





Washington SBCTC Guided Pathways Planning Guide: 2026-2028

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Thanks as well to the Guided Pathways Advisory Council (GPAC) for their expertise, thoughtful feedback, and ongoing efforts to shape a resource that reflects the complexity and nuance of leading institutional and system change.

Message From the Washington State Board for Community and Technical Colleges

This planning guide was created to support colleges in organizing, aligning, and documenting their Guided Pathways efforts. It is intended as a tool for practical use, as well as a reflection of the values that guide our collective work.

Effective planning and tracking are essential. They help us stay focused, make our work visible, and ensure that we can communicate the importance of student success efforts to policymakers and stakeholders across the state. As we continue this work together, the guide serves as one more way to maintain momentum and support each other in building stronger, more equitable institutions.

Thank you to everyone who contributed. Your time, leadership, and insight are helping to move this system forward in meaningful ways.

Ascendium Education Group

This guidebook was made possible through the generous funding of Ascendium Education Group, a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization committed to helping people achieve their academic and career goals. Their national philanthropy focuses on increasing opportunities for learners from low-income backgrounds to achieve upward mobility through high-quality learning after high school. Through their grants, they explore innovative ideas, validate promising practices, and scale successful solutions that advance meaningful, systemic change. To learn more, visit ascendiumphilanthropy.org.

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Introduction

The Washington State Board for Community and Technical Colleges (SBCTC) has prioritized closing equity gaps—differences in academic achievement levels among learners of different demographic groups—to ensure that all students can fulfill their education and career goals. A central strategy to support achieving this objective, the Guided Pathways (GP) framework is designed to improve systems that support student clarity, structure, and momentum and thereby help SBCTC realize its strategic vision to "maximize student potential and transform lives within a culture of belonging that advances racial, social, and economic justice in service to our diverse communities." ¹

As the system looks ahead to the future of Guided Pathways implementation, there is a clear need for systemwide guidance. This includes identifying best practices, establishing data collection and reporting cycles, and defining key performance indicators for success, especially in light of the need to complete required legislative reports that explore leading and lagging indicators for student success. The purpose of this guide is to support practitioners in aligning their Guided Pathways efforts with this vision by emphasizing equity to ensure that all students have opportunities to succeed, using data to inform action, and developing an action plan modeled on previous planning cycles.



INTRODUCTION

About the Guide

The Guided Pathways 2026 Planning Guide is the anchor of a statewide strategy to support the Washington community and technical colleges in updating their 2026-2028 Guided Pathways plans to maximize student success outcomes. This guide includes the following guidance and resources:

- Establishing a "vision" for Guided Pathways in its ideal state
- Examples from exemplars in the field
- Key performance indicators and performance targets
- Interim and annual data reviews and action cycle recommendations
- A practical action planning tool

Designed in collaboration with key system stakeholders, including administrators, staff, and students, this guide embodies the following design principles:

Customizable: The guide supports each college's ability to lean into what is most important for its implementation efforts and align their planning accordingly.

Non-prescriptive: The recommendations in the guide are intended to be additive to each college's efforts and allow flexibility within a set of guidance.

Continuous Improvement Approach: The guide acknowledges the tremendous effort and progress over the past several years as the basis of how each institution moves forward while centering the needs and success of students.

As you work your way through this guide, you will engage in a planning process that will involve reading materials and completing activities that will lead to the development of an action plan. This final action plan will be the document that is submitted to SBCTC.

This planning cycle involves the following steps:



Step 1: Complete an Institutional Self-Assessment



Step 2: Reflect and Prioritize for Action



Step 3: Set Data-Informed Goals and Explore Evidence-Based Strategies



Step 4: Plan for Action



Step 5: Track Progress and Impact

As colleges deepen their Guided Pathways work, this guide offers a framework to support intentional planning, cross-functional collaboration, and progress toward student success outcomes.

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Vision for Guided Pathways

To anchor this Guided Pathways planning cycle in a unified vision and approach, system leaders developed a Guided Pathways "Ideal State" which describes what it looks like in practice for a college to operate at its fullest capacity to support student success outcomes. This Ideal State honors the unique context, strengths, and needs of each institution while ensuring that the vision for Guided Pathways stays at the center of ongoing student success efforts. and progress toward student success outcomes.



Ideal State Dimension	Description
Integrated Approach	Campus processes are integrated and key players, including faculty and staff members, are coordinated to allow for real-time collaboration that benefits student outcomes.
Faculty and Staff Buy-in	Faculty and staff demonstrate their commitment to Guided Pathways implementation through equity-centered advising and teaching and learning practices. Faculty and staff use data to inform student support strategies.
Student Access and Agency	Students can access information and guidance when needed in real time and in customizable ways through mobile and web-based tools.
Leadership Commitment	Campus leaders champion Guided Pathways by connecting the framework to the college's mission and goals. They set a clear vision, delegate authority while maintaining accountability, and align retention, completion, and equity priorities with the college's core principles and strategic plans. Leaders have aligned and embedded Guided Pathways priorities for retention, completion, and equity in the college's guiding principles and strategic plans.

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Ideal State Dimension	Description
Student Voice and Participation	Students are engaged and active across campus, and student voice is included in program assessment and continuous improvement processes.
Equity in Practice and Outcomes	The college has aligned Guided Pathways planning with its diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) strategic plan (a key deliverable required in SB 5194) and has identified specific actions to support integration. Key performance indicators show similar equitable outcomes across student groups, and services are delivered promptly in ways that are equitable and culturally responsive.
Institutionalization of the Guided Pathways Practices	Campus operations are developed and maintained with Guided Pathways practices in mind, in an integrated and systemic manner such that all students interact with them, not just those that opt in.

To better understand how your Guided Pathways implementation team can effectively bring the ideal state from vision to action, see <u>Appendix A</u>.

"The system is built for the average student, not for those of us navigating multiple intersecting challenges: disability, financial instability, or being the first in our families to attend college. Services exist, but they're fragmented and reactive rather than proactive."

— SBCTC Student

Guided Pathways requires urgent, radical, equity-minded, transformational organization change.² As you reflect on the following institutional strategies for Guided Pathways implementation, consider how your decision-making will support meaningful efforts to foster change that will have lasting impact for students of all identities and experiences.

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Complete an Institutional Self-Assessment

The institutional self-assessment process is meant to establish a benchmark for your Guided Pathways planning.

