated, and how policy intentions are translated into consistent practices.

#### Problems of Practice:

- ▶ How can systemic barriers in placement, advising, and math instruction be identified and addressed to increase student enrollment in transfer-level math?
- ▶ How can we improve communication and coordination across departments to ensure students receive accurate, timely information about courses, support services, and academic pathways?
- ▶ How can we improve retention and successful completion of transfer-level math and English, and increase student engagement with campus resources and support services through Early Alert?

#### Actions and Progress:

- ▶ Investigated institutional systems through a cross-functional inquiry team that interviewed counselors, observed classrooms, and analyzed syllabi, district numbering, and placement processes. Identifying gaps in systems resulted in structural improvements, including streamlined student information system processes and updated placement tools.
- ▶ Strengthened academic support services, with tutoring now standardized and robustly staffed in advance of the fall term, and embedded tutoring and learning resource centers promoted through outreach.
- ▶ Surveyed staff on the Early Alert system, and next steps include rebranding to reduce stigma, updating faculty, exploring Canvas integration, surveying students, and customizing to meet department-specific needs.



## Recommendations

Building on the successes and challenges observed within this community of practice, the following recommendations offer guidance to institutions and governing bodies seeking to foster long-term impact.

### 1 **Invest in Faculty Capacity and Mindset.**

Compensated learning communities, subject-specific pedagogy institutes, and peer leadership models for full-time and part-time faculty can drive sustained changes in instruction and advising. Opportunities to build asset-based mindsets and culturally sustaining practices are critical to disrupt deficit narratives about students.

### 2 **Expand and Deepen Cross-College Learning Opportunities.**

Structured exchanges through convenings, peer consultation models, and cross-college learning (virtual or in-person) can foster ongoing reflection, facilitate idea exchange, and strengthen a statewide culture of collective problem-solving.

### 3 **Improve Equitable Data Access and Application.**

Investments in strengthening institutional research capacity, developing data visualization tools, and sharing protocols can help colleges apply data in ways that are both equity-centered and trust-building.

### 4 **Provide Technical Assistance for Systems and Policy Alignment.**

Providing colleges with clear, actionable guidance and technical assistance can assuage policy confusion and support implementation and continuous improvement.





## Conclusion

The colleges engaged in this community of practice have taken important steps toward building more equitable placement systems and student support structures. Although the work continues through designated leads at some colleges and through continued cross-collaboration at others, their collective efforts demonstrate what is possible through intentional, structured collaboration, inquiry, and action. As colleges move forward, the learnings from this community of practice serve as a reference for continued implementation. We encourage college teams to follow the guidance in the resources accompanying this brief, informed by the learnings and recommendations shared here. If your institution is interested in technical assistance support, EdTrust-West's [Educator Engagement Team](#) offers a range of services. Our team is available to guide you through the action planning process to implement equitable course placement and completion at your campus.

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