Keeping Colleges on the Path

A LOOK AT MICHIGAN'S GUIDED PATHWAYS PROGRESS FROM 2017-19

MICHIGAN CENTER FOR STUDENT SUCCESS
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OVERVIEW

The publication of *Redesigning America's Community Colleges*[1] marked the launch point for the national Guided Pathways movement. The Michigan Center for Student Success (MCSS) was an early statewide adopter of this transformational initiative, launching its initial cohort of the Michigan Guided Pathways Institute (MIGPI) in February of 2015. More details about the first three years of MIGPI can be found in the Supporting Guided Pathways in Michigan: Lessons Learned from Cohort I and Guided Pathways: The Scale of Adoption in Michigan publications.

In fall 2017, MCSS kicked off version MIGPI 2.0. In this phase, rather than joining one of two 18-month cohorts, colleges have elected to participate either as Mentor Circle or Study Circle colleges for the entire three years. The Mentor Circle colleges, who are the focus of this brief, felt they were prepared to undertake more intensive Guided Pathways work, including attending in-person institutes, sharing data via the Voluntary Framework for Accountability (VFA) and reporting on their progress via the Community College Research Center (CCRC) Scale of Adoption Assessment for Guided Pathways (SOAA). To date, the 13 Mentor Circle colleges have participated in four in-person institutes focused on designing integrated student supports, supporting student financial stability and moving from program maps to student learning plans. MIGPI 2.0 will continue through spring 2020. The colleges will participate in two additional in-person institutes and another round of SOAA reporting, including filling out a self-rating scale and participating in a validation interview with MCSS.

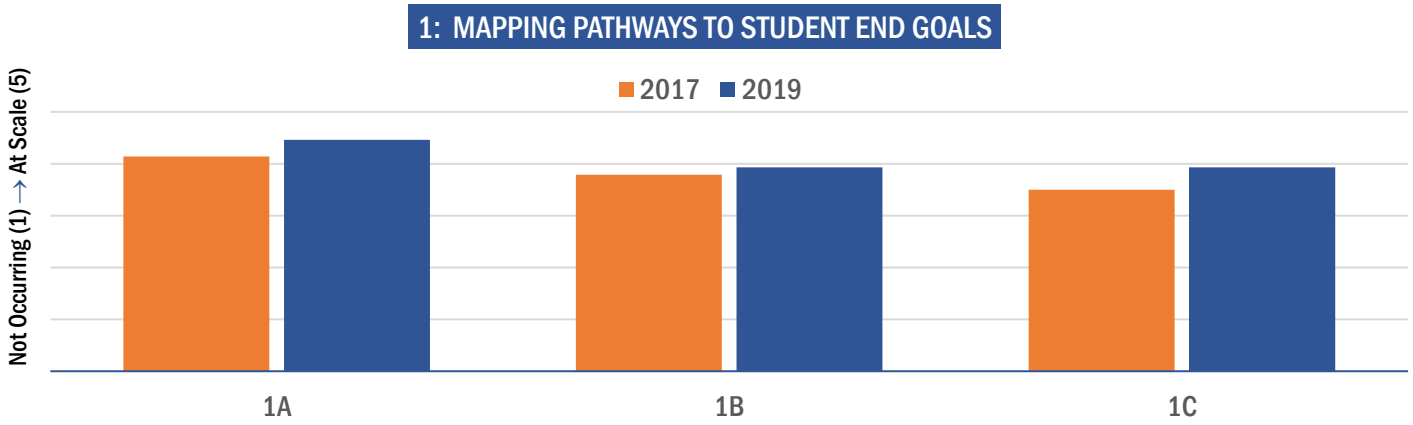
The Mentor Circle colleges profiled in this brief are all extremely active in supporting student success. In addition to the dedicated institutes for Mentor Circle colleges, over the past 18 months they have also participated in Michigan Student Success Network meetings focused on advising for mathematics pathways, emerging best practices in developmental education and embedding active learning in pathway courses. They have also joined their colleagues from Michigan community colleges and public and private bachelor's degree-granting institutions at faculty summits to design statewide associate-to-bachelor's degree pathways in a dozen of the state's most popular majors through the MiTransfer Pathways project. These activities, aligned with ongoing work on campus, play a role in supporting the colleges' adoption of the practices associated with Guided Pathways.