The table below offers a scoring rubric that you can use to assess your college's progress toward implementation of the Guided Pathways framework. Each section of the table represents a pillar of Guided Pathways implementation. The first four mirror the sections of the 2024-2026 Guided Pathways Work Plan—Leading Large-Scale Change, Pathway and Program Design, Pathway Entry and Navigation, and Teaching and Learning—and then there is one additional pillar: Academic, Career, and Financial Planning. In addition, this table also includes rubrics for Data and Continuous Improvement and Student Voice and Engagement, because these are design principles and cross-cutting practices that are critical to the implementation of Guided Pathways.

In each section, the left-hand column of the table lists components that are critical elements of progress within each pillar, and the four cells to the right of each named component are phrases that describe the institution's status—under the headings Emerging, Accelerating, Sustaining, or Leading—relative to each component. In each row,

circle the descriptive phrase category that best describes your institution's current status, using these explanations as a guide:

Emerging: Colleges in the emerging category are laying the groundwork for growth in the Guided Pathways planning process. Conversations may be happening, and interest may be growing across campus, indicating that the work is likely moving from individual commitment to shared ownership.

Accelerating: Colleges in the accelerating category are moving forward with intention. Strategies are taking shape as collaborative cross-campus efforts get underway. These colleges are finding ways to integrate goals for achieving broad-based student success into planning and decision-making.

Sustaining: Colleges in the sustaining category have integrated the framework of Guided Pathways into their cultures, systems, and continuous improvement practices. Students are intentionally included in the process.

Leading: Colleges in the leading category model innovation and continuous improvement in Guided Pathways. Equity and student success drive institutional strategy. These colleges share their lessons learned, mentor others, and use data and student voice to shape both campus- and system-level change.

In addition, each section includes a column that offers guiding questions to support your assessment, and another with space for you to share evidence and reflections.

Guiding Questions: These are recommendations for questions that you can use to structure the discussion among members of your institution's GP planning committee. The topics they address include the scale of adoption of components from the 2024-2026 Guided Pathways Workplan.

Evidence and Reflections: Use this space to document the committee's thinking on topics like what your institutional data tells you about your current efforts and the areas where you have had successes, and the areas that still show evidence of equity gaps in rates of student participation, retention and attrition, program completion, and job placement.



INSTITUTIONAL SELF-ASSESSMENT RUBRIC

	Leading Large-Scale Change					
Component	1. Emerging	2. Accelerating	3. Sustaining	4. Leading	Guiding Questions	Evidence and Reflections
Shared commitment to equity, student success, and system priorities	Equity and student success are sometimes mentioned but not prioritized.	These values are commonly discussed but unevenly practiced.	Equity and student success are core values shared across leadership and teams.	Equity and student success drive strategy, resource allocation, and decisionmaking across the college.	Are the college's strategic planning efforts aligned with systemwide planning priorities? Are college units collaborating to achieve successful outcomes for all students? (Are they engaging in planning discussions, reviewing disaggregated student data, and taking action?)	
Clarity and consistency of vision for Guided Pathways across college units	Some alignment exists but with inconsistencies.	Most units follow a common vision.	All departments consistently align with a clear college- wide vision for Guided Pathways.	All units share and act on a clear college-aligned vision of Guided Pathways that informs daily work.	Is there a clear and accessible plan that members of the campus community reference to understand their role in the Guided Pathways implementation? Are departments reviewing Guided Pathways data to ensure that their planning is in alignment with the GP plan progress and goals?	



Pathway and Program Design

In the 2024-2026 planning cycle, this section of your plan included the following components:

- **Meta-Majors:** Credit programs that are organized by "meta-major" or broad field.
- Career-Technical Workforce Program Maps:
 Credit career-technical and workforce programs
 that provide information on course requirements
 and recommended sequences (program maps) on
 the college's website.
- Math Pathways: Program maps that designate a program- or field-specific math sequence

Indicate progress on these and other components; use the guiding questions for discussions among stakeholders, especially within the GP committee.

Component	1. Emerging	2. Accelerating	3. Sustaining	4. Leading	Guiding Questions	Evidence and Reflections
Clear program maps aligned with careers and transfer pathways	Some programs have maps, but not all align with outcomes.	Most programs offer maps aligned with career and transfer pathways.	All programs have clear, accessible maps tied to workforce and transfer outcomes.	Every program has an up- to-date map showing course sequences, credentials, and career and transfer options.	Are there program maps for some or all majors? Are programs organized by meta-major or broad field? Is the college consulting with industry partners to ensure that the pathway is aligned to critical indemand skills? Is the information available to staff and students alike, and do people know how to access and use it?	
Integration of general education and career outcomes	Some integration exists but there is a lack of clarity about the degree or nature of integration.	General education and career outcomes are somewhat integrated.	General education and career/transfer outcomes are fully integrated.	The institution is utilizing innovative practices to partner with workforce leaders to ensure general education alignment to pathways.	Are general education courses mapped to pathways to support students? Are general education courses supporting foundational skill-building for the chosen career pathway? Do program maps designate a program or field-specific math sequence?	

Pathway Entry and Navigation

In the 2024-2026 planning cycle, this section of your plan included the following components:

- Academic and Career Exploration and Program Choice: The following activities have been adopted for all or nearly all
 new credit students (not including high school dual enrollment credit students) to help them explore career and academic
 interests and choose a program of study when they first enter the college:
 - » Mandatory orientation
 - » Mandatory orientation with meta-major-specific content
 - » Mandatory career assessment
 - » Mandatory first-year experience course
 - » Mandatory first-year experience course with meta-major-specific content
 - » Field-specific events or activities organized by each meta-major community
- Advising in the First Term: First-time students are advised to take at least one course related to their program (other than math, English, or a first-year experience course) in their first term.
- Educational Planning: First-time credit program students (not including high school dual enrollment credit students) are helped to develop a program education plan by the end of their first term.
- Educational Plans Online: Students can see their educational plans online and determine which courses they have already taken and which they need to take to complete their programs.

Indicate progress on these and other components, use the guiding questions for discussions among stakeholders, especially within the GP committee.

Component	1. Emerging	2. Accelerating	3. Sustaining	4. Leading	Guiding Questions	Evidence and Reflections
Equitable access to advising and career exploratio n services	Services are available but are inconsistent or confusing.	Most students can access support.	All students can easily access advising, career exploration, and financial aid navigation services.	All students have consistent and easy access to advising and career exploration services that are culturally responsive and aligned with their goals.	Do students have access to clear information about advising services and do they understand how to use it? Are students developing academic plans for their educations? Does the college monitor and provide ongoing educational plan adjustments? Are students being advised to complete at least one programspecific course in the first term? Are credit students taking advantage of academic exploration and career choice services?	
Students are receiving guidance about financial aid options to support their goals	Some students are receiving the guidance they need to develop financial aid plans.	Many students are receiving the guidance they need to develop financial aid plans.	All students are receiving the guidance they need to develop financial plans.	Students are receiving timely, personalized financial aid guidance integrated into academic and career planning services.	Do students have access to financial aid information that enables them to get the resources they need to succeed?	

