# Faculty & Staff Support: A Toolkit for Mid-Level Managers

Building vital leadership capacity for large-scale, equity-grounded, student-focused change

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Every student deserves a strong start in their first year of college. This toolkit is part of a SSTF three-part series, providing resources to assist postsecondary leaders design and implement reform strategies that support equitable outcomes for students who are marginalized and racially minoritized.

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STRONG START to FINISH

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# Executive Summary

This toolkit provides tested change leadership strategies for mid-level leaders, and those who support them, with the goal of better equipping these critical actors to lead efforts that accelerate equitable outcomes for marginalized and racially minoritized students. We define equity here as the elimination of race and socioeconomic status as predictors of outcomes. We also approach equity with explicit recognition of the intersectionality of identity and the importance of factors including age, gender identification and immigration status when it comes to the work of dismantling structural and systemic barriers to student success. To support administrators' efforts to address patterns of inequity in student outcomes, the toolkit includes topics related to evaluating institutional policies and scaling culturally responsive pedagogical practices.

## Why focus on mid-level leaders?

As those who impact faculty and staff most directly, mid-level leaders must be equipped to translate priorities from above into action plans for those deeper in the institution. It falls to them to shape priorities and mindsets, model silo-spanning collaboration across different functional units, and strengthen shared appetite for the hard work of student reform. Perhaps most importantly, mid-level leaders are tasked with achieving ambitious goals, often without formal authority. This means they must develop and hone a particular set of leadership skills that expand their capacity to influence, motivate and inspire others.

## How this toolkit helps

Large-scale, equity-grounded redesign of developmental education requires leadership training. Nowhere is this more important than at the mid-level, where leaders are tasked with leading implementation of promising practices, strategic direction, systemic change and evidence-based interventions. This toolkit is intended to help these leaders assess their leadership capacity, build skills related to policy evaluation, and measure structural change as they seek to transform developmental education to benefit Black, Latinx, Indigenous and first-generation students, and those from households with low incomes.

## How to use this toolkit

This toolkit provides rubrics, guiding questions, case studies and resources to help mid-level leaders increase their capacity to spearhead reform. The tools included here can be used separately or together.

- **Leadership Capacity Assessment —** A rubric to help mid-level managers reflect on and assess their leadership capacity to galvanize faculty and staff resolve for improvements, build trust, forge high functioning relationships with senior leaders, facilitate effective cross-functional teams, and effectively manage projects.

- **Policy Typology —** A framework designed to support mid-level managers to better understand and influence the policy development and implementation process. Through a set of guiding questions and recommended action areas, this resource offers a simple framework for evaluating institutional policies, identifying areas for improvement, and making the case for change.

- **Measures of Structural Change —** A tool to help mid-level leaders assess the extent to which policies and practices create institutional conditions that yield equitable access, opportunity and experiences for students in racially minoritized communities. Measures include placement policy and practices, advising practices, alignment of gateway courses with programs of study, number of corequisite course sections based on enrollment, and proportional representation of student groups enrolled in corequisite courses.

- **Practice Profiles —** Short stories that highlight colleges doing exceptional work, as well as field-based lessons. One practice profile also focuses on the role of mid-level system leaders as drivers of innovation.

- **FAQ —** Frequently asked questions about mid-level managers.

## Key takeaways

- Increasing the capacity of mid-level managers to lead developmental education reform includes assessing and developing their change-leadership skills, and helping them understand how to:
  - Evaluate and impact policies.
  - Make the case and build shared will for transformation.
  - Connect the dots between high-level priorities and needs on the ground.
  - Support high-quality implementation of reforms. Successful developmental education reform efforts share commonalities that shape the work of mid-level leaders:
  - Ongoing, authentic engagement at every level is necessary for systemic change.
  - Transformation requires cross-functional teamwork and a culture of collaboration that truly values distributed leadership and empowers co-ownership of complex work.
  - Senior administration must be supportive of time allocation and professional learning opportunities for mid-level leaders and frontline faculty/staff to own and lead efforts.
  - Using quantitative and qualitative data to elevate the experiences of faculty, staff and students is essential to continuous improvement, and should be supported at multiple levels within and across departments and functional units.
  - Cultivation of an institutional culture of belonging and care for faculty, staff and students to achieve true co-ownership of complex, equity-minded change work is the result of ongoing effort.
- Prioritization leadership skills that relate to social and emotional intelligence so that mid-level managers — often lacking formal authority — are able to influence and motivate others.

# Leadership Capacity Assessment

This capacity assessment considers five key skills essential for mid-level managers as they work to accelerate student-focused change. Details for each skill are noted below, followed by a rubric that provides measures for each skill, from emerging to advanced. A mid-level leader at the advanced level will demonstrate all the competencies included in emerging, developing, intermediate and advanced levels.

## Key Skills

### Using data effectively to engage and motivate

Mid-level managers at their best are equity-minded and have both the data literacy and emotional intelligence required to access, translate and use data to inspire curiosity and empower front-line faculty and staff to implement and refine promising practices with integrity. To build a culture of evidence-informed improvement, mid-level leaders must support consistent collection/reporting of student data and possess the social skills entailed in effective data use. Understanding that data conversations can be emotionally hard for faculty and staff, and that people struggle to bring their best when they feel shamed or defensive, skillful mid-level leaders work hard to enter data conversations with empathy, as well as principled focus. Program evaluation and continuous improvement, based on equity-minded quantitative and qualitative data, are essential to sustainable progress on any of the reforms outlined in the Core Principles.

### Building trust with faculty and staff

Policy changes frequently and understandably face resistance from faculty and staff who feel excluded from decision-making processes or who perceive threats in reform priorities. In these situations, mid-level managers must facilitate meaningful engagement between their units and higher-level leaders to foster understanding of the rationale and goals of the new policy or practice. These discussions must be designed to foster trusting relationships through respectful communication grounded in shared values, consistency in leadership, and transparency in decision-making. Mid-level managers can accelerate and improve student success by creating a culture of transparency, an ethos of mutual respect, and a sense of belonging among faculty and staff. They are also uniquely positioned to elevate student voices and keep everyone focused on the student experience.

### Forging high functioning relationships with senior leaders

Mid-level managers are in a difficult position of needing to meet the expectations of senior leaders while navigating the expectations and anxieties of those deeper in the institution. Developing the skills to simultaneously manage up and down amid competing perspectives is essential to the

success of mid-level managers. Helping senior leaders understand the impediments to change, securing the cover needed from senior leaders to pursue reform boldly, and successfully lobbying for the resources and focus needed from senior leaders are all essential areas of professional development for mid-level managers.

