

# Student Success Centers AND GUIDED PATHWAYS



A Student Success Center is a statewide organization that supports community colleges' efforts to develop guided pathways and increase student completion rates. Fifteen Student Success Centers are part of the national Student Success Center Network.

## WHAT ARE GUIDED PATHWAYS?

Guided pathways are academic and career pathways that provide structure, mileposts, and clear outcomes for each student's college experience. Each pathway is based on a program of study that is aligned with specific employment goals and/or additional education.

Guided pathways include detailed academic plans and incorporate a range of evidence-based supports. The pathways approach is geared to helping more students complete credentials, transfer, and attain jobs with value in the labor market.

Because guided pathways touch on every aspect of the student experience, implementing this approach typically requires broad-scale institutional change. The work is challenging, and it includes:

- **Planning**, including ensuring that key players are prepared and resources are aligned so the institution can undertake large-scale transformational change.
- **Clarifying the paths** by mapping programs to specific course sequences, progress milestones, and learning outcomes to ensure that students prepare for employment and further education in their field of interest.
- **Helping students get on a path** by simplifying student decision-making and helping students from the start to explore career options, choose a program of study, and develop a plan based on the program maps.
- **Helping students stay on their path** by providing ongoing advising, systems for students to track their progress, and other targeted support.
- **Ensuring that students are learning** with student engagement that is built into the typical student experience, faculty-led improvement of teaching practices, and systems for the college and students to track mastery of learning outcomes.
- **Evaluation**, including revisiting planning and implementation steps to continuously improve pathways.

## WHY GUIDED PATHWAYS?

Educators know what types of changes can help community college students complete degrees—and do so more quickly and at a lower cost. Students are more likely to earn credentials if they:

- Choose a program and develop an academic plan early in their college experience;
- Have a clear road map of the courses they need for their credential; and
- Receive guidance and support to help them stay on track.

Guided pathways incorporate all of these elements by:

- **Replacing the cafeteria model.** Most colleges invite students to choose from a broad range of disconnected courses, programs, and support services with little that is mandatory. Students often have difficulty navigating these choices and end up making poor decisions about what program to enter, what courses to take, and when to seek help. Many drop out of college altogether. Guided pathways give students what they need to make more informed choices.
- **Implementing whole-college reform.** Research on organizational effectiveness suggests that scaling discrete best practices is not sufficient to achieve substantial improvements in outcomes. When colleges implement guided pathways, they undertake whole-college reform, and improvements to discrete programs are shaped by broader institutional-reform goals.

With guided pathways, the key factors that help students succeed are built into every student's experience. In that way, every student has a real opportunity to succeed.

## STUDENT SUCCESS CENTERS AND GUIDED PATHWAYS

Student Success Centers are leading the design and implementation of guided pathways across their states, helping to build a national movement. The Centers use guided pathways as the framework for all of their efforts to increase student completion rates in their states.

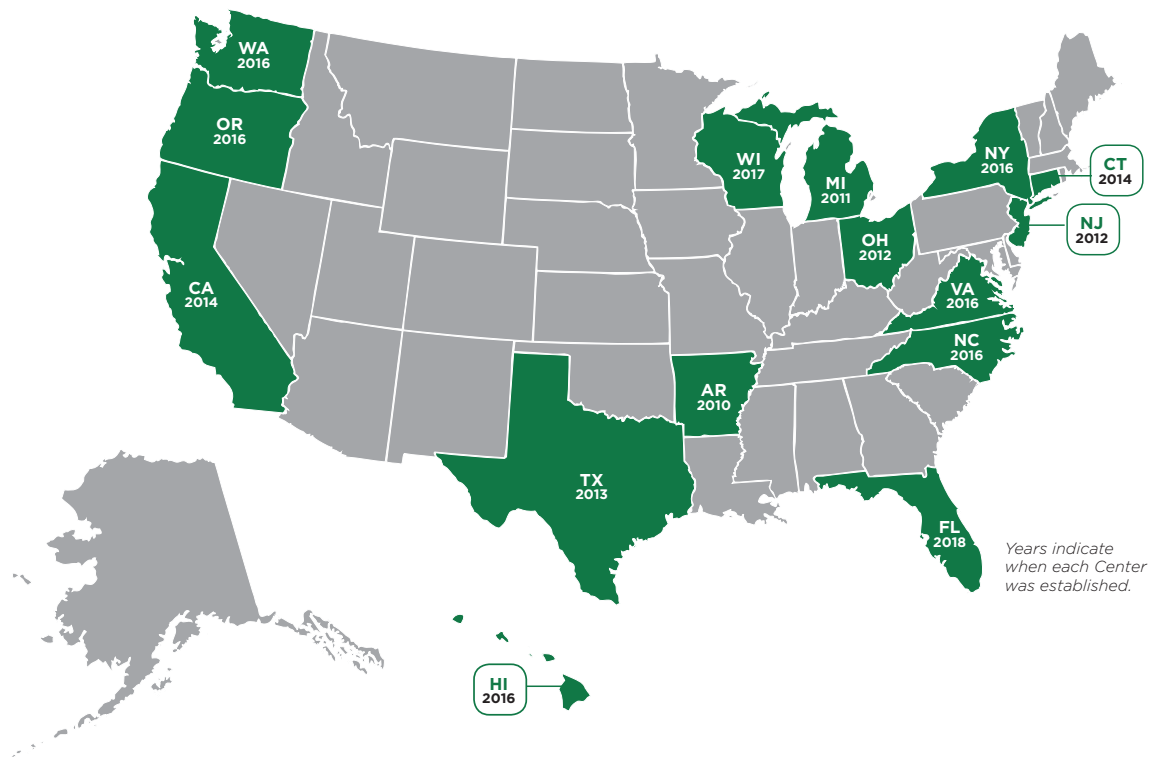
Centers provide training, support, and guidance to colleges as they undertake this challenging, complex work. In addition, Centers build partnerships with K-12 educators, universities, employers, policymakers, and other stakeholders.

The Centers' role includes:

- **Providing coherence** so efforts across the state are unified and colleges can collectively meet their state's completion goals. Many Centers offer technical assistance on key aspects of implementing guided pathways to help scale effective practices statewide.

- **Advocating for policies** that support equity and completion, such as transfer agreements or outcomes-based funding models.
- **Bringing colleges together** for learning opportunities and to discuss common challenges. For example, Centers hold institutes that focus on issues such as redesigning advising systems or meeting the needs of underprepared students.
- **Improving data sharing** among community colleges and with K-12 and four-year institutions.
- **Promoting research** and knowledge development that make it easier to scale effective practices.

Centers also help stakeholders across sectors collaborate to better serve students. For example, Centers convene leaders from the education and workforce fields to align career and technical education pathways with four-year transfer pathways.



### REFERENCES

This document includes content from the AACC Pathways Project and the Community College Research Center. For more information:

- <http://www.aacc.nche.edu/Resources/aaccprograms/pathways/Pages/default.aspx>
- <https://ccrc.tc.columbia.edu/media/k2/attachments/What-We-Know-Guided-Pathways.pdf>
- <http://ccrc.tc.columbia.edu/media/k2/attachments/guided-pathways-scale-adoption-initiatives.pdf>
- <http://ccrc.tc.columbia.edu/publications/redesigning-americas-community-colleges.html>