Teaching and Learning

In the 2024-2026 planning cycle, this section of your plan included the following components:

- Enriched Instruction in Program Foundation Courses: Division-or college-wide efforts to improve instruction in program-related foundation courses (other than math, English, or first-year experience courses).
- Math Co-requisites: First-time students (not including high school dual enrollment/credit students) who are deemed to need remediation in math are placed in a co-requisite math course.
- Co-requisite Math-Aligned Academic Support: Academic support is provided to students in co-requisite math that aligns with the content of their college-level math course.
- Institutional Support and Faculty Development: Teaching excellence is prioritized; disaggregated data drives program-aligned faculty development.
- Career-Aligned Teaching & Learning: Courses link learning to career/transfer skills, use authentic assessments, and align with program maps/outcomes.
- Class Scheduling Based on Educational Plans: Course schedules are developed based on data from students' educational plans.
- Annual Course Calendar: An annual course calendar is available for students to see course offerings and times for future terms.

Indicate progress on these and other components, use the guiding questions for discussions among stakeholders, especially within the GP committee.



Component	1. Emerging	2. Accelerating	3. Sustaining	4. Leading	Guiding Questions	Evidence and Reflections
Institutional Support & Career- Aligned Teaching	Priorities are unclear; data use and career-aligned practices are sporadic.	Initial criteria, pilots, and data-informed professional development appear in select courses/programs.	Most programs apply data- driven professional development and career- aligned teaching with clear alignment.	Systemwide, audited alignment and routine evidence of improved student artifacts/progressi on.	Where is teaching excellence explicitly embedded in hiring, evaluation, and professional development? What do disaggregated results tell us to prioritize, and how will professional development address them? How do courses link skills to career/transfer with authentic assessments aligned to program maps/outcomes?	
Faculty engagement in equity- focused instruction and student- centered learning	Some faculty are engaged, but support for this approach to teaching and learning is limited.	Many faculty engage in equity- focused learning.	Faculty are consistently engaged in equity-focused instruction and in ongoing professional development.	Faculty apply inclusive practices and use disaggregated data to improve student learning.	Are faculty engaging in culturally responsive teaching practices and addressing bias? Is the college providing the appropriate professional development for faculty to engage in culturally responsive teaching practices? Are faculty developing discipline-appropriate strategies for experiential and applied learning? ³	



Academic, Career and Financial Planning

In the 2024-2026 planning cycle, this section of your plan included the following components:

- Progress Monitoring: The following systems are structures that
 are in place to support the monitoring of students' progress on
 their
 educational plans, with at least 80% of credit students experiencing the
 form of advising:
 - » Mandatory advising
 - Subsequent terms (advisors must sign off before students can register)
 - » Checkpoint advising (required appointments with advisors at key progress milestones)
 - » Automatic registration alerts (to notify when students have registered for courses not on their educational plan)
- Pathway Alignment: Professional or faculty advisors are assigned to students in specific meta-majors or broad fields.

Indicate progress on these and other components; use the guiding questions for discussions among stakeholders, especially within the GP committee.

Component	1. Emerging	2. Accelerating	3. Sustaining	4. Leading	Guiding Questions	Evidence and Reflections
Advising models are aligned with pathways.	Advising models may consider pathways but are not central to the student support experience.	Advising models generally consider student pathway engagement.	Advising models are anchored in the student's selected pathway and support the student's goals.	Advisors are assigned by pathway and support students from entry to completion with aligned guidance.	Are advisors monitoring students' progress on their educational plans and communicating that progress to students? Are professional and faculty advisors aligned to specific pathways?	
Proactive, integrated academic and non-academic supports are a core part of the student experience.	Some supports are used but they may not be proactive or integrated.	Advising and student support is available, but not all students are connected.	Advising and student support is central to the student journey.	Supports are embedded, coordinated, and triggered by real-time data to keep students on track.	Does the college provide experiences that are part of the Guided Pathways essential practices, such as predictive courses and structured exploratory experiences? Are students engaging with these supports in a consistent manner?	

	Data Use and Continuous Improvement						
Component	1. Emerging	2. Accelerating	3. Sustaining	4. Leading	Guiding Questions	Evidence and Reflections	
Use of disaggregated data to assess progress and address inequities	Data is disaggregated in limited ways and reviewed by a few individuals or departments. Use is informal and inconsistent.	Cross-functional teams are reviewing disaggregated data to identify equity gaps. Data use is becoming more intentional and connected to planning.	Disaggregated data is used to inform planning, evaluation, and improvement across the college. Gaps are tracked and addressed through established processes.	Equity-focused data use is embedded in college culture. Data is used to inform strategy, policy, and practice. Students and employees engage in data-driven improvement.	Is data disaggregated to ensure equitable outcomes across all groups? Is data accessible across campus so it can be included in decisionmaking?		
Campus Culture of continuous improvement	Some units engage in inquiry or improvement.	Cross-functional teams use data and feedback to guide planning and improvement.	A collaborative approach to continuous improvement is embedded across the college.	Improvement is part of the college culture, with shared accountability and visible results.	Is student data being regularly accessed and utilized in decision-making? Are units taking concrete steps to adapt their strategic planning based on campus data?		

	Student Voice and Engagement						
Component	1. Emerging	2. Accelerating	3. Sustaining	4. Leading	Guiding Questions	Evidence and Reflections	
Mechanisms exist to gather and act on student input	Some surveys or forums exist, but follow-up is limited.	Feedback is collected regularly and used to inform some decisions.	The college systematically gathers student input and uses it to improve programs and services.	Student input directly shapes policy and practice. Changes are communicated back to students.	When student feedback is collected, does it lead to meaningful change? Does the student feedback include both qualitative and quantitative data? Is the college conducting focus groups and interviews to effectively capture student voice? Are there clear feedback loops in place to determine what is done with student feedback after it is received?		
Students are involved in the Guided Pathways Planning and Implementation.	A few students are invited to attend Guided Pathways meetings or events.	Students are included on some committees or workgroups with clear roles.	Students are active co-designers and change agents in institutional improvement.	Students colead Guided Pathways work, and their insights shape strategy and design.	Are students engaging in Guided Pathways implementation in meaningful ways? (For example, do they have roles on committees?) Are students being consulted to help design meaningful solutions to campus needs? Is student input into GP planning part of their own career-connected learning and development?		

Reflect and Prioritize for Action

Now that you have completed the institutional self-assessment, it's time to pause and reflect and set your planning priorities for the 2026-2028 Guided Pathways planning cycle.

