HOW CAN THE VISION FOR SUCCESS SERVE AS A TOOL FOR RACIAL EQUITY?

Laura Lara-Brady and Eric Felix

Moving from Racelessness to Race-Conscious Approaches

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BIOGRAPHY

**Laura Lara-Brady, Ph.D.
(she/her/hers)**
Senior Program Manager, WestEd

Laura Lara-Brady, Ph.D. is part of the Postsecondary Pathways and Career Development Team at WestEd as a Senior Program Manager. Her work includes working alongside partners and organizations to amplify and align their efforts and create meaningful and sustainable change that supports the needs of marginalized communities. Dr. Lara-Brady's efforts as the first Guided Pathways regional coordinator, supporting the California Community College Chancelor's Office, served as the foundation and structure for creating a regional model with 18 coordinators across the state. Currently at WestEd, Dr. Lara-Brady leads a number of state-wide projects within California and Utah centered on aligning K-12 and higher education systems with occupational demand statewide and by region; with a clear goal of supporting marginalized communities.

Dr. Lara-Brady obtained her doctorate degree from the University of Northern Colorado in Educational Psychology with two minors; research and statistics, and special education. She is a proud product of the California State University System, having received her Bachelor's degree from San Francisco State University in Psychology. Ask her about running or her latest adventure in the ocean. Her walk up song is Mirando de Lado by the Mexican band Kinky.

BIOGRAPHY

Eric R. Felix, Ph.D.
(he/him/his)
Assistant Professor, Administration, Rehabilitation, and Postsecondary Education, San Diego State University

Eric R. Felix is the proud son of Mexican and Guatemalan immigrants. Born and raised in Anaheim, California, I'm the product and beneficiary of public education from kindergarten to graduate school. I'm the first in my family to attend and graduate college. Now I get to be a faculty member at San Diego State University and do my best to fulfill our state's promise of providing affordable, quality, and transformative education. I hold three principles dear to me —Partner, Parent, Professor— and do my best to be present and passionate for each. Using Critical Policy Analysis, I explore the ways policymakers craft higher education reform and how institutional leaders implement them. Particularly, I focus on understanding how the implementation of lauded student success reforms may benefit, harm, or render invisible racially minoritized groups in the community college context. Ultimately, my work seeks to highlight the possibilities of policy reform to improve racial equity in higher education.

Brief Purpose

In 2017, the California Community Colleges (CCC) established the [Vision for Success](#), a collective "North Star" guiding the system towards more equitable outcomes for students. Now five years later, the goals of the Vision for Success to improve completion, increase transfer, and successful job placement, all while reducing racial equity gaps across these areas, are more urgent than ever. As we live through the COVID-19 pandemic, we recognize the hypervisibility of structural racism and the ways it permeates our education system, healthcare infrastructure, and employment opportunities, all influencing the trajectory and success of community college students. As the initial timeline of the Vision for Success sunsets, we use this brief to highlight how a renewed *Vision* can serve as a system-level tool to explicitly improve racial equity and model ways for educators to embed these revised goals into everyday practice. This renewed *Vision* is one grounded in racial justice and seeks to interrogate, identify, and dismantle the legacy of white supremacy and structural racism embedded within our organizational structures, policies, practices, and mindsets so that we can disrupt the processes that perpetuate student inequities. We divided this brief into three sections. First, we highlight the **progress** made under the *Vision* to improve equity across the system, specifically among racially minoritized students. Then, we discuss the **possibilities** of crafting an updated *Vision* that prompts system-wide transformation to become more anti-racist educators and just institutions. We conclude with recommendations and strategies to infuse the renewed *Vision* into everyday **practice**.

1. The *Progress* of the Vision for Success

What does progress look like when you start a five-year journey to improve equity and attempt to redress a 100-year-old system with nearly 2 million students that employs thousands of educators? In trying to assess the progress of the *Vision*, a focus on outcomes alone was insufficient. Beyond the limited data available to evaluate the impact on outcomes, we considered progress more expansively: system mobilization, infrastructure building, and early results. Additionally, we consider how this progress has benefited and improved the conditions, experiences, and outcomes for racially minoritized students.

System Mobilization

Chancellor Eloy Oakley Ortiz and California Community Colleges embarked on a transformational journey towards a new vision for all 116 community colleges in the state. This vision was crafted through a participatory process that engaged key stakeholders and research experts as well as invited all Californians to share their perspectives in a virtual town hall to gather feedback. This work culminated in [6 ambitious goals](#) for significantly increasing student completion and eliminating equity gaps throughout the state. Coupled with [7 core commitments](#) from the California Community College Chancellor's Office (CCCCO), the [Vision for Success](#) outlined key areas of improvement:

- Increasing the number and percentage of students who reach their educational goals and living wages,
- Decreasing the amount of time and costs for students; and
- Addressing critical equity gaps across student groups and regions.

