

Unification Taskforce Listening Sessions

Summary Report

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The Unification Taskforce listening sessions were designed to center the voices of those who work closest to students each day in ten programmatic areas: Counseling, EOPS/CARE/CalWORKs/NextUp, Learning Resources (Tutoring), Library, Mental Health, Puente, Student Accessibility Services (SAS), Student Life, Umoja, and Veterans. These conversations created space to reflect honestly on current realities, share successful practices, and imagine what else might be possible as we move toward a more unified district structure. Participants spoke candidly about the strengths of their programs, the challenges students and employees face when systems do not align, and the deep commitment across our colleges to creating environments where students feel welcomed, supported, and seen.

Across all sessions, a common thread emerged: transformation is not simply about organizational design but improving the lived experience of students and strengthening the conditions that allow employees to do their best work. Participants expressed strong support for greater collaboration, shared infrastructure, and clearer systems, while also emphasizing the importance of preserving the identity, culture, and relationships that define each campus and program. The summaries and system design principles that follow reflect the collective wisdom of these conversations and serve as a foundation for building a three-college model that is more coherent, more connected, and more responsive to the students and communities we serve.

Executive Summary

Over the course of ten listening sessions, faculty, classified professionals, and managers shared perspectives on opportunities and concerns related to district transformation and eliminating fragmentation of services to students. While each program area brought unique operational realities, clear patterns emerged across conversations.

Participants consistently emphasized the need for a more coherent and student-centered system that reduces barriers while preserving the relationships, identities, and culturally grounded practices that drive student success.

System Design Principles for a Three-College Model

- 1. Design the System Around the Student Experience and Not Internal Structures**
 - a. Students already move fluidly across campuses, programs, and services, but policies, processes, and data systems do not consistently follow them.
 - b. A unified model should emphasize seamless navigation, clear and consistent communication, shared onboarding and referral processes, and reduced administrative complexity for students.
- 2. Align Infrastructure While Preserving Campus Identity and Program Culture**
 - a. Participants distinguished between alignment and uniformity. There is strong support for shared systems alongside strong concern about losing program identity, campus culture, or culturally responsive practices.

- b. Alignment should strengthen local impact while preserving relationships, spaces, and program identity.
- 3. Build Shared Operational Systems to Reduce Duplication and Increase Capacity**
 - a. Many challenges stem from fragmented infrastructure rather than lack of collaboration, including data reporting, purchasing and travel procedures, hiring and onboarding, training, grant administration, counseling documentation, and certification workflows.
 - b. Participants identified opportunities for shared operational systems and improved tools (ex, SEP) that allow staff to spend more time supporting students.
- 4. Invest in Staffing Stability, Training, and Role Clarity**
 - a. Concerns about staffing, workload, and role changes surfaced in several listening sessions.
 - b. Successful implementation will require transparent communication, cross-training, onboarding support, and intentional staffing design that protects continuity of services.
- 5. Center Belonging, Equity, and Relationship-Based Support**
 - a. Across all program areas, participants emphasized that students succeed when they feel connected, seen, and supported.
 - b. Dedicated program spaces, authentic relationships, culturally responsive programming, and welcoming interactions must remain central in any structural model.

Transformation succeeds when students experience fewer barriers and employees experience greater clarity.

Counseling Listening Session

1. Context & Core Tensions

Participants described counseling as holistic, empowering, and relationship-based.

Tensions include student expectations vs. system inconsistency and counseling vs. administrative burden.

2. Operational Strengths & Gaps Identified

Strengths already in practice:

- Multiple access modalities
- Strong local innovations
- Collaborative counselor culture
- Strong campus identity

Key operational gaps:

- Inconsistent processes
- No centralized information hub
- Broken SEP system
- Communication gaps
- Articulation inconsistencies

3. Emerging Opportunities

- Develop a centralized, districtwide hub for counseling information and resources, providing consistent access to policies, processes, program offerings, and contact points for both students and staff.
- Standardize student-facing communication across the district, including application follow-up, onboarding steps, and ongoing updates, to reduce confusion and ensure students receive clear and consistent guidance regardless of entry point.
- Modernize core counseling tools, including the Student Educational Plan (SEP) system, to improve functionality, reduce manual entry, ensure accurate unit calculations, and better align with financial aid and state requirements.
- Create a consistent and accessible orientation experience for all students, including online and in-person options that are regularly updated and clearly guide students through enrollment, program selection, and next steps.
- Standardize documentation practices across counselors (e.g., ConnexEd notes) to improve communication, continuity of care, and the ability to support students who access services across multiple campuses.
- Leverage technology, including AI and automation tools, to handle routine inquiries, application support, and administrative tasks, allowing counselors to focus more on direct student guidance and relationship-building.
- Address articulation and curriculum alignment challenges across campuses, reducing confusion around degree requirements and preventing students from enrolling in courses that do not meet their educational goals.