The questions in the table below prompt you to identify strengths to sustain, challenges to address, and opportunities to pursue with greater focus. As you answer each question, consider the "why" behind your responses and think about evidence that supports your conclusions.

- For any areas where you indicated that your work fits in the leading or sustaining category, you may consider these as components of your plan that are your strengths and can act as anchors of your work. These might be considered as some of your institution's "strengths."
- For any areas where you indicated that your work fits in the emerging or accelerating category, these actions may be areas that you can lean into for your 2026-2028 plan. These are areas where you may have existing momentum, and you may be able to achieve significant impact by focusing your time and resources

on them. They may also be areas where you have had challenges that you would like to address.

 If there are activities or programs that you have attempted to institute but have been unsuccessful, you might want to consider discontinuing them. No institution has the time or resources to do everything. This is the opportunity to rethink your priorities and refocus your efforts on activities that will have the greatest impact on student outcomes.

What are the strengths of your Guided Pathways implementation that you can leverage in your planning?	
Where have you had the greatest challenges in driving student outcomes through Guided Pathways?	
What are your current needs? What's missing?	
What kind of training or professional development would support the implementation of your institution's action plan?	

REFLECT AND PRIORITIZE FOR ACTION

Now that you have identified your strengths and the areas you should focus on in the 2026-2028 Guided Pathways planning cycle, we encourage you to think about this process in terms of what you would like to keep doing, what you would like to stop doing, what would you like to start doing, and what you would like to lean into in this next planning cycle. You can start to think about this in terms of specific practices and structures.

• What do you want to keep doing?

What practices, structures, or mindsets are working well and should continue as part of your college's Guided Pathways efforts?

What do you want to stop doing?

Are there practices or efforts that are no longer effective, create barriers, or do not align with your equity goals?

What do you want to start doing?

Are there new approaches you want to pilot? Are there opportunities to integrate new tools into your GP Plan, such as the new advising platform. (You may get additional ideas after reviewing the Evidence-Based Strategies section later in this guidebook.)

What do you want to lean into in this next planning cycle? Where do you see momentum or opportunity for growth? What new or emerging ideas feel exciting, urgent, or essential?

What is the evidence?

What data and rationale do you have to support these decisions?



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Question	Reflections	Evidence What data do you have to support this decision?
What do you want to keep doing?		
What do you want to stop doing?		
What do you want to start doing?		
What do you want to lean into during this next planning cycle?		
How are you going to engage students in your Guided Pathways Implementation Planning and Continuous Improvement Cycle?		

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Set Data-Informed Goals and Explore Evidence-Based Strategies

Now that you have reflected on your institution's strengths, areas for growth, and what activities you might no longer need to pursue, you can begin to identify goals. Each goal should be aligned to a Guided Pathways Planning component connected to the previous activities, and include a performance target. As you identify data points and performance targets connected to your goals, consider the continuous improvement mindset and ensure that your data review cycles will be actionable and lead toward continued progress.

Data Guidance

Data collection and utilization is a critical component of the Guided Pathways planning and implementation process, because data helps college leaders understand the student experience, identify barriers, and drive continuous improvement. This section provides guidance on how to use data strategically to inform decision-making, assess progress, and ensure that the work remains centered on students. This will also act as the foundation for the goals that your institution sets for this GP planning cycle.



In March 2024, the Washington State Institute for Public Policy (WSIPP) published a preliminary report about the implementation of Guided Pathways in the state of Washington. It included information on progress to date in GP implementation, with early findings based on leading indicators, such as credit accumulation in the first year, first-year college-level math and English completion, and retention. In 2029, WSIPP will publish a comprehensive report that will demonstrate the impact of Guided Pathways implementation across the state's community and technical colleges. The 2029 report will focus on lagging indicators such as certificate or degree completion and employment and earnings post-graduation. The indicators outlined in the 2029 report will serve as a powerful anchor for institutions to align Guided Pathways planning to SBCTC system priorities and campus needs, as fall 2025 enrollment will be reflected in the 2029 report.



2024 Guided Pathways Report: Leading Indicators	2029 Guided Pathways Report: Lagging Indicators
Credit accumulation in the first year	Time to degree or credential
First year college-level math completion	Certificate and/or associate's degree completion
First year college level English completion	Transfer rate to four-year institutions
Retention: fall to spring	Bachelor's degree completion at community colleges
Retention: fall to fall	Employment and earnings post-graduation
Overall GPA	Equity in outcomes
Math co-requisite adoption	

Why These Indicators Matter

The 2029 indicators reflect a statewide commitment to equitable student success and provide a shared framework for tracking progress across all colleges. These outcomes align closely with the goals of Guided Pathways and provide colleges with a target for long-term planning and continuous improvement. Rather than seeing the 2029 indicators as simply a reporting requirement, view them as a tool for reflection and prioritization. Be sure to do the following as you engage in planning and continuous improvement:

- Use the indicators to assess alignment between your current efforts and where the state is headed.
- Identify which indicators your college is well positioned to address and where focused efforts could accelerate progress.
- Ground data conversations in these shared metrics to support common understanding and cross-functional collaboration.

By anchoring your Guided Pathways to these indicators, your college becomes part of a broader movement to transform the student experience systemically.

Additional Indicators of Success

While the legislatively required indicators include both leading and lagging student outcomes, your campus may also consider additional indicators to support a more comprehensive and equity-centered

approach to planning and implementation. Many of these were developed in collaboration with the Washington Guided Pathways Advisory Committee (GPAC).

Student Services

- Education Plan Completion: Percentage of students with a documented academic and career plan in their first year
- 2. Financial Plan Completion: Percentage of students with financial plans in place to support persistence
- 3. Student Advising Engagement: Number and percentage of students engaging in advising appointments, with the data disaggregated by student demographics
- **4. Early Alert Follow-Through:** Percentage of students following up on faculty/staff referrals to tutoring, counseling, or support services
- Student Use of Campus Resources: Frequency of student engagement with academic support, career services, and other student success programs

Equity

 Language and Accessibility Equity: Availability and utilization of resources that have been translated into languages other than English; accessibility accommodations in enrollment, advising, and course navigation

- Wait Times for Student Support Services: Time between request and access to key services, including advising, financial aid, and others
- Outreach to Stop-Out Students: Analysis of students who do not return and targeted interventions to re-engage them
- **4. Faculty and Staff Representation:** Demographic alignment of faculty and staff with the student population
- Sense of Belonging: The degree to which students, faculty
 and staff feel like they are accepted and belong in the campus
 environment

Institutional Effectiveness

- Faculty and Staff Use of Data: The extent to which programs are using disaggregated data to inform program reviews, course planning, and equity initiatives
- Guided Pathways Awareness: The percentage of students and faculty members who can articulate the purpose and benefits of Guided Pathways in surveys
- 3. Student Engagement With Online Planning Tools: The extent to which website analytics are being used to track student interactions with pathway planning resources

4. Institutional Strategic Alignment: The extent to which Guided Pathways priorities are embedded in campus-wide strategic planning and budgeting decisions

Your Institution's Current Performance

In the table below, provide the most recent data your institution has collected for the leading and lagging indicators. There is space to include additional indicators that may be relevant to your institution (you may use any of the additional indicators included in the three lists above, or you can develop your own indicators based on considerations specific to your institution). This data will act as your baseline.