The Mentor Circle colleges are Bay College, Delta College, Grand Rapids Community College, Jackson College, Kalamazoo Valley Community College, Kellogg Community College, Lake Michigan College, Macomb Community College, Montcalm Community College, Mott Community College, Muskegon Community College, Oakland Community College and West Shore Community College. Along with the Mentor Circle colleges, an additional 13 colleges are participating in the Study Circle, with access to online resources to support their Guided Pathways implementation.[2]

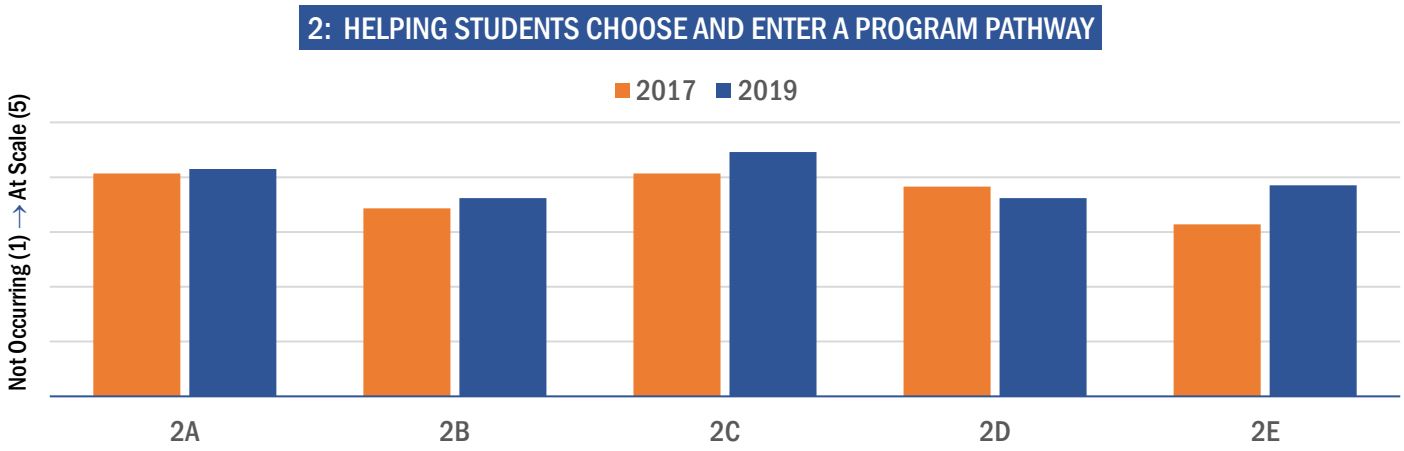
[1] Bailey, T., Jaggars, S.S. & Jenkins, D. (2015). *Redesigning America's Community Colleges.* Boston: Harvard University Press.
[2] Study Circle colleges were encouraged but not required to participate in the 2019 SOAA process. To date, four Study Circle colleges have participated. Their ratings are not included in the graphs in this brief, but college examples are featured at https://www.miguidedpathways.org/guided-pathways-resources.

GRAPHING COLLEGE PROGRESS

A comparison between the Mentor Circle colleges' self-ratings in 2017 and 2019 on the SOAA is shown in the tables below. The colleges are close to scaling practices related to program design (1A), developing program learning outcomes (4A) and aligning mathematics requirements to programs of study (2C). While it is tempting to quantify colleges' adoption of the practices based on the SOAA ratings scale, which ranges from "Not Occurring" to "At Scale," it is important to keep in mind that these are subjective, highly contextual ratings. For example, while it may appear that the colleges have moved backwards in some areas, conversations during validation interviews reveal that they have in fact developed a deeper understanding of what it means to implement a particular practice such as providing support for very poorly prepared students to enter college level courses (2D).