- Develop districtwide strategies to support SEP completion, including coordinated messaging, integration into instructional practices, and timing outreach to avoid overwhelming students during peak periods.
- Create centralized support for application and onboarding assistance, providing a clear entry point for students and families rather than relying on individual counselors to respond to fragmented inquiries.
- Improve coordination between counseling and other student support areas, ensuring consistent messaging, clearer referral pathways, and more seamless student experiences across departments.

EOPS/CARE/CalWORKs/NextUp Listening Session

1. Context & Core Tensions

Participants discussed districtwide transformation and unification within categorical programs, emphasizing both collaboration and protection of program identity.

Core tensions included alignment versus program identity and equity versus resource variation across campuses, especially related to grants and staffing.

2. Operational Strengths & Gaps Identified

Strengths already in practice:

- Strong local orientation models integrating academic and student services.
- Effective virtual service delivery supporting working students and parents.
- Cross-department collaboration and use of technology tools such as Connex Ed.
- Existing collaboration among basic needs and categorical staff.

Key operational gaps:

- No unified districtwide application or reporting system across categorical programs.
- Duplicative counseling requirements and documentation for students in multiple programs.
- Inconsistent grant and voucher practices creating student 'swirl' between campuses.
- Staffing vacancies disrupting continuity of services and onboarding.
- Fragmented data reporting limiting targeted outreach.

3. Emerging Opportunities

- Develop shared onboarding frameworks across categorical programs, ensuring that students receive consistent guidance and access to services regardless of program or campus entry point.
- Standardize key data fields and reporting systems, allowing programs to better track student progress, coordinate outreach, and reduce duplication in data collection and analysis.
- Allow counseling appointments and documentation to be recognized across programs, reducing redundancy for students participating in multiple categorical services.
- Create shared calendars and coordinated programming across campuses, improving efficiency and expanding access to workshops and support services.
- Establish internal guidelines for grants, vouchers, and resource distribution, reducing disparities that contribute to student movement between campuses for financial support.
- Develop mechanisms for cross-campus staffing support during vacancies, ensuring continuity of services and minimizing disruption to students.
- Integrate facilities planning with student support needs, including shared spaces that maintain program identity while supporting collaboration.

Learning Resources Listening Session

1. Context & Core Tensions

Participants emphasized holistic and accessible student support.

Tensions include strong program design vs. operational constraints and collaboration vs. lack of coordination.

2. Operational Strengths & Gaps Identified

Strengths already in practice:

- Effective student worker programs
- Cross-campus tutoring
- Strong tutor training
- Student leadership

Key operational gaps:

- Long HR timelines that create staffing shortages at the start of the term
- Budget constraints
- Data inconsistencies
- Low visibility

3. Emerging Opportunities

- Centralize tutor training and professional development across the district, building on existing campus-based models to ensure consistent quality, reduce duplication, and improve onboarding timelines for new tutors and student workers.
- Develop a districtwide tutoring visibility system (e.g., shared schedule or grid) that allows students to easily see available tutoring across campuses, particularly benefiting online, evening, and multi-campus students while maximizing existing tutoring capacity.
- Streamline hiring and onboarding processes for tutors and student workers, including reducing HR processing timelines and simplifying workflows, so programs can respond more quickly to student demand—especially at the start of semesters.
- Improve access to and consistency of data systems (e.g., ConnexEd) to better track student engagement, evaluate program effectiveness, and support targeted outreach to students who are not utilizing available services.
- Expand student-led programming within learning centers, including workshops, presentations, and leadership opportunities, to strengthen student engagement and position learning centers as hubs for both academic support and community-building.
- Increase coordinated outreach and marketing of learning center services, including integration into onboarding, dual enrollment pathways, and campus events, to improve student awareness and utilization of available resources.

Balance districtwide data visibility with campus-level program evaluation needs, ensuring that centralized systems support alignment without limiting the ability of individual campuses to assess and improve their own services.