After you have entered data for your leading and lagging indicators, use the right column to log your goals for increasing the indicators of focus in the new GP planning cycle. You do not have to have a target for every indicator, but your strategies should be aligned to specific goals that will affect those indicators over the next three to five years, which will be evidenced by your own internal data and the 2029 statewide report. When you set your goals, it is recommended that you use 5% as the target increase over the previous year's performance. You should review this data on at least an annual basis, with additional reviews as needed.

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Use 5% as your target increase in performance when you set goals for the future.

Guided Pathways Indicators (Leading and Lagging)	Baseline: Current Institutional Performance (2023-24 or 2024-25)	Performance Target for GP Plan (e.g. +5 percentage points)
Leading Indicators		
Credit accumulation in the first year		
First-year college-level math completion		
First-year college-level English completion		
Retention: fall to spring		
Retention: fall to fall		
Overall GPA		
Math co-requisite adoption		
Lagging Indicators		
Time to degree or credential		
Certificate and/or associate's degree completion		
Rate of transfer to four-year institutions		

Guided Pathways Indicators (Leading and Lagging)	Baseline: Current Institutional Performance (2023-24 or 2024-25)	Performance Target for GP Plan (e.g. +5 percentage points)
Bachelor's degree completion at community colleges		
Employment and earnings post- graduation		
Equity in outcomes		
Additional Indicators of Success (Enter any other performance indicators that are relevant to your institution.)		

Goal Setting

Now that you have a picture of your institution's baseline data and the targets you wish to set for this GP planning cycle, it is time to translate these into specific goals in your institution's <u>Guided Pathways</u> <u>Implementation Plan</u>. Your implementation plan will be anchored in three to five overarching goals toward which your strategies and activities will be directed. This section provides guidance on articulating those anchoring goals. The following section provides extensive guidance on evidence-based strategies and interventions that can be effective in attaining goals that will have a direct impact on the leading and lagging indicators above.

Use the SMARTIE Framework

It can be helpful to use the SMARTIE framework when you set your goals. This approach enables you to set clear, attainable, and trackable goals that are . . .

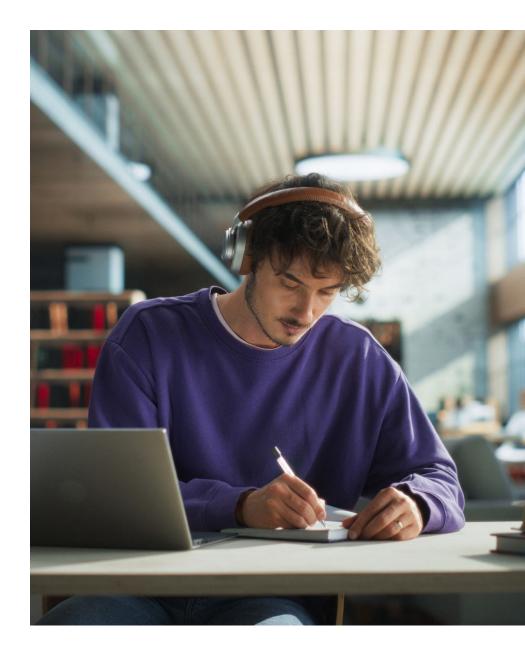
S	Specific
M	Measurable
A	Achievable
R	Relevant
T	Time-Bound
I	Inclusive
E	Equitable

For each of the targets you set above, draft a SMARTIE goal in your Guided Pathways Implementation Plan.

For example, for a goal addressing a target in the leading indicators, you might use this goal, which includes the recommended 5% increase: "Raise the fall retention rate from the current baseline of 30% to 35% by the fall of 2027, with no significant differences in retention rates among student groups based on gender, race, ethnicity, socioeconomic status, disability, or English language learning status."

This is a SMARTIE goal because it uses a precise, measurable figure that is relevant to the college's success and is attainable on a specific timeline. It also includes students of all demographic groups, and it is designed to promote equity by closing gaps in retention rates among demographic groups while increasing retention of students of all backgrounds.

If you set this goal, your institution would need to adopt specific strategies to achieve it. The following section provides guidance on evidence-based strategies to consider.



Evidence-Based Guided Pathways Strategies

The next section offers an overview of Guided Pathways Planning Practices aligned to the "ideal state." It includes examples of effective strategies, practices, and approaches for driving change at scale, along with profiles of colleges that have implemented effective Guided Pathway (GP) initiatives and student success stories from across the Washington Community College System. After exploring this section, you will be prepared to turn the priorities that you identified in your reflection into tangible strategies that will be directed toward achieving your institution's goals.

LEADING LARGE-SCALE CHANGE

To implement the Guided Pathways Planning on a large scale, institutions must engage their campus communities to create infrastructure needed for large-scale change. This type of engagement will help bring Guided Pathways planning from isolated efforts to a collective initiative that drives systemic impact. This section outlines key practices and approaches that support institutions in leading large-scale change with clarity and purpose.

Core Strategy: Campus Engagement

- Create a broad and intentionally inclusive plan, ensuring that there is representation from all parts of the campus community.
- Provide structural support that engages stakeholders across the institution. This may include equitable access to information about GP implementation, and clear opportunities for engagement.
- Ensure that faculty members, along with student focus groups, are engaged in developing new professional development opportunities and revising campus processes.
- Articulate a clear vision of where the college is, where it wants to be, and how it intends to get there. Clearly communicate this plan to the campus and ensure that any updates are clearly communicated across all stakeholders.
- Ensure continuous engagement on campus and in the community. (For example, you could launch a Caring Campus initiative to coach faculty and staff to adopt specific and intentional behaviors that promote connectedness.)

