

# Pathways to Possibilities: Designing a Coherent Student Experience from Entry to Completion

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## Report to the Unification Taskforce-May 2026

### Taskforce Approach and Foundation

The Unification Taskforce began its work by centering a simple but essential question: *What should every student experience when they come to our colleges?*

Through this process, the Taskforce developed a shared vision of the Ideal Student Experience that emphasizes clarity, belonging, connection, and purpose, and served as the foundation for listening sessions and surveys.

### What We Heard Across Students and Employees

Across listening sessions and surveys, students, faculty, classified professionals, and managers described remarkably consistent experiences. While perspectives varied, the patterns aligned across five core themes.

#### 1. Entry into the Colleges Is Confusing and Fragmented

Students and employees described a system with multiple entry points, inconsistent processes, and unclear next steps.

- Students often repeat applications, counseling steps, and documentation
- Communication varies by campus and program
- There is no clear, centralized starting point

One student shared: “There should be one place where students can find everything instead of going to different places for each thing.”

#### 2. Students Struggle to Navigate Pathways and Course Requirements

Both students and employees identified challenges with understanding how to move through programs and access required courses.

- Course sequencing is not always clear or aligned
- Students are unsure which courses apply to their goals
- Scheduling conflicts and limited availability delay progress

One student noted: “It’s confusing trying to figure out what classes I need and if they actually count.”

#### 3. Support Systems Are Strong, but Difficult to Access Consistently

Across all feedback, there was strong affirmation of the quality of support programs and services and equal concern about how difficult they can be to navigate.

- Counseling experiences vary by campus and availability
- Students are not always connected to support early

- Employees spend significant time helping students navigate systems rather than focusing on direct support

One student reflected: “Counseling is helpful, but it’s not always easy to access or consistent.”

#### **4. Systems and Infrastructure Create Barriers for Students and Staff**

Participants consistently identified fragmented systems, tools, and processes as a major barrier to student success.

- Data systems are not aligned across campuses
- Administrative processes are duplicative and time-consuming
- Employees often work around systems and processes to meet program student needs

#### **5. Belonging, Relationships, and Program Identity Are Essential**

Across all groups, there was a shared understanding that students succeed when they feel connected, seen, and supported. Moreover, employees want a sense of community, too.

- Programs such as Umoja, Puente, and EOPS play a critical role
- Relationships with employees and peers are central to success
- Students value spaces and communities that reflect their identities

Taken together, these themes point to a single, unifying insight: ***Students experience us as one system. We operate as many.*** Students are not experiencing a lack of commitment or support. They are having trouble navigating a system that is not aligned with how they move through college.

#### **From Fragmentation to Coherence**

While the listening sessions surfaced a wide range of operational challenges, they consistently pointed to a common insight: The issue is not a lack of effort or innovation, it is a lack of alignment across how students enter, move through, and complete their educational journey.

These challenges cluster around three critical points in the student experience:

1. Entry into the system
2. Movement through academic pathways
3. Completion of educational goals

Improving any one of these areas in isolation will not resolve the broader issue. What is needed is a coordinated approach that connects all three.

## The Recommendation: Pathways to Possibilities

The Pathways to Possibilities model establishes a districtwide framework for redesigning the student experience, grounded in what was heard through the listening sessions and leveraging the foundational work on Guided Pathways. It focuses on three critical points where fragmentation most impacts students: how they enter the system (Pathways Onboarding), how they move through their programs (Pathway Clusters), and how they complete their goals (Student Completion). This approach ensures that students begin with clarity, progress through aligned pathways, and are supported to complete within a system designed to guide them every step of the way.