As the *Vision* rolled out in 2017, the CCCCO made it clear that the goals and commitments would serve as the "North Star" for the system "making sure students from all backgrounds succeed in reaching their goals and improving their families and communities" (CCCCO, 2017)." The symbolism of a "North Star" served as critical messaging that the *Vision* would become the guiding light for the field and a signal towards mobilizing the system towards a new destination of access, equity, and success. To meet the *Vision* goals, [Guided Pathways](#) (GP) surfaced as a "structure to provide all students with clear enrollment avenues, course-taking patterns, and support services." In other words, GP became the framework and the vehicle for transformational change centered on the student experience.

Building Capacity and Expanding Infrastructure

Compared to previous initiatives and frameworks, two notable differences accentuated how the CCCCO introduced the *Vision*: the support provided to increase internal capacity and resources to expand existing infrastructures. In contrast with other initiatives and frameworks, colleges had personalized support via the newly created [GP Regional Coordinators](#) model, which supported individual colleges, districts, and regions to implement GP with an equity lens. Also, the creation of the [Vision Resource Center](#) provided a space to house resources such as recorded webinars and presentation materials, as well as increased dialogue between colleges on scaling effective practices to increase completion, transfer, and employment outcomes.

Another way that the CCCCO supported colleges to adopt the *Vision* goals into their college priorities was by expanding existing infrastructures of support. In addition to creating the Regional Coordinator model (including [Guided Pathways](#) and [Rising Scholars](#)), and the new Vision Resource Center portal, the CCCCO enlisted the support of state-wide partners (e.g. ASCCC, 3CSN, and WestEd) and provided an additional investment of $150 million towards GP. This strategic move positioned the CCCCO away from a compliance-based role and towards a more collaborative, evidence-based, and innovative system to achieve the *Vision* goals.

Early Results

Today, five years after its enactment, traces of progress can be seen and measured across all 116 colleges. Among key advances, are the increases in intersegmental collaboration to reach *Vision* goals that allows for a better understanding of the institutional, district, and regional barriers encountered as part of the student journey and some of the ways to mitigate those barriers to support retention efforts. For early outcomes, we turn to the [2022 State of the System](#) (SOS) report which shares the annual advancement of the *Vision* Goals and highlights improvements made for all students. In reviewing the last four SOS reports, the *Vision* has made progress in increasing completion at the aggregate level as well as sending more transfers to CSUs and UCs. Still, the goal to reduce equity gaps among "underrepresented students" falls short, especially for Black, Indigenous, Latinx, and Pacific Islander students.

Outside of quantitative metrics, one of the most prominent measures of progress remains the examination of how current college processes impact student retention and success. Every day transactional processes, such as enrolling for classes, paying for registration, or attending orientation, are being examined in more detail to detect opportunities for improvement. Motivated by the *Vision, a common question that serves to guide this approach is 'how does this impact student achievement?'* This approach required a heavier reliance on data and

cross-functional teams. In addition, the formation and institutionalization of cross-functional college teams that include a wide representation of students, faculty, administrators, and classified professionals, has helped to set up the necessary structures for GP and the *Vision* to make sure its progress is integrated with decision-making bodies and centers student achievement.

2. *Possibilities:* Moving from a Symbolic Vision to System-Wide Action for Racial Equity

As progress continues, we see the first five years of the *Vision* as an effort to mobilize the field and set the agenda to address educational inequities across the system. Akin to a long voyage, the *Vision* set the course and destination for the field. Early progress could be seen through the process of introducing the *Vision*, garnering buy-in for the ambitious goals, and allowing individual campuses time to reflect and consider how they would respond to the new charge. These years have been crucial to building the infrastructure and commitment for the system's journey towards equity. Kezar (2014) describes this as a critical step in deep organizational change; making sure to first "galvanize" members in the system and then begin to lay the foundation for how the institutions, collectively, will shift policies, practices, and beliefs to align with the change outlined within the *Vision*. Now it is time to set a new course and venture forward with implementation and action that propels the system towards achieving the goals of the *Vision for Success*. With recent race-conscious initiatives from the [Call to Action](#) in 2020 to Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Accessibility commitments in 2022, the Chancellor's Office has created new resources, tools, and curricula that explicitly center on racially minoritized students and the need to address their unique challenges and barriers. Among the areas that can move the *Vision* from symbolism to system-wide action for racial equity are *centering race-conscious language and building accountability structures for organizational change*.

Centering Race-Conscious Language

The central purpose of the *Vision* is described by the Chancellor's Office as, "making sure students from *all* backgrounds succeed in reaching their goals and improving their families and communities, eliminating achievement gaps once and for all" (CCCCO Website, n.d.). Language such as this can dilute the urgency to address racial disparities in the system. Reviewing progress and cumulative change from the 2016-17 baseline year shows that Black, Indigenous, Latinx, and Pacific Islander students faced steep challenges in progressing towards the established 5 and 10-year goals. Although important to note how the *Vision* serves all students, the next iteration must include stronger language that focuses on the gaps

experienced by communities of color and how institutions can play an active role in reducing equity gaps. Similarly, *Vision* Goal 5 seeks to "reduce equity gaps among underrepresented students by 40% over five years and eliminate them in 10 years." Using the term "underrepresented" allows those campus colleagues uncomfortable with issues of race to avoid addressing racial inequity head-on. In renewing the *Vision* for the next five years, the CCCCO can bolster its central purpose by being more explicit in how racially minoritized communities are identified, emphasized, and supported within the system-level efforts.