Core Strategy: College Committees

- Articulate a clear and meaningful plan to bring together groups that are essential to advancing the work.
- Clarify committee processes and structures; identify main committees relevant to GP.
- Define committees in terms of their impact on policies and practices related to GP, backed up by a system of review and decision-making. (For example, you could ask the college's Justice, Equity, Diversity and Inclusion (JEDI) Council to engage individuals across campus.)
- Clarify committee processes and structures and how they fit into the larger GP Implementation Plan.
- Ensure that many stakeholder groups, such as faculty (of various disciplines), staff, administrators, and students, are represented on the GP steering committee, and that those individuals represent a wide variety of identities, lived experiences, and perspectives, so that decisions are based on broad, representative consensus and aren't the result of singular top-down action.

Core Strategy: Student-Centered Planning

- Recognize the need for inclusion of student voice in the process.
- Support meaningful student inclusion on committees. Students
 on campus committees should be provided with clear roles
 that contribute to advancing the work, and their activities on
 the committee should contribute to their own professional
 development.
- Use quantitative and qualitative data to provide a comprehensive picture of the student journey.
- Commit to a continuous improvement model that uses
 qualitative and quantitative data to build on previous work with
 new elements that are equity- and student-centered.
- Compensate students for their valuable time and effort by providing them with stipends, honoraria, or other types of monetary rewards.
- Provide professional development around inclusive studentcentered planning efforts that engages key campus planning stakeholders.

PROGRAM DESIGN AND PATHWAY CLARITY

The goal of the Pathway and Program Design process is to ensure that every program has a clear, easy-to-follow path that helps students choose the right courses, stay on track, and reach their education and career goals without unnecessary delays or confusion. Pathways are aligned to the skills sought by employers.

Core Strategy: Program Maps and Meta-Majors

- Offer students programs of study that are well designed with clearly defined and industry-aligned outcomes.
- Make sure that resources for navigating program maps are readily available for students online and/or through academic advising services.
- Leverage student journey mapping to provide pathway clarity.
- Consider ways to reorganize instructional divisions to support meta-major development into groupings based on career sectors, such as "health care" and "manufacturing and trades."

Core Strategy: Math Pathways and Placement

 Engage in math pathway redesign to ensure that math courses are aligned and contextualized within the areas of study and are accessible to undeclared majors.



- Use directed self-placement models for math pathways including multiple measures for placement using high school transcripts.
- Add co-requisite math courses where possible to support course completion in the first year.

Core Strategy: Exploratory Experiences and First-Year Courses

- Offer career success courses tied to areas of study to help students explore and confirm, narrow, or change their pathway.
- Develop and contextualize exploratory course sequences within meta-majors to help students navigate their chosen pathways.
- Offer peer mentoring for first year experience courses as students enter pathways to help them understand the world of work.

Student Perspective:

Navigating College to Career Transitions

In a focus group discussion about Guided Pathways, a Washington State community college student said he had spent 20 years as a laborer before he enrolled in a community college, and the transition to becoming a full-time student was difficult.

He found advising support through the Northwest Workforce Council and was guided to a new program that was highly in demand: mechatronics—a field of study that combines electronics and mechanical engineering. While this was a new field for him, he was invested in the pathway because staff at the Northwest Workforce Council had helped him understand that it was the direction his industry was headed. The student said he has had success in this pathway in part because tutoring is available at "odd hours"—which accommodates his work schedule. One key barrier has been housing. He said he's had difficulty finding affordable housing programs that view student financial aid resources as sufficient income to qualify.

Overall, he observed that many available supports are geared primarily toward students transitioning directly from high school. While advising has helped bridge some of the gaps in supports for students his age, he emphasized that there's a need for more targeted resources to support students returning to education after years in the workforce, including services that help students find safe and affordable housing.



PATHWAY ENTRY AND NAVIGATION

Work related to Pathway Entry and Navigation focuses on how students discover, choose, and successfully enter a program of study that aligns with their goals. This principle emphasizes the importance of early support, clear information, and proactive guidance to help students make informed decisions and start on a path with confidence and clarity. The following are core strategies that support effective pathway entry and navigation:

Core Strategy: Onboarding and Orientation Support

- Use student services staff as navigators to help onboard new students.
- Add peer support to orientation experiences to ensure that students are engaging with the experience.
- Align onboarding experiences to pathway entry.
- Consider providing tailored onboarding, including inclusive, equity-focused options for students who are members of specific demographic groups, including people from lowincome backgrounds, first-generation college attendees, and parents. Additionally, colleges may consider organizing onboarding efforts by pathway.

Core Strategy: Advising and Navigation Support

- Develop an intake process that includes required academic planning, proactive advising, and intrusive and proactive follow-up support.
- Consider team-based advising and developing a structured, multiyear advising model.
- Use culturally responsive and student-centered advising practices that acknowledge the impact of student identity on the college experience.
- Value proactive, caseload-based advising support and student success.



College Profile: Emphasizing Equitable Student Outcomes at Wenatchee Valley College

Wenatchee Valley College (WVC), located in north central Washington, has a diverse campus community. It is a federally designated Hispanic-Serving Institution (HSI), and many of the students are members of local Indigenous tribes. For that reason, the college has focused on creating an equitable advising model that acknowledges students' cultural values and includes practical services like guided career assessments that incorporate best practices from other programs for students who are members of specific populations, such as the U.S. Department of Education's College Assistance Migrant Program (CAMP) and its TRIO programs, which serve students from low-income backgrounds, those who are first-generation college attendees, and students who have disabilities.

WVC's <u>equity and inclusion strategic plan</u> contains best practices in advising, teaching and learning, and student supports that acknowledge student identity and are culturally responsive. The plan includes an equitable advising model; a diversity, equity and inclusion framework; institutional resource allocation and prioritization guidelines; and classroom practices.

Identifying best practices and finding ways to scale them across campus is a prime example of the collaborative nature of Guided Pathways implementation at WVC.



Core Strategy: Educational Planning

- Develop and review educational plans for every student.
- Monitor plans for adjustments as students move through their programs.

Core Strategy: Student Support Programs

- Provide supplemental support through peer mentoring to address equity gaps through targeted interventions.
- Offer first-year experience programs that provide essential support to help students develop college skills and build social capital.
- Provide just-in-time advising opportunities such as opportunities to register for courses at orientation events.

Core Strategy: Course Scheduling

- Provide annual course scheduling reviews, which can make it easier to set up responsive course calendars and facilitate advance planning.
- Implement guided self-placement efforts, which can reduce barriers and increase equitable placement outcomes in math and English courses.



College Profile: Utilizing Program Maps at Clark College

Southwest Washington's largest public institution of higher education, Clark College, is an open-enrollment college that offers students of all ages and backgrounds opportunities to pursue career-connected learning. The school has adopted a pathway entry and navigation framework that it calls the Penguin Path Model (named in honor of the school's mascot, Oswald the Penguin) to guide students toward success from the moment they enroll to the day they're ready to start a career or transfer to a four-year institution.