### Facilitating effective cross-functional teams

Mid-level managers are on the frontlines of shaping how their units respond to initiatives and how they implement changes. Mid-level managers are in a unique position to create practices that foster cross-team collaboration and empower their people to work across functional areas around shared priorities and goals. The skills here include deftness in spanning functional cultures; facilitating co-discovery processes that result in shared commitment across diverse agendas; building relationship-based collaboration beyond transactional cooperation; and organizing collaborative work to meet the demands and realities of those involved. Effective institutional change entails all units working in coordination to leverage collective strengths.

### Managing projects to foster continuous improvement

Mid-level managers are uniquely positioned to foster their team's professional development and provide feedback to senior leaders. Mid-level managers must cultivate project management and portfolio management skills that enable them to turn mandates/directives/aspirations into coordinated workflow that brings the best out of those deeper in the institution. More sophisticated and capable mid-level leaders understand that project management is change management, and find natural ways to embed a continuous improvement mindset into the way day-to-day work is organized and executed.

*Effective institutional change entails all units working in coordination to leverage collective strengths.*

# Leadership Capacity Assessment Rubric

This rubric is designed for use as both a personal reflection tool and as a peer learning resource. It is also designed as an input to formal leadership training. It can be used as a standalone resource or be embedded in a wider leadership development program. The elements included accommodate a wide range of change models. The scale from emerging to advanced should be viewed as scaffolding, with the capacities at each level included and built upon at the next level.

| | Emerging | Developing | Intermediate | Advanced |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Using Data** | Understands and shares the importance of consistently collecting and using data to make evidence-based decisions.<br><br>Identifies available data, how and when it is collected, and how it is used. | Discusses the significance of disaggregating student results when evaluating equity.<br><br>Develops a research agenda, including:<br><br>• Key measures that are important to assessing student performance (KPIs and lagging indicators, like course completion, GPA, excess hours, time to completion). | Ties disaggregated data use to broader equity conversations that focus on structural impediments to fairness.<br><br>Shares research agenda across college community and develops plan for implementation.<br><br>Provides professional development activities to help all employees understand and begin reviewing data.<br><br>Develops regular, consistent and easy to review and use data reports, for specific target audiences.<br><br>Uses data to discuss measures and set targets. | Rounds all conversations about disaggregated data in a shared statement about the institution's definition of equity.<br><br>Bases college planning and budget development on evidence-informed results.<br><br>Develops action plans based on measures that attend to both the technical and adaptive, human dimensions of data-driven change.<br><br>Includes data and technology capacity reviews in annual planning — from compliance to regular reporting — and uses data strategically to inform and measure. |

| | Emerging | Developing | Intermediate | Advanced |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Using Data (continued)** | Understands and shares the importance of consistently collecting and using data to make evidence-based decisions.<br><br>Identifies available data, how and when it is collected, and how it is used. | • Measures for processes and activities aligned with the KPIs that will provide faculty and staff with evidence to make improvements (leading indicators) [e.g., completion and success by course by faculty, number of hours completed in first term, completion of first writing and math courses in first year, having program plan documented in first 15 hours].<br><br>Gathers baseline data (disaggregated by student groups), where available.<br><br>Gathers qualitative data through student focus groups/interviews to understand the student experience. | Aligns measures with processes and activities to encourage use of evidence to make changes.<br><br>Shares measures, targets and action plans for improvements with college.<br><br>Begins discussions for sharing progress data with students based on ongoing equity discussions on student results. | Practices, reviews and enhances a culture of decision-making.<br><br>Shares and celebrates results, and continually reaches for improvements/push for excellence.<br><br>Develops and expands a cadre of faculty, staff and administrators who model social and emotional intelligence in engaging colleagues as partners in sense-making around data. |

| | Emerging | Developing | Intermediate | Advanced |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Building Trust** | Shares policy and practice changes (and rationale for them) in emails with stakeholders. | Shares policy and practice changes (and rationale for them) with a small circle of advisors.<br><br>Delegates change management and process improvement plans to a small circle of advisors.<br><br>Ensures diversity of experience, perspective and background is included in committee make-up. | Shares policy and practice changes (and rationale for them) in ways that explicitly invite input and feedback from a broad range of stakeholders, particularly those on the frontline.<br><br>Facilitates the development and implementation of change management and process improvement plans by stakeholders, particularly those on the frontline.<br><br>Creates an atmosphere where team members acknowledge need for change and feel comfortable asking for help and admitting mistakes.<br><br>Creates an atmosphere of belonging by consistently recognizing effort or accomplishment and by visibly elevating the successes of others.<br><br>Ensures committees and composition of working groups are reflective of the diversity of the student populations served by the institution. | Ensures that policy and practice change recommendations flow from stakeholders, particularly those on the frontline, with dedicated room created by mid-level leaders for frontline faculty and staff to discuss concerns and provide insights that are then fed into improvement plans.<br><br>Shares change management and process improvement plans progress reports at regular intervals, and success is celebrated in visible ways.<br><br>Creates an environment where team members from all circles display co-ownership for change by regularly collaborating in ways that yield additional insights about policy and practice changes that ought to be considered or refined.<br><br>Displays skills associated with emotional intelligence and actively fosters psychological capital (hope, efficacy, resilience and optimism) among colleagues through consistent communication and ongoing collaboration.<br><br>Makes consistent efforts to acknowledge and address implicit bias by centering the voices of faculty and staff from racially minoritized groups in committees and working groups. |

| | Emerging | Developing | Intermediate | Advanced |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Forging high functioning relationships (vertical)** | Understands the position of their division or functional unit within the organization and how their work fits into the overall success of the college. Understands the expectations of senior leaders. | Sees the importance of developing high functioning relationships with the executive leadership team.<br><br>Begins to be aware of the importance and influence of team members and individuals up the organizational chart on team performance and the overall performance of the organization. | Establishes strong professional and high functioning relationships with executive leadership.<br><br>Successfully signals commitment to implementing leadership priorities. | Understands how to work with executive leaders to receive the cover and support needed to effectively bring those deeper in the organization along as reliable partners in the work. |
| **Facilitating effective cross-functional teams (horizontal)** | Ensures that functional units have representation on appropriate teams. Selects team members on the basis of human resource data, and college and team needs.<br><br>If appropriate, advocates for a cross-functional team where mid-level leaders are equivalent in terms of levels, titles, job descriptions and responsibilities. | Focuses on promoting a culturally responsive environment of equity and belonging in addition to providing clear team charges and operations.<br><br>Creates relationship-building opportunities for members beyond team meetings and outside formal roles. | Aligns team operations with the mission and values of the college.<br><br>Ensures that team goals, actions, and evaluation plans are informed by data.<br><br>Takes opportunities to communicate team strategies and work with the whole college with transparency, and creates effective opportunities for feedback.<br><br>Provides feedback opportunities for team members around the cultural-responsiveness of team functionality. | Sees that team operations, including perceptions related to cultural-responsiveness of team practices, are reviewed at least annually along with appropriate data, and makes efforts to improve functionality accordingly.<br><br>Establishes and monitors an "all up" communications and engagement plan across and between cross-functional teams to ensure information flows effectively. |