Component	Purpose	Design	Outcome
Pathways Onboarding (Entry Point)	Create a clear, coordinated start for every student	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• One coordinated entry experience</li> <li>• Clear, consistent onboarding steps</li> <li>• Early connection to programs, counseling, and supports</li> <li>• Standardized communication across campuses</li> </ul>	Students begin with clarity, confidence, and direction
Pathway Clusters (Backbone)	Ensure pathways are navigable and aligned	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Coordinate course sequencing across disciplines</li> <li>• Align schedules to reduce conflicts and bottlenecks</li> <li>• Ensure access to high-demand and gateway courses</li> <li>• Integrate academic and student support services</li> </ul>	Students move through pathways without delays
Student Completion (Outcome)	Support timely, equitable completion	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Clear and achievable program maps</li> <li>• Alignment between Student Educational Plans and course availability</li> <li>• Reduction of excess units</li> </ul>	Students complete efficiently and with purpose

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Closing equity gaps in completion outcomes</li> </ul>	
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## Implementation Approach

### Priority 1: Pathways Onboarding-Strengthen Entry

- Design and pilot a coordinated pathways intake model
- Standardize onboarding communication and processes
- Implement “no wrong door” practices

### Priority 2: Pathway Clusters-Align Pathways

- Organize programs into pathway-based clusters
- Align course scheduling and sequencing (multi-year schedules)
- Design and implement pathway-level coordination
- Review course and program duplication, articulation, and offerings
- Implement Transformation Taskforce Recommendations: Dual and Concurrent Enrollment, Distance Education, Evening and Weekend College

### Priority 3: Identify Measures of Success

- Increased enrollment in gateway courses
- Improved first-year momentum
- Reduced time to completion
- Decreased excess units
- Reduction in equity gaps
- Improved student sense of clarity and belonging

## Priority 1 Recommendation—Strengthen Entry Pathways Onboarding System – Staffing Model

### Overview

A Pathways Onboarding System organizes recruitment, intake, and onboarding around academic and career pathways rather than traditional outreach or admissions silos. The goal is to guide prospective students from initial contact through enrollment and into their first semester with clear direction and support. This model increases enrollment conversion, improves program alignment, and supports student momentum.

### Purpose of the Pathways Onboarding Model

- Create a clear and welcoming entry point for prospective students
- Improve conversion from outreach contact to enrolled student
- Connect recruitment with academic programs and workforce pathways
- Provide structured onboarding support for new students
- Increase enrollment, persistence, and completion outcomes

### Core Staffing Structure

- **Director of Enrollment and Pathways:** Provides leadership for districtwide recruitment, intake processes, pathway alignment, and enrollment strategy.
- **Student Pathways Specialists:** Guides students from recruitment through enrollment and early onboarding. They are aligned by academic and career pathways, so they develop expertise in program areas.
- **Transitions Liaison:** Provides one-on-one support helping adult learners clarify goals and navigate college entry processes (currently configured by college).
- **Department Chairs:** Lead cross-college cluster disciplines and collaborate across pathways to align courses, schedules, and programs to support timely student progression and completion.

### Recommended Pathway Clusters

Pathway Cluster	Disciplines
Math, Science & Technology	Artificial Intelligence, Computer Information Systems, Computer Science, Engineering, Mathematics, Physics, Chemistry, Biology/Biological Sciences, Astronomy, Physical Science, Anthropology, Geography, Geology, Architecture, and Landscape Horticulture.
Culture, People & Society	African American Studies, Asian & Asian American Studies, Ethnic Studies, Native American Studies, Mexican & Latin American Studies, Women’s Studies, History, Sociology, Political Science, Psychology, Social Science, Humanities, Philosophy, Labor Studies