At the core of Clark College's pathway model are program maps that offer students information on course sequencing and employment outcomes for the school's six areas of study: Creative and Communication Arts; Business and Entrepreneurship; Advanced Manufacturing and Mechanical; Health Care and Biosciences; Public Service Society, and Education; and Science, Technology and Engineering.





TEACHING AND LEARNING

This principle emphasizes embedding high-impact teaching practices, contextualized learning, and culturally responsive instruction within the pathways. The following are core strategies that promote excellence in teaching and learning:

Core Strategy: Faculty-Led Equity and Instructional Innovation

- Implement faculty-developed equity-centered assignment review and rubric redesign.
- Develop an "Inclusive Teaching Institute" for professional development.
- Invest in faculty professional development programs that focus on culturally responsive teaching and learning.

Core Strategy: Learning Outcome Alignment and Assessment

- Align course outcomes with program-level outcomes and industry certifications.
- Revise course and program learning outcomes to align with guided pathway career outcomes.
- Provide opportunities for colleges to work in instructional councils to update outcome and assessment practices.

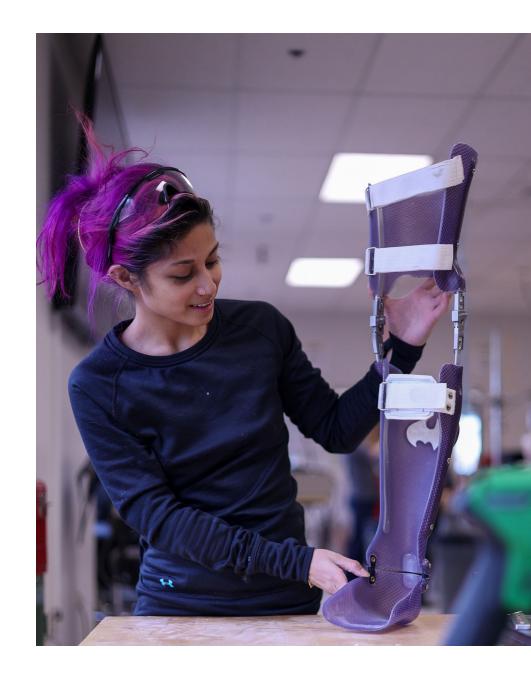
Core Strategy: Interdisciplinary and Collaborative Professional Learning

- Use a learning community model to support faculty in sharing strategies.
- Create professional development experiences that focus on culturally responsive practices.
- Support instructional improvement by offering faculty opportunities to take part in peer evaluations.
- Engage faculty in summer collaborative workgroups to review degree pathways and develop program maps.



College Profile: Excellence in Teaching

Spokane Community College (SCC) is a large community college that is known for offering programs that prepare students for careers in fields such as automotive repair, health care, culinary arts and many others. SCC promotes high-impact practices that prioritize equity and inclusion in teaching and learning through the programs and services offered in its teaching and learning center. One of the center's core initiatives is a community of practice that focuses on practices and perspectives that promote equitable student success, such as equity mindedness, holistic student support, transparent assignment design, and more.



EFFECTIVE USE OF DATA AND TECHNOLOGY

Efforts that promote the effective use of data and technology focus on how students discover, choose, and successfully enter a program of study that aligns with their goals. This principle emphasizes the importance of early support, clear information, and proactive guidance to help students make informed decisions and start on a path with confidence and clarity. The following are core strategies that support effective use of data and technology:

Core Strategy: Data Dashboards and Visualizations

- Set up interactive dashboards with disaggregated data for faculty and staff.
- Build data tools that allow departments to monitor equity gaps in real time.

Technology Supporting Scheduling and Program Planning

- Align course scheduling technology with program maps to ensure class availability.
- Use technology to simulate completion pathways and reduce scheduling bottlenecks.





College Profile: Tracking Student Success at Bellevue College

Bellevue College is a large college in western Washington. Because Bellevue is so large, it has invested extensively in determining how to best use data to support student success outcomes. The college relies heavily on tools it calls Student Success Dashboards to track student outcomes and make data-informed decisions to ensure that its equity goals are addressed. Bellevue recently developed a resource called the Data Disaggregation Framework to track outcomes for various student populations, enabling the adoption of equity-focused interventions. The college has also implemented other technology tools to complement its data integration efforts. One example is the TargetX student tracking tool from Liaison International, which the college uses to facilitate early intervention and student support strategies.



STEP 4

Plan for Action

With the institutional assessment completed and your team's review of the planning practices guidance underway, you've taken important steps to better understand where your college stands and where you want to focus your Guided Pathways implementation. You have identified specific SMARTIE goals directed toward impacting important indicators, such as the leading indicators referenced in the 2024 statewide report or lagging indicators, which will be referenced in the 2029 statewide report. You may also have decided to direct one or more of your goals toward the additional indicators suggested and vetted by the Guided Pathways Advisory Committee in 2025. It is now time to put the final pieces together for your institution's implementation plan. But before doing that, it would be helpful to think about how to manage large-scale change at the institutional level in order to have the greatest impact on student outcomes.

Action Planning for Effective Change Management

Guided Pathways is a large-scale change management initiative. This type of transformational change is difficult to implement because it is looking toward a future state, and it involves both a new way of operating and culture change. For guidance about handling this type of initiative, read the University of California, Berkeley's <u>Change Management Toolkit</u>, an internal staff resource the university developed to help school leaders navigate significant transformational change management efforts.⁵

Continuous improvement is at the heart of Guided Pathways work. It requires colleges to move beyond one-time data reviews and instead build a culture where data is consistently used to inform decisions, assess progress, and adapt strategies in real time. As you think about your long-term objectives while working through your institution's implementation plan, consider setting goals with room for iterative evaluation and adjustments as a way to anchor your college's work in a continuous improvement approach. Completing this tool will help ensure that your planning process is both intentional and actionable.

Drafting Your College's Implementation Plan

Go to your Guided Pathways Implementation Plan to revisit your goals and to map out the specific strategies you will employ in this next GP implementation cycle. The GP Implementation Plan is in an editable form that was designed to be updated and revised as you hone your plan and track progress toward your goals. Each institution will be expected to send its plan to the Washington SBCTC so the state will have all of the plans in its records. Additional instructions with details about how to submit your plan will be provided.