| | Emerging | Developing | Intermediate | Advanced |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Managing projects to foster continuous improvement** | Develops action plans for projects with specific objectives. Tracks progress using student success metrics. Meets with faculty and staff each semester to share results. | Engages faculty and staff in project/portfolio planning to improve student success.<br><br>Builds and monitors a living implementation plan that includes milestones aligned to objectives to ensure clarity around expectations/roles, and to foster a shared understanding of conditions for successful implementation.<br><br>Establishes accountability measures to track results. Regularly reviews and shares results with faculty and staff. Identifies areas and strategies for program improvement.<br><br>Regularly engages students in reviewing results to identify areas needed for improvement. | Creates a communications and engagement plan to ensure strong feedback loops are built around the implementation of major projects.<br><br>Fosters continuous quality improvement by establishing and supporting a learning community of faculty and staff.<br><br>Facilitates faculty and staff sense-making about program-level student success data, and sets program goals, areas to explore and strategies for improvement. Facilitates conversations about equity and the experience of different student populations. | Focuses faculty and staff on equity and student success in project planning and implementation.<br><br>Leads internal and external stakeholders to collaboratively set program goals, clear objectives, shared commitments and accountability structures.<br><br>Promotes sustained learning about program successes and needs by centering the experiences of different groups of students.<br><br>Engages students as co-creators of solutions. |

# Policy Typology

In institutions of higher education, policy is used to incentivize desired outcomes, shape individual and collective behavior, and establish transparent guidelines for processes and practices. Mid-level managers often find themselves in the challenging position of being responsible for leading implementation of policies without having been a part of the decision-making process that led to their adoption, and without the formal authority to mandate quality implementation. One essential area of leadership development for mid-level managers is to recognize that they do have the power to influence the policies that are established at higher levels in the institution, system or state. When mid-level managers own their power to influence policy, they also expand their capacity to support quality implementation.

Through a set of guiding questions and recommended action areas, this policy typology is designed to help mid-level managers evaluate institutional policies, identify areas for improvement, and make the case for transformation.

| Policy Evaluation and Change Steps | Guiding Questions | Recommended Action Areas |
|---|---|---|
| 1. Evaluating policy problems | A) Do current student outcomes align with the institution's strategic goals? Are there particular policies at the state, system or institutional levels that are driving misalignment, or is the problem driven by practice or implementation challenges?<br><br>B) What is the scope of the problem? Do policies support equitable outcomes for all student groups, disaggregated by race, sex, and income? | A) Identify specific examples of policy in code, rule or regulation that are negatively impacting student success.<br><br>B) Gather student-level data, disaggregated by race, sex, income, age and program of study to identify the numbers and proportions of student groups affected by the policy. |

| Policy Evaluation and Change Steps | Guiding Questions | Recommended Action Areas |
|---|---|---|
| **2.** **Root cause and policy analysis — identifying areas for improvement** | **A)** Which stakeholder groups are impacted by, or have the jurisdiction to change, the policy problems that have been identified? What is the optimal method and timing for engaging these groups to understand their perspectives and garner support for change?<br><br>**B)** Which student-level data points and evidence-based practices most effectively demonstrate the problem? Are systems in place to collect and analyze that data? Are there peer examples/case studies that help identify root challenges in policy? | **A)** Actively communicate with mid-level managers across the institution to identify stakeholders and develop a plan for communication, engagement and mobilization.<br><br>**B)** Coordinate with institutional research staff and other stakeholders to establish metrics for describing the impact of the policy on student outcomes with a specific focus on aspects of policy that are problematic. Determine if current infrastructure is set up to collect relevant data or if new collection processes are required. |
| **3.** **Advocating for change** | **A)** What is the highest level of decision-making authority needed to approve policy changes?<br><br>**B)** Which arguments would be most persuasive to these decision-makers?<br><br>**C)** Do examples of policy solutions exist in other institutions or states? How can lessons from those policies be applied to the context of our institution? | **A)** Determine if the desired policy change can occur at the department, committee, institution, system or state levels. Learn the processes and deadlines for how the governing body approves changes, and plan backward from those parameters.<br><br>**B)** Conduct research on the decision-makers' previous actions and strategic goals to frame the imperative for change in terms of their priorities. Provide information to senior leaders of the problems, known to frontline staff and faculty, that might escape policy deliberations at senior levels.<br><br>**C)** Provide a framework for solution-oriented action by deriving examples of policy reforms from other states, systems and institutions. Identify resources to support effective policy adoption. |

### Policy Typology example using a placement policy

Below you will find an example from Texas with content filled in so you can see how the rubric can be used.

| Policy development process | Guiding Questions and Answers | Recommended Action Areas |
|---|---|---|
| **1. Evaluating policy problems** | **A)** Do current student outcomes align with the institution's strategic goals? Is there a particular policy that is driving this misalignment, or is the problem driven by practice or implementation challenges?<br><br>• Currently, 60% of our incoming students are assigned to developmental math. Very few of these students ever complete a gateway math course, much less a degree or credential.<br>• The policy driver is the state-level requirement that placement be based solely on standardized test scores.<br><br>**B)** What is the scope of the problem? Do policies support equitable outcomes for all student groups, disaggregated by race, sex and income?<br><br>• All students are affected by placement policy, but not all student groups are affected equally. Policies based on standardized test scores, by definition, privilege students who are white, Asian, and from middle and upper-income families. | **A)** Identify specific examples of policy in code, rule or regulation that are negatively impacting student success.<br><br>• The Texas Success Initiative is a state-legislated program to improve student success in college that relies on the use of a high-stakes placement test to determine student "readiness" for college.<br><br>**B)** Gather student-level data, disaggregated by race, sex, income, age and program of study to identify the numbers and proportions of student groups affected by the policy. |

| Policy development process | Guiding Questions and Answers | Recommended Action Areas |
|---|---|---|
| **2. Identifying areas for improvement** | **A)** Which stakeholder groups are impacted by the policy problem? What is the optimal method and timing for engaging these groups to understand their perspectives and garner support for change?<br><br>• Math faculty who teach developmental and gateway courses, advisors.<br><br>• Existing meeting structures and additional professional learning opportunities woven throughout the academic year.<br><br>**B)** Which student-level data points most effectively demonstrate the problem? Are systems in place to collect and analyze that data?<br><br>• The proportion of students placed into developmental math, disaggregated by race, sex, income, age and program of study.<br><br>• The rates at which various student groups complete gateway math courses and continue to advance toward transfer and/or degree completion. | **A)** Actively communicate with mid-level managers across the institution to identify stakeholders, and develop a plan for communication, engagement and mobilization.<br><br>• Coordinate with deans and chairs to engage in discussion on the policy topic during committee meetings or other engagement opportunities in the department.<br><br>• Create protocols for collecting input from a variety of stakeholders to create a shared understanding of the problem, division of responsibilities, and a plan for coordinated action.<br><br>**B)** Coordinate with institutional research staff and other stakeholders to establish metrics for describing the impact of the policy on student outcomes. Determine if current infrastructure is set up to collect relevant data or if new collection processes are required.<br><br>• Determine if these data are already regularly reported to senior leaders of the state THECB. Establish common metrics for evaluating problematic aspects of the policy and impacting policy change over time. |