Art, Media, Design & Movement	Art, Graphic Arts, Photography, Music, Commercial Music, Theatre Arts, Dance, Media Communications, Multimedia Arts Kinesiology, Sports Fitness, Athletics
Language & Communication	English, English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL), Communications, Journalism, American Sign Language, Chinese, French, Japanese, Spanish, Vietnamese
Health & Human Services	Nursing, Medical Assisting, Dental Assisting, Radiologic Science, Emergency Medical Technician, Health Professions & Occupations, Health Education, Nutrition & Dietetics, Human Services, Community Social Service, Child Development, Education, Administration of Justice, Fire Science, Cosmetology
Business, Entrepreneurship, & Occupational Training	Automotive Technology, Auto Body & Paint, Diesel Mechanics, Carpentry, Construction Management, Electricity/Electronics Technology, Environmental Control Technology, Environmental Management & Technology, Machine Shop, Welding, Wood Technology, Modern Making, Business, Banking & Finance, Management & Supervision, Economics, Real Estate, Apparel Design & Merchandising, Culinary Arts, Paralegal Studies, Legal Community Interpreting

### **Sample Student Intake Workflow**

1. Prospective student attends information session or outreach event
2. Student meets with Pathways Specialist for intake conversation
3. Specialist helps student explore academic and career pathway options
4. Student completes application and enrollment steps with guided support
5. Student registers for first semester courses
6. Specialist connects student with counseling, financial aid, and support services
7. Follow-up occurs during the first semester to ensure successful transition

### **Sample Instructional and Engagement Components**

- Pathway exploration workshops for prospective students
- Enrollment labs where students complete applications and registration
- Program orientation sessions for new students
- Career exploration presentations in high schools and community organizations
- Support for first-semester success programming and connection to eligible student support programs and resources

## **Recommended Staffing Ratios**

- Hire 6 Student Pathways Specialists (or convert some existing roles i.e., staff assistants, etc. to new positions).

## **Expected Outcomes**

- Increased conversion from outreach contact to enrolled student
- Improved alignment between student interests and academic programs
- Stronger connections to counseling, financial aid, and support services
- Greater first-semester momentum for new students
- Increased FTES and improved retention

## **Priority 2 Recommendation**

### **Cluster Disciplines & Department Chairs**

As part of the Pathways to Possibilities framework, academic programs will be aligned into pathway-based clusters, with department chairs coordinating across colleges. This approach preserves discipline expertise while strengthening cross-campus collaboration and coherence. Together, these shifts better align how programs are organized with how students enter, progress through, and complete their educational journey.

This alignment connects directly to the pathways onboarding model, which serves as a coordinated starting point for students. While intake helps students enter with clarity and direction, clusters and department chairs ensure that once students begin, they can progress efficiently through well-aligned programs and complete their goals in a timely manner.

Department chairs will continue to play a critical role in:

- discipline leadership
- curriculum oversight
- faculty coordination

Within a cluster-based structure, department chairs serve as also collaborate across disciplines to:

- align course sequencing and program pathways
- coordinate scheduling to reduce barriers and improve access
- identify and address bottlenecks in high-demand courses
- ensure availability of gateway and required courses
- strengthen alignment between instruction, counseling, and student support services

This model strengthens faculty leadership by connecting discipline-based expertise across campuses to a shared responsibility for student access, progression, and completion, collaboration and coordination between student services and

instruction to guide students clearly from entry through completion. Each department chair would have 1.0 FTE reassignment.

### **Math, Science & Technology Cluster**

This cluster supports STEM pathways and emerging technologies, aligning sequencing and access for efficient student progression.

- Core STEM Disciplines: Artificial Intelligence, Computer Information Systems, Computer Science, Engineering, Mathematics, Physics, Chemistry, Biology/Biological Sciences, Astronomy, Physical Science
- Applied & Interdisciplinary Fields: Geography, Geology, Anthropology, Architecture, Landscape Horticulture

Recommended Department Chairs/Cluster Leads: Three (3)

### **Culture, People & Society Cluster**

This cluster supports pathways focused on identity, society, and civic engagement.

- Identity & Community Studies: African American Studies, Asian & Asian American Studies, Ethnic Studies, Native American Studies, Mexican & Latin American Studies, Women's Studies
- Social & Behavioral Sciences: Sociology, Political Science, Psychology, Social Science, Labor Studies
- Humanities: History, Humanities, Philosophy

Recommended Department Chairs/Cluster Leads: Two (2)

### **Art, Media, Design & Movement Cluster**

This cluster supports creative, performance, and media pathways along with movement and wellness fields.