Library Services Listening Session

1. Context & Core Tensions

Libraries already function as a partially unified system.

Tensions include alignment vs resource inequity and consistency vs local flexibility.

2. Operational Strengths & Gaps Identified

Strengths already in practice:

- Shared catalog
- Monthly collaboration
- Data-informed operations
- Strong student spaces

Key operational gaps:

- Technology inequities
- Funding challenges
- Staff shortages
- Loan inefficiencies
- Inconsistent hours

3. Emerging Opportunities

- Develop more consistent access to technology resources across campuses (e.g., Chromebooks, hotspots, study room equipment) by coordinating purchasing, maintenance, and replacement cycles to reduce inequities in student access.
- Streamline funding and purchasing processes for shared databases and resources, reducing delays and repeated justification requirements while ensuring continuity of access to essential academic materials.
- Improve interlibrary loan systems and turnaround times, exploring ways to increase responsiveness so students can access needed materials more quickly without overburdening staff capacity.
- Expand and better align study space availability, including extended hours and improved facilities, recognizing that many students rely on libraries as primary study environments due to housing or resource constraints.
- Strengthen districtwide technology support and coordination, including consistent approaches to equipment maintenance, software access, and student-facing tools such as chat services and printing systems.
- Improve data collection, reporting, and analysis practices, particularly with an emphasis on equity, to better understand student usage patterns and inform resource allocation across campuses.
- Explore opportunities for more unified student support tools, such as shared chat services or integrated systems, while balancing cost considerations and campus-specific needs.

Mental Health Services Listening Session

1. Context & Core Tensions

Participants described an ideal experience as easy, flexible, and empowering, where students feel connected and supported.

Key tensions include growing demand vs. limited staffing and strong collaboration vs. lack of formal infrastructure. With changes in the community around access to mental health services, there will be increased need and the majority of students prefer in-person sessions during the day.

2. Operational Strengths & Gaps Identified

Strengths already in practice:

- Strong collaboration among coordinators
- Shared electronic health record system
- Districtwide hiring and training of interns
- Peer navigation programs

Key operational gaps:

- Lack of crisis response protocols
- Staffing limitations for licensed supervision
- No districtwide coordinator
- Inconsistent HR onboarding processes
- Loss of translation services

3. Emerging Opportunities

- Formalize partnerships with county behavioral health and crisis response services, creating clearer pathways for referrals, coordinated care, and access to higher levels of support beyond what campuses can provide.
- Establish a districtwide mental health coordinator role to lead system-level planning, manage contracts, align services across campuses, and ensure consistent implementation of policies and practices.
- Expand staffing models to meet increasing demand, including hiring additional mental health specialists and increasing licensed clinician coverage to support supervision requirements and broaden service capacity.
- Institutionalize and scale the existing Mental Health Training Institute, creating a clear pipeline from academic programs to clinical training while exploring opportunities for grant funding and third-party billing to sustain and grow the model.
- Standardize onboarding processes for interns, associates, and volunteers, reducing delays and inconsistencies across campuses and enabling more timely placement of trainees into service roles.
- Reintroduce or expand translation and language access services, ensuring that students can receive mental health support in their primary language and reducing barriers for multilingual populations.
- Strengthen coordination with basic needs, special programs, and other student services, creating more integrated support systems that address the intersection of mental health, housing, food insecurity, and academic challenges.

Puente Listening Session

1. Context & Core Tensions

Participants discussed the future of the Puente program within district transformation and potential structural changes, emphasizing its cultural significance and transfer mission.

Tensions included program legacy versus structural change, campus autonomy versus district alignment, and support capacity versus student need.

2. Operational Strengths & Gaps Identified

Strengths already in practice:

- Strong culturally responsive programming and faculty engagement.
- Dedicated student spaces and student-led events supporting belonging.
- Informal cross-campus collaboration among Puente staff.
- Commitment to transfer-focused student development.

Key operational gaps:

- Limited transfer center infrastructure at some campuses.
- Inconsistent outreach and enrollment processes across colleges.
- Variability in curriculum coordination and textbook practices.
- Communication gaps between academic and student services.
- Limited shared data access for outreach and planning.