*When mid-level managers own their power to influence policy, they also expand their capacity to support quality implementation.*

| Policy development process | Guiding Questions and Answers | Recommended Action Areas |
|---|---|---|
| **3. Advocating for change** | **A)** What is the highest level of decision-making authority needed to approve policy changes?<br><br>• THECB could change policy through the rulemaking process. However, they have historically relied on the legislature to mandate significant changes.<br><br>**B)** Which arguments would be most persuasive to these decision-makers?<br><br>• Educational equity and student success.<br><br>• 60x30TX strategic plan.<br><br>• Cost savings for students and taxpayers.<br><br>**C)** Do examples of policy solutions exist in other institutions or states? How can lessons from those policies be applied to the context of our institution?<br><br>• Significant policy changes on placement are occurring in dozens of states and systems of higher education. These changes have been catalyzed by an overwhelming amount of evidence about the efficacy of using HS GPA to predict postsecondary outcomes. | **A)** Determine if the desired policy change can occur at the department, committee, institution, system or state levels. Learn the processes and deadlines for how the governing body approves changes, and plan backward from those parameters.<br><br>• In light of the COVID-19 pandemic, THECB has offered flexibility to IHEs to place students using multiple measures of readiness, instead of on standardized test scores. In addition, there will be an opportunity to advocate for making these exceptions permanent during the anticipated rulemaking process at the end of August 2020.<br><br>**B)** Conduct research on the decision-makers' previous actions and strategic goals to frame the imperative for change in terms of their priorities. Provide information to senior leaders of the problems, known to frontline staff and faculty, that might escape policy deliberations at senior levels.<br><br>• Analyze longitudinal student data on the inequitable impacts of current placement policy.<br><br>• Connect estimates for improved student success rates with the 60x30TX plan.<br><br>• Analyze financial data, including expected revenue from improved retention and completion.<br><br>**C)** Provide a framework for solution-oriented action by deriving examples of policy changes from other states, systems and institutions. Identify resources to support effective policy adoption.<br><br>• Gather reports and resources to support institutional implementation decisions. CCRC, MDRC, CAPR, CAP, RP Group and many other organizations have deep expertise in this area. |

# Measures of Structural Change

Measures of structural change are metrics used to assess the extent to which policies and practices create institutional conditions — and not necessarily student-related measures — that yield equitable access, opportunity, experiences and outcomes for students in racially minoritized communities, first generation students and those with low incomes. In developmental education reform efforts, examples of structural change that can be measured include:

- Placement policy

- Advising practice

- Alignment of courses with programs of study

- Sufficient number of sections for corequisite courses based on enrollment projections in the previous years

- Proportional representation of student groups enrolled in corequisite courses based on overall enrollments or program of study designations

- Student experiences in corequisite courses

To determine equitable access and experiences, all data will be dis-aggregated by student group, including race/ethnicity, gender, age, Pell grant recipient status (socioeconomic status) and other groupings relevant to the institutions' equity goals. Quantitative indicators should be examined and used in conjunction with qualitative indicators (e.g., feedback from interviews or focus groups with students/families).

### Why do they matter?

Measures of structural change matter because they help mid-level leaders better understand and more effectively influence the factors that impact the quality of implementation of large-scale reform priorities.

**What is the difference between structural change measures and student outcomes measures?**

Structures are policies and practices that create conditions for student success. Outcomes are skill, knowledge, completion, attitude and perception-based indicators that measure student progress (e.g., GPA, course grades, graduation rates, retention rates, and social emotional and academic learning). Structural change measures are precursors to student outcome measures. Creating structures that attend to equitable access, opportunity and experiences may lead to equitable and sustainable student outcomes (if the right quantitative and qualitative data are consistently reviewed, updated, critically queried and used as the basis for equitable action).

**How and when do mid-level leaders use structural change measures to inform their practices over time?**

Compared to other groups, mid-level leaders are uniquely positioned with respect to impacting measures of structural change. While mid-level leaders often lack the formal authority and "levers" for change that senior leaders enjoy, they are the most influential leaders when it comes to building will, capacity and resilience for such efforts on behalf of those whose support is essential for successful implementation (i.e., frontline faculty and staff).

**What affects the timeline?**

The timeline for measuring structural change depends on college and departmental calendars. For example, measuring changes in advising practice might be done annually after fall registration. For measuring academic programs, late spring/early summer might be most appropriate.

**How is a cohort defined?**

A cohort is defined as the number of first-time students enrolled in the fall or spring of their first academic year. Cohorts can be defined based on overall first-time, first-year (FTFY) student enrollment and disaggregated by student group. Determine the proportion of student groups by dividing the student group total by the cohort total. For example, the fall 2021 cohort includes the total number of students who enrolled as first-time, first-year students in fall 2020 plus the number of first-time, first-year students enrolled in spring 2021. If the total number of FTFY students enrolled in fall 2021 was 1,634, and the total number of FTFY students in spring 2021 was 495, the fall 2021 cohort has 2,129 FTFY students. If a total of number of FTFY students (across both semesters) who identified as Latino was 649, 30% of FTFY students in the fall 2021 cohort were Latino.

For measuring structural change for policies, see the Policy Typology section of this toolkit.

# Practice Profiles

The purpose of this section is to provide readers with concrete examples of mid-level leadership in practice. These short profiles highlight colleges doing exceptional work and field-based lessons. Most of the profiles feature institutions; one practice profile focuses on the role of mid-level system leaders as drivers of innovation. The institutional profiles were selected by the The Charles A. Dana Center (Dana Center) based on its direct experience with the colleges profiled, while the system profile was selected as an exemplar by Sova.

# Black River Technical College

## Implementing quality corequisite courses

There is much to learn from Black River Technical College (BRTC) about developmental education reform. BRTC achieved its goal of enrolling 75% of underprepared students in corequisite support by fall 2021 one year early, in spring 2020. Corequisite courses have been rapidly brought to scale and are now offered for College Algebra, Mathematical Reasoning/Quantitative Literacy and Pre-Calculus. BRTC is one of 22 community colleges in Arkansas committed to implementing high quality, rigorous corequisite courses in English and mathematics.