- Visual & Design Arts: Art, Graphic Arts, Photography
- Performing Arts: Music, Commercial Music, Theatre Arts, Dance
- Media & Digital Production: Media Communications, Multimedia Arts (Animation/Game, Digital Imaging, Mobile & Web, Video)
- Movement & Wellness: Kinesiology, Sports Fitness, Athletics

Recommended Department Chairs/Cluster Leads: Two (2)

### **Language & Communication Cluster**

This cluster supports foundational communication skills critical to student success, transfer, and completion.

- English & Composition: English, English for Speakers of Other Languages
- Communication: Communications, Journalism

- World Languages: American Sign Language, Chinese, French, Japanese, Spanish, Vietnamese

Recommended Department Chairs/Cluster Leads: Two (2)

### **Health & Human Services Cluster**

This cluster prepares students for careers in care, service, and community well-being.

- Healthcare: Nursing, Medical Assisting, Dental Assisting, Radiologic Science, Emergency Medical Technician, Health Professions & Occupations, Health Education, Nutrition & Dietetics
- Human Services: Human Services, Community Social Service, Child Development, Education
- Public Safety: Administration of Justice, Fire Science
- Applied Services: Cosmetology

Recommended Department Chairs/Cluster Leads: Two (2)

### **Business, Entrepreneurship & Occupational Training Cluster**

This cluster supports workforce development, economic mobility, and career pathways.

- Skilled Trades: Automotive Technology, Auto Body & Paint, Diesel Mechanics, Carpentry, Construction Management, Electrical/Electronics Technology, Environmental Control Technology, Environmental Management & Technology, Machine Shop, Welding, Wood Technology, Modern Making
- Business & Entrepreneurship: Business, Banking & Finance, Management & Supervision, Economics, Real Estate
- Applied Professions: Apparel Design & Merchandising, Culinary Arts, Paralegal Studies, Legal Community Interpreting

Recommended Department Chairs/Cluster Leads: Two (2)

### **Student Learning & Support Cluster**

This cluster integrates counseling, library, and academic support services to ensure students enter with clarity, build momentum through their coursework, and receive the support needed to persist and complete their educational goals.

- Counseling,
- Library Information Systems,
- Learning Resources

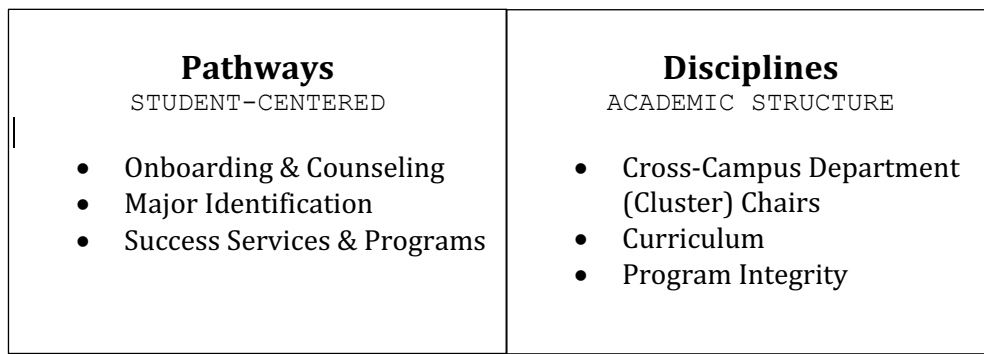
Recommended Department Chairs/Cluster Leads: Two (2)

## A Coordinated System Across Three Colleges

The visual below outlines how student pathways, academic structures, and leadership roles are intentionally aligned to ensure consistency, reduce fragmentation, and improve outcomes across campuses so students succeed no matter which college they begin at.



↓Aligned Through↓



↓Sustained & Supported By↓