3. Emerging Opportunities

- Develop a districtwide Puente network, creating structured opportunities for collaboration, shared programming, and alignment across campuses.
- Establish regular cross-campus meetings for Puente faculty and staff, supporting coordination of outreach, curriculum, and student engagement strategies.
- Coordinate outreach efforts to high schools and community partners, improving efficiency and expanding access to prospective students.
- Increase use of shared data systems (e.g., Power BI) to support targeted recruitment, track student outcomes, and inform program planning.
- Explore opportunities for curriculum alignment and shared instructional resources, reducing duplication while maintaining culturally responsive teaching practices.
- Create districtwide student events and engagement opportunities, strengthening community and identity across campuses.

Student Accessibility Services (SAS) Listening Session

1. Context & Core Tensions

Participants explored opportunities for unifying accessibility services while maintaining equity and compliance across campuses. SAS was viewed as well-positioned to model alignment because of existing shared systems.

Key tensions included consistency versus staffing capacity, innovation versus infrastructure limitations, and equity goals versus operational realities.

2. Operational Strengths & Gaps Identified

Strengths already in practice:

- Shared use of AIM database to streamline accommodations across campuses.
- Strong collaboration among coordinators and accommodation specialists.
- Dedicated test proctoring roles improving student and faculty experiences.
- Commitment to reducing barriers and supporting belonging.

Key operational gaps:

- Limited staffing and counselor availability at some campuses.
- Inconsistent faculty engagement and communication, especially among part-time faculty.
- Physical accessibility barriers affecting student access.
- Duplicate software licensing and uneven technology access.
- Lack of centralized faculty training and resources.

3. Emerging Opportunities

- Develop districtwide faculty training on accessibility and accommodations, ensuring consistent understanding and implementation of support practices across campuses.
- Centralize coordination of assistive technology and software licensing, improving access, reducing duplication, and ensuring equity for students.
- Standardize test proctoring timelines and communication practices, providing clarity for both students and faculty while maintaining compliance requirements.
- Expand proactive outreach to students who may not request accommodations, ensuring that support is accessible and visible to those who need it.
- Create centralized faculty resource hubs, supporting consistent communication, training, and access to accommodation tools and guidance.
- Explore districtwide roles or coordination structures to support accessibility services, particularly in areas such as technology, training, and compliance.

Student Life Listening Session

1. Context & Core Tensions

The session focused on aligning student life and leadership services while maintaining vibrant campus culture and traditions.

Participants described tensions between standardization and campus culture, operational efficiency and limited capacity, and unified experience and role clarity.

2. Operational Strengths & Gaps Identified

Strengths already in practice:

- Strong relationships between student leadership and campus administration.
- Successful collaborative events and shared programming practices.
- Growth in student clubs where clear policies exist.
- Committed staff creating welcoming environments and engagement opportunities.

Key operational gaps:

- Lack of districtwide policies for club funding and event purchasing.
- Inconsistent travel procedures and liability documentation.
- Staff often using personal funds due to reimbursement barriers.
- Varying vendor systems and procurement practices across campuses.
- Inconsistent election processes and low voter turnout.

3. Emerging Opportunities

- Create shared digital platforms (e.g., Canvas shells) for student life resources, providing consistent access to leadership information, events, and support services across campuses.
- Standardize student election processes and tools, including exploration of districtwide voting systems to increase participation and reduce administrative burden.
- Develop clear, districtwide policies for student club funding and event purchasing, reducing reliance on informal processes and eliminating the need for staff to use personal funds.
- Establish unified procedures for student travel and event planning, including standardized documentation, liability processes, and reimbursement timelines.
- Create shared vendor lists and procurement systems, improving efficiency and consistency across campuses.
- Implement “no wrong door” training for frontline staff, ensuring that students are accurately referred and supported regardless of their point of entry.
- Standardize student-facing communications during onboarding, embedding student life, basic needs, and engagement opportunities early in the student experience.

Umoja Listening Session

1. Context & Core Tensions

The session focused on student belonging, culturally grounded support, and concerns about program continuity during district transformation.

Participants described tensions between belonging and operational instability, growth expectations versus staffing capacity, and consistency versus campus variation.

2. Operational Strengths & Gaps Identified

Strengths already in practice:

- Strong culture-building through cohort models and authentic relationships.
- Orientation practices that foster belonging and student connection.
- Collaboration with other departments and referral-based enrollment growth.
- History of tutoring and cohort support models when funding is available.

Key operational gaps:

- Inconsistent staffing and lack of full-time coordinators in some locations.
- High turnover affecting continuity and cross-campus relationships.
- Inconsistent eligibility and application processes across campuses.
- Program vulnerability related to space access and institutional support.
- Financial and logistical barriers for student conferences and events.