- Located in Arkansas
- One of 22 community and technical colleges
- 3,000 students enrolled annually
- Student population: 93% white, 3% Latinx, 2% Black

### Developing an action plan with a cross-functional team

Black River Technical College put together a cross-functional leadership team to lead this work. The dean of general studies led the team. Other members of the team included a math department head, two additional math faculty, two advisors and an institutional researcher. The team developed a multi-year action plan, including implementation targets for a percentage of students who would be placed in corequisite courses and who completed gateway math courses.

### Corequisite Student Enrollment

| | AYS2019 | | AYS2020 | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | # of Students | % of Students | # of Students | % of Students |
| Total # of Students Enrolled in Remedial Mathematics Coursework | 355 | 100% | 289 | 100% |
| Corequisite Remediation Enrollment | 203 | 57% | 216 | 75% |
| Pre-Requisite Remediation Enrollment | 152 | 43% | 73 | 25% |

Target for corequisite enrollment by AY2021 was 75%. The goal was achieved in AY2020.

## Roles and responsibilities

The team took a two-pronged approach to implement the plan. Dean Statler served as the ambassador of the effort, introducing the corequisite support courses and discussing the model with faculty and staff. She met with advising staff to talk about why the corequisite model and multiple pathways are important, and to help them understand how to place students appropriately based on their scores and degree program.

For its part, the math department created a spreadsheet that detailed the multiple paths students could take to achieve their math requirements, beyond the default gateway course of College Algebra. The spreadsheet aligned the appropriate math course to the degree programs and was provided to advisors to assist them in placing students into corequisite courses and the right math pathway.

## How BRTC uses data

Assessment is an ongoing process for all BRTC classes. The math department works together to backmap courses, align curriculum and create common assessments in all sections of a course, which are analyzed at the end of each semester. The data is then used to improve the quality of each course. The faculty utilize course level assessment data reports to measure all the outcomes for all sections of a particular course. The college continues to utilize their Course Level Assessment Data Reports to determine if they are meeting all the objectives and outcomes they set for each course. At the end of each semester, student outcome data from corequisite math and English courses are shared with all the faculty and the administration.

## Key takeaways

BRTC's success can be attributed to several key strategies.

- A cross-functional approach was critical from the beginning of the implementation process to develop a robust process that could be scaled. Gaining an understanding of all elements of the student experience, from entry through placement and completion of the gateway courses, was vital for this change process to be effective from the start.

- Faculty were involved in the change, and the dean of general studies encouraged faculty collaboration and communication during implementation and the continuous improvement processes. The senior administration was supportive of time allocation and professional learning opportunities for faculty to own and lead the change.

- BRTC set targets in the action plan for structural change, and student outcomes provided milestones for the implementation process. Common calendars, numbers and strategic scheduling of courses, as well as a percentage of students placed into corequisite courses, are examples of structural measures that the college undertook.

- BRTC's departments engaged (and continue to engage) in continuous improvement processes, including gathering qualitative and quantitative data from both students and faculty. They disaggregated data to understand student populations and address opportunity gaps.

# Cuyamaca College

## Driving reform to increase support and student success

Cuyamaca College began transforming its developmental math programs in 2016. Its multipronged approach included incorporating multiple measures to place students in their first math courses and quickly scaling up corequisite course supports in two pathways. Engaging departments across the college, gaining administrative support, and using data to influence change were all a part of the process to implement multiple math pathways to increase student success.

Cuyamaca's changes dramatically increased the number of students achieving transfer-level math credit within their first year of enrollment. In 2015-16, that percentage was 29%. In 2016-17 that number increased to 46%. The table below shows the results of the pilot program in fall 2016.  The results show students passing intermediate algebra (a transfer course in California) with support in one semester compared to the traditional multi-course developmental sequence measure by two years to completion.

- **Located in California**
- **One of two colleges in the Grossmont-Cuyamaca Community College District**
- **5,500 students annually**
- **Student population: 46% white, 33% Latinx, 6% Black**

### First-time Students Intermediate Algebra Success Rates[1]

| Initial Placement | One semester with Support (Fall 2016) | Two years traditional (Fall 2014 cohort) |
|---|---|---|
| All Levels | 54.7% | 35.4% |
| Transfer Math | 100% | 65.6% |
| One Level Below | 71.4% | 62.4% |
| Two Levels Below | 66.7% | 28.4% |
| Three or More Levels Below | 37.5% | 17.7% |

1. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FzBXN8kBkjA

## Engaging departments across the college

In 2015, Tammy Marshall, the chair of the math department, spearheaded an effort to change the developmental math program at Cuyamaca. She began by meeting with all of the departments on campus that would be impacted by the introduction of multiple math pathways for students.

Marshall met regularly with admissions staff, counselors advising students, programmers creating the registration site, members of the curriculum committee, staff in the disability services, veterans' services and financial aid offices, and the campus evaluator to be sure everyone knew why the reforms were under way and to hear from them how the changes would impact them. She presented the college's lackluster student success data alongside research that showed the promising outcomes possible with curriculum and pedagogical reforms, and invited leaders across the campus to have a conversation with her. Marshall recognized that she needed input from all these facets of students' campus experience to understand how it would impact their way of doing things.

For example, because the college was removing all of the remediation courses, prerequisites had to change. Marshall describes asking chemistry and economics faculty what math skills students needed to be successful in their courses and noted none of the topics faculty mentioned were being taught in the prerequisite algebra course, but rather aligned much more closely to the topics covered in the statistics corequisite course. This two-way communication across departments built trust and paved the way for students to get the math content they needed for their fields of interest.

## Administrative support

Marshall says such broad reforms that impact nearly every campus department are not possible without strong, ongoing support from college administrators who prioritize the changes that need to be made at so many student contact points. At the same time, the impetus for change must be faculty-led. A reform-minded administration that doesn't have faculty buy-in will not be able to implement systemic change. Rather, faculty-led innovation and reform, shifting mindsets about how student success is measured, and engaging in pedagogical reform is best achieved when faculty are pushing and supporting each other. Marshall emphasizes that all faculty, full-time and part-time, need to be included in the reform effort and given appropriate support throughout the process.

## Utilizing data to constructively engage around faculty resistance

Making large-scale changes at such an accelerated pace will inevitably be met with resistance from some faculty members. In listening to faculty opinions and fears about the changes, Marshall came to realize that many came from a place of concern for their students' success. She showed them the data that while their students were passing remediation classes, they were not in fact making it through the transfer-level courses that followed. In other words, what they had been doing just wasn't working.