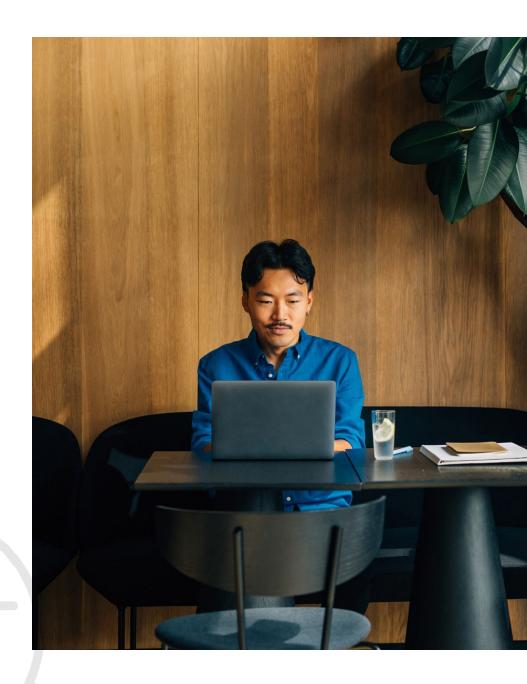
PLAN FOR ACTION 43

Track Progress and Impact

Don't let your institution's GP Implementation Plan sit on the proverbial shelf. Use it to direct and measure impact over the two years extending from 2026 to 2028. The final two columns in your implementation plan provide space for you to track progress over time and record notes relevant to your institution.

Progress Tracker and Notes

The "Progress Tracker" is a space that will be blank for now but can be a helpful field to capture progress over time. The "Notes" section is a space to record notes relevant to that specific strategy. It might include information on specific internal or external stakeholders that should be involved, implications for shared governance or role-specific commissions, or other factors or considerations relevant to that strategy for your institution.



TRACK PROGRESS AND IMPACT 44

Conclusion

Guided Pathways is a long-term commitment to redesigning how Washington colleges serve students, and fulfilling this commitment takes time and persistence. This guide offers tools, frameworks, and reflection prompts to support your team in assessing progress, identifying priorities, and planning with purpose. The advice and activities in this guide provide the scaffolding needed to support the development of a strong Guided Pathways Implementation Plan for the 2026-2028 planning cycle. The Washington SBCTC Student Success Center is committed to supporting the success of colleges through the Guided Pathways Planning process and continues to support the culture of innovation and continuous improvement throughout the Washington Community College System.

As you move forward, keep returning to the heart of this effort: creating more equitable, coherent, and student-centered learning experiences. Keep students at the center of your work and use data and lean on the shared wisdom of your peers across the state.



CONCLUSION 45

Appendix

The Role of Key Stakeholders in the Ideal State

Key stakeholders are a critical component of bringing the ideal state from vision to action. Below are specific actions aligned to various components of Guided Pathways planning to consider as you work your way through the action planning process.

Working Through an Integrated Approach

- Faculty have access to appropriate data to support student progress and success.
- Faculty are able to make referrals to campus services without difficulty or confusion.
- Faculty are collaborating on creating a course schedule that supports student needs and Guided Pathways outcomes.
- Staff look at students holistically and work to make transitions between services, tools, and resources seamless, uncomplicated, and centered on student needs and their success.
- Campus leaders are engaged in supporting faculty and staff navigating challenges associated with Guided Pathways implementation.

- Guided Pathways leads are respected, valued, consulted and included in conversations about high-level Guided Pathways structures and approaches.
- Campus leaders prioritize integrated systems and resource allocation to enable Guided Pathways implementation and ensure student success.

Faculty and Staff Buy-In

- Faculty are using equitable teaching, learning, and grading practices.
- Faculty have bought into Guided Pathways (GP), as evidenced by their promotion of its structure to students and their use of GP resources in their support of students inside and outside of the classroom.
- Faculty are collaborating on creating a course schedule that supports student needs and GP outcomes.
- Faculty understand and incorporate career-connected learning concepts in their courses.
- Faculty (when applicable) co-facilitate program-level prescriptive advising to support high-touch, in-person interactions with students over the course of their programs. Efforts are directly coordinated with professional advising and career development.

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- Faculty act as mentors for students in helping them to build social capital and make education and career connections through guidance and informal opportunities for support.
- Staff have bought into guided pathways, as evidenced by their promotion of its structure to students and their use of GP resources in their support of students outside of the classroom.
- Campus leaders have bought into the Guided Pathways process and actively support its implementation.
- Campus leaders promote Guided Pathways principles as key priorities for campus planning and service delivery, and they can articulate how GP is a vehicle for advancing student success.

Student Access and Agency

- Students are demonstrating agency within the Guided Pathways process.
- Students can articulate their plan and goals.
- Students understand how they connect to the mission of the college and guided pathways implementation. (Note: they may not use "guided pathways" terminology, but they understand GP principles and how the model works and how this approach will assist them in meeting their academic and career goals.)

- Students are transitioning from basic or entry-level courses to higher-level courses and completing credentials, certificates, and degrees in a timely manner (according to their needs and circumstances).
- Students have career-connected learning and exploration experiences integrated into their coursework throughout their educational journeys.
- Students are experiencing equitable outcomes across key performance indicators.
- Staff look at students holistically and work to make transitions between services, tools, and resources seamless, uncomplicated, and centered on student needs and their success.
- Staff are providing services that meet the needs of students and work to break down barriers to completion, including providing wraparound supports.
- Staff ensure that students have access to information about the services that are available to them to meet their basic needs so they can successfully engage with their coursework.
- Staff are working to ensure that all students have an education plan, a financial plan, and a career or transfer plan that is consistent with their short-term and long-term goals and informed by a broader understanding of their field of interest.

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Student Voice and Participation

- Students are actively engaged in the continuous improvement process for Guided Pathways, providing feedback and consultation for campus leaders, and holding leadership positions that impact key campus functions and further their own professional and career development.
- Students are engaging in sufficient touchpoints with the campus, including academic advising and student activities to progress in their courses and programs of study.
- Students are reporting a sense of belonging in campus climate surveys and other data collection mechanisms.
- Staff are soliciting feedback from students to improve campus operations.

Equity in Practice and Outcomes

- Faculty are using a curriculum that is accessible to all students, culturally relevant, and equitable.
- Students are reaching their intended milestones and goals equitably across different groups.

Institutionalization of the Guided Pathways Principles

- Campus leaders allocate resources to prioritize Guided
 Pathways implementation, including mental health resources
 and other services and supports that help students meet their
 basic needs.
- Campus leaders prioritize integrated systems and resource allocation to enable Guided Pathways implementation and ensure student success

APPENDIX 48

Endnotes

- "SBCTC Staff Mission and Values," Washington State Board of Community and Technical Colleges, https://www.sbctc.edu/about/agency/mission-values/, accessed August 12, 2025.
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ENDNOTES 49