Building Accountability Structures

As we reviewed available documents, reports, and data on the *Vision* we recognized the need to have a robust accountability structure that cuts across individual, regional, and state levels to achieve the six system-wide goals. Accountability structures can leverage efforts like Local Vision Goals or Regional Collaboratives or new opportunities like the Governor's 70% Attainment target.

To tap into the possibilities of racialized system-level change and increase accountability, the CCCCO can incentivize colleges to review Local Vision Goals and consider how they tackle and monitor racial equity change directly. As part of this process, campuses were able to create local efforts that target racial/ethnic groups experiencing disproportionate impact. With a renewed *Vision* focused on racial equity, individual institutions can revisit the progress on the local goals created and how far they have come in serving marginalized communities.

A second way to build transparency and accountability structures is by increasing opportunities for regional collaboration to advance *Vision* goals in priority geographic areas like the Far North, Central Valley, and Inland Empire, particularly as those regions have established regional consortiums (NFNRC, CVHEC, and GIA) and house a large percentage of racially minoritized students. These collaboratives are the action that can drive the progress and achievement of Vision goals across the state. This added racial focus to the purpose and goals of the Vision can be paired with Governor Newsom's efforts to improve degree attainment by 2030.

3. *Practice*: Embedding the Vision for Success in Everyday Practice

The social context in which we find ourselves today is much different than when the 2017 *Vision* goals and commitments were established. Five years ago, these efforts to increase attainment, improve efficiency in credit accumulation, and close persistent equity gaps may have been seen as bold, transformational, and an aspiration off in the distance. Today, these goals are a necessity and a way forward that helps individuals, colleges, and the system to identify, address, and close the longstanding and emerging inequities experienced by community college students.

Amid the pandemic, we shifted our structures, our policies, and our practices to address the immediate needs of our students, demonstrating ways to cut through long-standing organizational routines that maintained the status quo. The amplified calls for racial justice in society are mirrored in our community college system, having developed several efforts (e.g., Call to Action, DEIA, Culturally Competent Professional Development) to sharpen our commitments to building equitable institutions. As educators, we are experiencing an environment more inclined to work toward racial equity, as supports and investments from the state CCCCO are increasingly in line to create diverse, equitable, and just community colleges.

The closing of equity gaps is just the beginning. Challenging assumptions of what success looks like as well as what is acceptable can take the work of the *Vision* to the next level and into the next five years. The Call to Action mobilized the system from an inquiry stage and building momentum in each campus, and towards an institutionalized collective action centered on supporting racially minoritized students and their communities. Our hope is that the recommendations that follow build on that work, and prompt some ideas for how individuals, colleges, and districts can move forward and embark on a journey into the next five years of the renewed *Vision*.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR REALIGNMENT, RECOMMITMENT, AND RACIAL EQUITY

Individual-Level

- Critically reassess your day-to-day practices to consider how they influence the success of students of color. In reflecting on your role within the institution, consider how you can cut down processes that are not supportive of their achievement.
- Become well-versed with the concepts of equity, race, equity-minded competencies, and structural racism to have nuanced conversations on campus that can lead to progress for racially marginalized groups.
- Lean into the importance of cross-functional teams as a strategy for improving racial equity on campus. How are current structures representing students of color and their communities within this work at your campus? Additionally, how can you engage those not at the table to be part of this work as well as engage leaders to commit to remaining accountable for this progress?

Institutional-Level

- Move beyond centering college-wide efforts on equity to how these efforts impact specific racial groups, particularly with small populations. How can supporting the needs of minoritized groups create insights that can support the achievement of all students? How can you leverage the data your college has already collected and move it into an actionable plan?
- Use GP principles as the basis for governance structures and college-wide plans. In considering how GP is the vehicle to move forward the Vision, how can it be truly integrated into governance structures such as Academic Senate, Classified Professional, and Consultation Council and be the driving decision-making process of how colleges establish their racial equity priorities?
- Braid college-wide funding to support student achievement (e.g. SEA, GP, SWP). How can institutions leverage distinct funding opportunities and group outcomes across a myriad of initiatives in support of student achievement?

System-Level

· Create a stronger alignment between initiatives. Integrated reporting mechanisms that leverage system-wide tools can reduce duplication and allow colleges to focus more on supporting student achievement and less on compliance documentation.

· Infuse race-centered language that reaches beyond two Vision for Success goals, and squarely around minoritized groups, namely Black, Latinx, and Pacific Islander students.

· Provide access to data dashboards that indicate real-time progress towards milestones and achievement of Vision. How can institutions, Districts, and regions access their progress under each of the Vision goals, particularly for marginalized populations? How can we build a robust accountability system that has transparency and students of color at the center?

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CONTACT

Dr. Adrián Trinidad
Assistant Director for Community College Partnerships
altrinid@usc.edu

Dr. Minh Tran
Director of Racial Equity Research Partnerships
mctran@usc.edu