## Culturally responsive pedagogical strategies

Cuyamaca embraced a pedagogical shift, as well. Prior to the fall semester during the first year of implementation, Marshall required faculty who would be teaching the new corequisite courses to attend training focused on shifting away from lecture-based to collaborative classrooms. A "train the trainer" model led to a community of practice teams based on the course and corequisite courses they would be teaching, and eventually led to faculty teaching the courses without the corequisite to start utilizing the same pedagogical techniques.

"Changes in the classroom were just as vital as structural changes," says Marshall.

Faculty were encouraged to think intentionally about creating student-centered learning practices where group work was the norm and so-called "brains on" activities had students thinking and talking about math with each other, gaining confidence in their own abilities, and increasing their math vocabulary and fluency.

Work toward closing the achievement gap for traditionally underserved student populations continues, with faculty analyzing their own disaggregated student data and participating in a campuswide equity teaching and learning institute that faculty are paid to attend. In analyzing their own student success data, faculty can begin to see areas where they might have biases and work to reform their own practices. Marshall is continually providing faculty with the latest research highlighting best practices in improving outcomes for racially minoritized students, and encouraging participation in conferences like the annual California Acceleration Project conference, which has a strong focus on equity.

## Key takeaways

Cuyamaca's changes increased student outcomes. Students across all ethnic groups passed transfer-level math courses at higher rates after changes were made to placement and the corequisite supports were added to the first-year math courses.

- Broad reforms that impact nearly every campus department require strong, ongoing support from college administrators who prioritize the changes that need to be made.
- Shifting faculty mindset from course success to throughput is an important step in the reform process.
- Ensuring stakeholders understand why the reforms are being implemented facilitates buy-in.
- Sharing data with faculty that illustrates how the traditional developmental math program is failing students reduces resistance.
- Both administrative and faculty engagement are necessary for systemic change.
- All faculty, full-time and part-time, need to be included in the reform effort and given appropriate support throughout the process.

# Harper College Leadership Institute

## A study in promoting equity-minded leadership

- **Located in Illinois**
- **24,000 students annually**
- **Student population: 48% white, 30% Latinx, 12% Asian, 4% Black, 1% Indigenous and 5% unknown**

When Harper College (HC) was established more than 50 years ago, its vastly white faculty and student body reflected the demographics of the surrounding community. As the community began to change, the college's enrollment started to shift and opportunity gaps emerged. The makeup of employees and students became less reflective of the population of this area of Illinois. Harper College senior leadership and its Board of Trustees knew that to advance equity-minded student success, they needed an intentional, transformative approach. They also knew it could not be a one-year solution or project. By advancing leadership at all levels of the institution through an intensive equity- and inclusion-focused leadership development program, the college has witnessed significant results. The college has seen substantial improvement in student success outcomes through many innovative, aligned initiatives throughout the college.

## Identifying areas of need

In 2012, President Dr. Ken Ender and the board of trustees engaged in a series of discussions with faculty, staff and the community. In the course of these conversations, two areas in need of strategic and intentional intervention emerged: leadership development and equity in hiring. To address the former, the college created a leadership institute; and to achieve equity in hiring it set and measured goals to recruit and retain employees from diverse backgrounds.

## Investing in professional development

To support leadership development for employees, Harper College created the Harper Leadership Institute (HLI) and, in 2013, welcomed its first cohort into a year-long program to enhance their leadership skills.

The HLI embraces a leadership development philosophy of learning, leading and reflecting. The curriculum is infused with principles and practices that reflect a deep commitment to diversity, equity and inclusion. Senior leadership with expertise in those areas liaise with the president and the HLI planning committee. The institute also employs an equity consultant to review and assist with the session planning.

The HLI is open to all full-time, part-time and unit eligible employees who apply in the spring of the year prior to the next HLI. Approximately 25 employees are selected each year.

## Immersing participants in diversity, equity and inclusion activities

The program begins in September with a four-day/three-night residential leadership-immersion located off campus. During this process, diversity, equity and inclusion permeate all the sessions, ranging from understanding individual diversity in leadership to using disaggregated data and understanding the student population at HC. The immersion session ends with a half-day workshop by the Kaleidoscope Group on Leading Inclusively. Following the immersion experience, participants meet monthly for a luncheon and facilitated learning experience on campus. Topics for these monthly sessions include identified leadership competencies and discussion of pre-readings around that topic. Each participant is assigned to a project group, and each group has the support of a coach, to develop and implement a project that supports the Harper Strategic Plan and improves the student experience.

## Weaving diversity, equity and inclusion principles throughout the college

To date, almost 200 HC employees have participated in the HLI. Participants have come from every area of the college, including information technology, institutional research, operations, financial services, student services, advising, faculty, president's office staff and custodial services. Past participants weave diversity, equity and inclusion principles throughout the institution in their roles as mid-level leaders.

## Achieving equity goals in employment

When Harper College was established more than 50 years ago, its vastly white faculty and student body reflected the demographics of the surrounding suburban community. As the community began to change, the makeup of employees and students became less reflective of the population. To lead multiple efforts to close gaps across all aspects of hiring and retention, the college created the office of Diversity, Equity and Inclusion and named a chief equity and inclusion officer.

## Acting on equity commitments

When HC appointed Dr. Avis Proctor, a Black woman, as the new college president in 2018, it broke a 51-year history of naming white men to the post. In fact, all of the finalists in this historic search were Black women, marking a new era in leadership for the college. To ensure more diverse hires, the college implemented a "diversity in new hires" goal to match or exceed the diversity of the community it serves. This goal was achieved in 2018 with 35.2% diversity in new hires, a little greater than the community diversity of 34.8%. This goal is measured annually for new hires.

The college also gathers data related to underrepresented employee voluntary separation. The FY2019 voluntary separation rate of underrepresented employees sharply decreased from 16.8% in FY2016 to 5.9% in FY2019. This 2019 percentage is just below the overall employee separation rate of 6.0%.

## Key takeaways

The Harper College story illustrates core lessons about leading impactful equity work:

- Developing collegewide equity consciousness is long-term, multi-channel work.

- A strong vision and sense of purpose must be combined with practical and ongoing opportunities for meaningful professional learning.

- A commitment to equity is not just about students; it is also about ensuring that the leadership of the institution at every level is representative of the student populations served by the institution.

- Equity work is personal, professional, structural and cultural — mid-level leaders are uniquely positioned to foster progress on all of these fronts.

# Pellissippi State Community College

## How a champion can jumpstart reform

Pellissippi State Community College's (PSCC) developmental math reform began in 2014 with a successful pilot project that offered a corequisite model of math support. By 2015, in accordance with a statewide mandate, the college had fully implemented the corequisite model. The results were outstanding and exceeded statewide success figures. Students enrolled in both the corequisite support and gateway math course passed at a rate of 66% in fall 2015 and 56% in spring 2016.