3. Emerging Opportunities

- Develop a centralized platform for Umoja program resources and communication, improving access for both students and staff while strengthening cross-campus alignment.
- Explore a districtwide orientation model that maintains cultural relevance, reducing duplication while preserving the relational and identity-centered aspects of Umoja programming.
- Establish regular districtwide convenings for Umoja coordinators, supporting professional development, data alignment, and shared problem-solving.
- Standardize eligibility and application processes where appropriate, reducing inconsistencies while maintaining flexibility to meet campus-specific needs.
- Provide structured onboarding and training for new coordinators, ensuring continuity of program quality despite staffing transitions.
- Institutionalize dedicated Umoja spaces across campuses, reinforcing program visibility, stability, and student belonging.
- Identify sustainable funding models for tutoring and academic support programs, ensuring continuity of high-impact services such as cohort-based tutoring.

Veterans Listening Session

1. Context & Core Tensions

Participants described strong existing collaboration but identified inconsistent processes that create friction for students enrolled across multiple campuses.

Two tensions emerged: consistency versus campus presence, and efficiency versus staffing stability. Participants expressed strong commitment to a seamless veteran student experience alongside concerns about role restructuring and workload.

2. Operational Strengths & Gaps Identified

Strengths already in practice:

- Monthly cross-campus Veteran Resource Center meetings and collaboration.
- Joint orientations and shared presentations (e.g., Chapter 31).
- Relationship-based support including onboarding guidance, financial aid assistance, and basic needs support.
- Strong coordination among veteran resource professionals despite structural barriers.

Key operational gaps:

- No full-time veteran counselor at any campus.
- Veteran students often do not self-identify early in intake, making timely support difficult.
- Complex VA certification rules tied to facility codes complicate multi-campus enrollment.
- Inconsistent VA payment processing and limited coordination among IT, Finance, Admissions, and Counseling.
- Data access and reporting inconsistencies across systems such as Power BI.

3. Emerging Opportunities

- Explore a hub-and-spoke service model, centralizing certification, intake, and administrative functions while maintaining campus-based resource centers focused on outreach, relationship-building, and student engagement.
- Increase cross-training for Welcome Center, counseling, and frontline staff, ensuring that veteran students are accurately identified early and referred to appropriate services regardless of where they enter the system.
- Develop a centralized repository of veteran-specific resources and external partnerships, including housing, VA services, and community organizations, to improve consistency and reduce duplication across campuses.
- Clarify and standardize VA payment processing workflows, including coordination between IT, Finance, and Admissions, to ensure accuracy and reduce delays or confusion for students.
- Explore options for increased flexibility in certification processes, including engagement with VA representatives to address challenges related to multi-campus enrollment and staffing coverage.
- Strengthen data access and reporting systems, enabling more accurate tracking of veteran student enrollment, services, and outcomes across campuses.

Cross-Session Design Themes

1. **Students experience the district as one system, even when operations do not.** Across sessions, participants described students moving between campuses while encountering different processes, requirements, and expectations. Reducing friction and creating seamless navigation was a consistent priority.
2. **Alignment is needed, not uniformity.** Participants supported shared infrastructure while emphasizing the importance of campus identity, culturally grounded programming, and local relationships.
3. **Data and infrastructure are central barriers.** Inconsistent data access, reporting tools, and workflows were identified as significant obstacles to collaboration and student support.
4. **Staffing stability and role clarity matter.** Concerns about workload, restructuring, and continuity surfaced in every session, underscoring the importance of clear communication and professional development.
5. **Shared processes can free staff to focus on students.** Duplicated administrative work was a recurring challenge; aligned processes were viewed as a way to increase capacity for relationship-based support.
6. **Belonging and culture must remain central.** Across all program areas, participants emphasized that students succeed when they feel welcomed, connected, and supported by relationships and community.
7. **High-impact student support exists across the district, but is unevenly experienced due to differences in infrastructure, staffing, and access to shared systems.** Across multiple sessions, participants described strong programs and committed staff, but noted that inconsistencies in systems, staffing levels, and access to shared resources create uneven student experiences.

Overall Insight: The listening sessions reflect strong readiness for increased collaboration and shared systems, alongside a clear expectation that unification should preserve program identity, campus culture, and student-centered relationship practices.