- Located in East Tennessee
- 10,800 annual enrollment
- Student population: 80% white, 6.3% Black, 5.4% Latinx

## Championing the reform process

Associate Professor Brittany Mosby was one of five instructors who took part in the corequisite model of support pilot and was instrumental in building relationships and doing the hard work of communicating the reasons reforms were critical to removing the stubborn barrier that passing a gateway math course presents for so many students. As Mosby said, "Transformative change takes more than an announcement at a department meeting. Someone has to be a champion for the change."



## Spreading reform across campus

Systemic reform is not possible without careful coordination among departments across campus. The logistics of "simply" adding corequisite courses at PSCC involved multiple departments that each serve different purposes in students' academic lives. Mosby understood the important role advisers play in guiding students to make the best decisions for their academic interests and goals. The success of the early pilot courses was instrumental in helping advisers understand the power of corequisite supports and be willing to encourage students to enroll in a college-level math course even when their placement scores deemed them unprepared.

Mosby participated in countless meetings, explaining the corequisite model with not only the advising department, but the registrar's office, the IT department's scheduling team, the financial aid department, and at the annual faculty in-service meeting. Gaining perspective and insight into how adding corequisite courses would impact each department paved the way for a smooth transition,

as did PSCC's culture of cooperation. The willingness to share information and ideas ensured that the logistics of scheduling, financial aid and appropriate advising were in place well before students had the option of a corequisite support class.

"Adjustments to curriculum can come later," said Mosby, "but the logistics of adding corequisite supports, making sure advisers understand how corequisite support courses save students time and money, and the necessary changes in the scheduling system itself all need to be an early priority."

## Constructively engaging faculty resistance

Faculty resistance is to be expected. In Mosby's math department, a recent change to remediation efforts resulted in opposition to yet another shift in direction. To reach "people in the middle," who didn't have a strong opinion about the promise of the corequisite model, and to build a critical mass of support within the math department, Mosby and the reform team presented the pilot study results, which demonstrated how getting students through their college-level math would enhance their success in other disciplines.

This was especially important because of the commitment the college made early on that the same person who was teaching the college-level course would also be teaching the corequisite course. She and others convinced reluctant faculty to consider the superior support they could give their students by keeping a tight alignment between the material presented in the course and the "just in time" material and topics provided in the weekly corequisite meeting.

Senior leadership supported faculty efforts by granting release time during the first two semesters the corequisites were offered to refine their implementation. Faculty were given some flexibility within the curriculum but were required to adhere to a master syllabus.

Additionally, the reform team led workshops for adjunct faculty from all disciplines, talking about the results of the pilot, which showed student success rates not only improved dramatically, but many of the students who took part in the corequisites were more likely to become leaders in the college-level course.

## Developing a growth mindset to create change for students of color

PSCC used grant funding to train students and faculty in how to nurture a growth mindset when it comes to equity for racially minoritized students. Workshops helped faculty recognize that student success can look different, and that cultural differences and diverse backgrounds can be acknowledged and elevated through a choice of data sets that include social justice and environmental data. Knowing that students arrive with valuable and diverse backgrounds, and embracing the job of meeting them where they are in order to promote a stronger sense of belonging and purpose, is a vital piece of the work at PSCC.

"We get the students we get with the background that is part of who they are. We need to level the playing field from the beginning by accepting each student's background," Mosby said.

## Key takeaways

- Systemic reform must be faculty led. The challenge of creating systemic change and intentionally pursuing continuous improvement cannot be done by a single leader or department within an organization. The support of senior leaders is critical if mid-level leaders are to gain faculty support and engagement in the transformation process.

- Transformation, not just transactional change, requires cross-functional teamwork and a culture of collaboration that values listening. Mosby advises those seeking to enact deep transformations to have broad conversations with people from across the institution.

*"Transformative change takes more than
an announcement at a department meeting.
Someone has to be a champion for the change."*

—BRITTANY MOSBY, ASSOCIATE PROFESSOR, PELLISSIPPI STATE COMMUNITY COLLEGE

# The State University of New York

## Supporting mid-level managers to create change

In 2018, State University of New York (SUNY) launched its work with Strong Start to Finish with the aim of supporting scaled implementation of corequisite gateway math courses, alternative multiple measures placement processes, and investment in change leadership strategies for faculty and staff to sustain this work over time. With this focus, SUNY seeks to significantly increase the number and proportion of students from low-income families, students of color, and returning adults who pass college math and English and enter a program of study in their first year of college.

- **29 state operated campuses, five statutory colleges and 30 community colleges**

- **424,000 students annually (not including adult education students)**

- **Student population: 54% white, 14% Latinx and 10% Black**

All 30 SUNY community colleges and eight technology and comprehensive colleges are participating in the SSTF work and are prioritizing: accelerating and scaling up Guided Pathways reform, Math Pathways, and expanding the corequisite English for the 236,000 students served by these institutions. SUNY is also committed to pursuing implementation of multiple measures placement and remediation in the context of the broader commitment to Guided Pathways implementation. The SSTF Core Principles have been purposefully adopted and leveraged as grounding and guiding resources for ensuring institutions are clear about the intended outcomes of SUNY's participation in Strong Start to Finish.



## Supporting mid-level leaders from the system level

The SUNY system office houses the New York State's Student Success Center where the day-to-day work is led by a small but focused team that understands the necessity of supporting institutional change through the empowerment of mid-level leaders. In addition to supporting presidents and senior leaders, the team prioritizes their role in providing support and frameworks for faculty and staff leaders to engage in and drive the work forward. With faculty planning teams who help design the content for professional development and enrichment sessions designed from faculty feedback, and mid-level leaders intentionally engaged as drivers, the system focuses on professional development as an engine for this work.

## Examples of support services offered

To provide mid-level managers the support they need to lead change at their institutions, SUNY has offered more than 30 different events covering a range of topics, from research to corequisite math pathways to supporting student progress on their chosen pathways. Since 2018, these events have created a wide range of experiences for mid-level leaders, and have included technical assistance, webinars, conferences, workshops and space for dedicated listening. By staying nimble in meeting institutions where they are, and listening to the needs of mid-level managers, system leaders at SUNY are keeping institutions focused on the right initiatives and providing mid-level managers the support they need. They are leveraging their "systemness" to invest in the people most important to successful implementation of Strong Start to Finish priorities.

The system provides this support and development of mid-level managers through efforts to 1) expose them to national experts and leading-edge research; 2) create space for mid-level leaders from across the system to reflect together on lessons learned about leading change; and 3) pay careful attention to understanding and fostering the "absorptive capacity" of institutions to make best use of information and experiences provided by the system. They also foster peer learning and relationship building by region, and they give mid-level leaders regular opportunities to provide insight that informs future support and engagements.

The system helps create coherence in the narrative and what it means to undertake comprehensive student success reform, and elevates the "why" of the various initiatives as they align to a broader vision. It also helps support campuses to understand how to integrate these programs and look holistically to help students succeed.

### Key takeaways

- Mid-level leadership is not about institutional actors, and the lessons and needs around effective mid-level leadership apply to systems as well.
- Whereas systems are traditionally viewed as compliance entities, sustainable progress on scaling evidence-based innovations requires systems to develop the capacity to serve as advocates and supporters of equity-grounded change. Mid-level system leaders are critical for strengthening the advocacy capacity of systems.

*"When it comes to SUNY's math pathways and corequisite work...the actual content development is all our faculty. They drive the work, and we support them in a variety of ways."*

— JENNIFER MILLER, SUNY ASSISTANT VICE CHANCELLOR FOR COMMUNITY COLLEGE SUPPORT

# Frequently Asked Questions

## What is a mid-level manager?

For the purposes of this toolkit, we define mid-level managers as those leaders who are accountable to senior leadership (e.g., president, provost, head of student services) and responsible for supporting/managing lower-level management and frontline faculty and staff. Mid-level managers exist at multiple levels between senior leadership and frontline faculty and staff, and include deans, directors, division heads, vice presidents, associate vice presidents and department chairs.

## Why are mid-level managers important?

Mid-level managers are important because they are responsible for leading implementation of institutional priorities and the objectives of senior leadership; translating information and policies from senior leaders to lower management and frontline employees; and inspiring and guiding lower-level managers/supervisors to accomplish objectives around implementation of student success priorities. Put simply, mid-level managers are critical influencers of both the quality and pace of implementation of priorities. Therefore, they are among the most important change agents within an institution.

## How do mid-level managers shape institutional culture?

Mid-level managers are uniquely positioned to touch all levels of the institution, which gives them the power to shape institutional culture through their ability to positively influence others through their approach to leadership. By fostering a healthy team culture of mutual care and support, mid-level managers empower others to participate in culture-building practices grounded in a core commitment to equitable student success. They also have the power to influence practice and policy changes that can shape institutional culture.

## Do mid-level managers really have any power to make change?

Yes, and in fact no sustainable positive change is possible in the absence of skillful mid-level managers. Despite the constraints mid-level managers face from above, below and across their institutions, they are uniquely positioned to influence both the quality and pace of change around the most important student success priorities. Mid-level managers have the power to make or break implementation of placement reform, math pathways, co-requisite remediation and advising redesign.

## What is equity consciousness and why does it matter for mid-level leadership?

Equity consciousness is being aware of the historic, systemic structural practices that have served to exclude/marginalize and continue to raise barriers for students from the benefits of higher education

based on socioeconomic status, race, gender, etc. It is important for mid-level managers to be equity conscious because they influence so many aspects of institutional culture, practice and policy.

### What does it mean for a mid-level manager to be data literate?

Mid-level managers who are data literate are successfully able to access, analyze, translate and communicate data in order to create a culture of evidence-based decision-making. They understand the importance of disaggregating student outcomes and addressing differences by student groups to further equity consciousness, and know how to create measurable action plans for improvement. Data literate mid-level managers also display emotional intelligence in helping frontline faculty and staff confront and work through hard issues revealed by effective use of data.

### What is the best leadership development/change management model for mid-level managers?

There are a range of leadership theories and models for managing change that could be adopted and applied effectively by mid-level managers. While this toolkit is agnostic when it comes to specific leadership and change management models, it is premised on the recognition that mid-level managers must be effective in managing and leading change around challenges that are both technical and adaptive. A variety of specific leadership development and change management models can be applied within this wider framework around adaptive and technical problem solving.

### Why does trust matter?

Trust is the cornerstone of strong relationships, and mid-level managers are in a unique position to influence both their teams as well as senior leadership. Mid-level managers with strong relationships built on trust are able to use their realm of influence to lead transformational change from the middle with less resistance from their team and other stakeholders. By building trust, mid-level managers can create a culture of transparency and belonging around them for both their teams and students. Because mid-level managers often lack formal authority, and therefore rely on their ability to influence others to make the changes they are tasked with implementing, the ability to develop, deepen and maintain trusting relationships is critical to their success.

# About This Toolkit

This toolkit was conceived by the Dana Center and Sova with the goal of bringing together leading lessons and insights gleaned by these organizations over the years through direct work supporting hundreds of institutions committed to scaling ambitious, equity-grounded student success reforms. Based on our combined insights, we built this toolkit to provide institutions and systems with practical resources to help mid-level managers become more effective leaders of complex change, and to help inform institutional and system leaders tasked with providing professional development for mid-level managers.

## Toolkit authors

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Martha M. Ellis, Ph.D. is president of Mellis LLC, a consulting firm bringing deep experience, substantive knowledge, and research-based innovation to leaders as they confront the challenges and opportunities facing higher education today and in the future. She is the senior pathways lead for the Texas Success Center, Achieving the Dream Leadership Coach, and professor in residence at the University of Texas at Austin.

Previously, Martha was managing director for the Charles A. Dana Center at the University of Texas at Austin. Prior to joining the Dana Center, Martha was associate vice chancellor of Academic Affairs for the University of Texas System. She has 35 years of experience in universities and community colleges in Texas, New Mexico and Oklahoma, including two college presidencies, provost, chief information officer, graduate and undergraduate dean, and faculty member positions. Martha has won numerous teaching awards, has written scholarly publications and is an invited presenter at national conferences. She was recognized by the U. S. Congress and Texas House of Representatives for her leadership in higher education.

### Alison Kadlec

Alison Kadlec is a founding partner at Sova, where she leads a body of work focused on accelerating the pace and improving the quality of large-scale, equity-grounded reform of higher education. She has worked with scores of colleges and universities across the country to support the capacity of senior and mid-level leaders to effectively engage members of their communities as constructive partners in the hard work of change on behalf of equitable student success. Alison and her team also work with state policymakers and system leaders in more than half the states in the U.S. to help improve the quality of policy development and implementation around higher education and workforce issues. She has been active in the Guided Pathways movement since its origins, led the 2020 update of the Core Principles for Transforming Remediation, and is working in several states on issues related to scaled redesign of developmental education.

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# About Strong Start to Finish

Strong Start to Finish is a network of policy and research partners, institution and systems leaders, and foundations advancing system reforms in developmental education, so every student can succeed in their first year of college. In particular, we support college success for Black, Brown, Asian American, Indigenous students, adult learners, and students with low incomes, who have been underserved by the education system for too long. We work to scale the use of proven, proactive strategies that remove barriers that typically impede these students from earning essential college credits in English and Math courses in their first year. Education Commission of the States is the host of the Strong Start to Finish network.

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