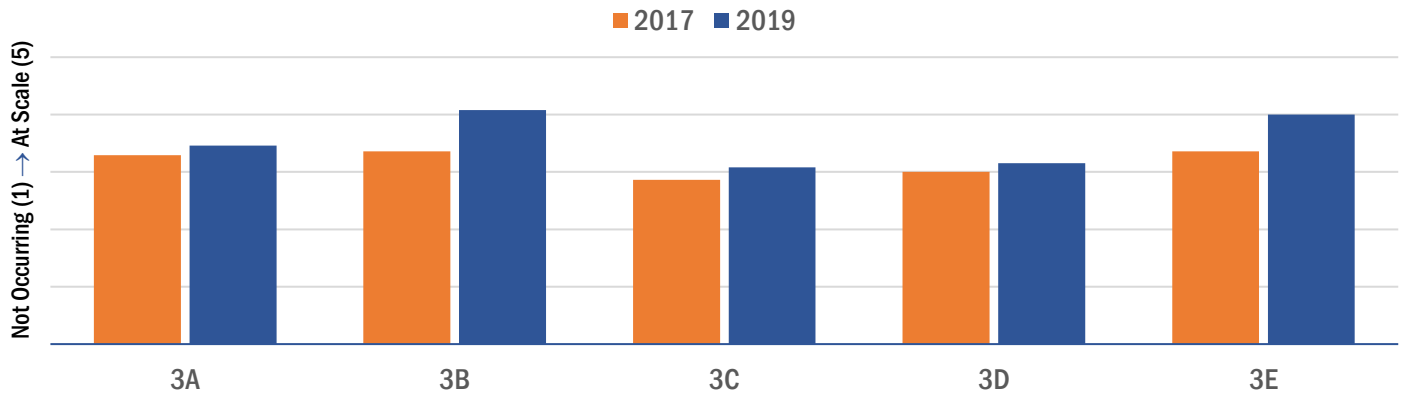


1A. Every program is well designed to guide and prepare students to enter employment and further education in fields of importance to the college's service area.
1B. Detailed information is provided on the college's website on the employment and further education opportunities targeted by each program.
1C. Programs are clearly mapped out for students. Students know which courses they should take and in what sequence. Courses critical for success in each program and other key progress milestones are clearly identified. All **of** this information is easily accessible on the college's website.



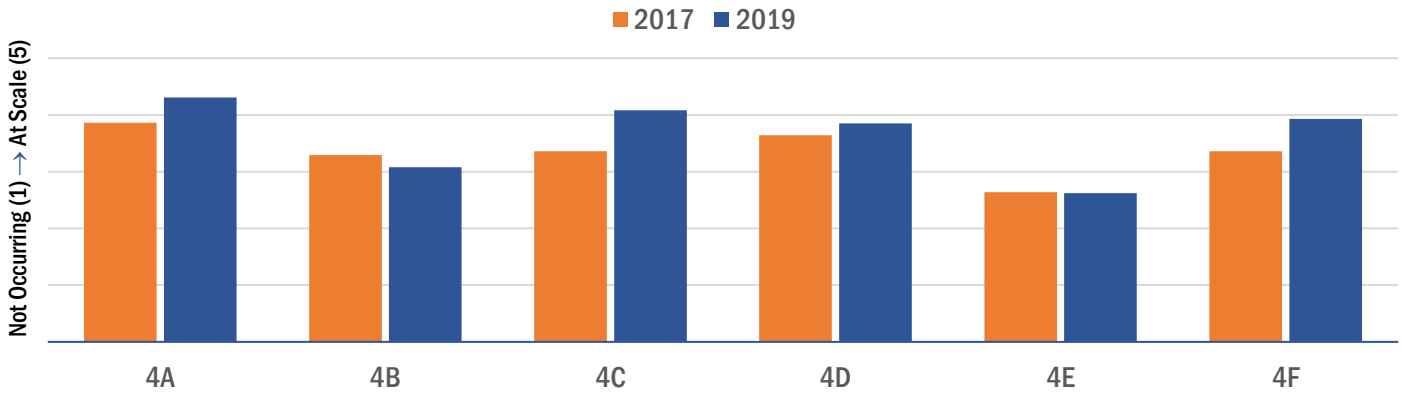
2A. Every new student is helped to explore career/college options, choose a program of study, and develop a full-program plan as soon as possible.
2B. Special supports are provided to help academically unprepared students to succeed in the "gateway" courses for the college's major program areas—not just in college-level math and English.
2C. Required math courses are appropriately aligned with the student's field of study.
2D. Intensive support is provided to help very poorly prepared students to succeed in college-level courses as soon as possible.
2E. The college works with high schools and other feeders to motivate and prepare students to enter college-level coursework in a program of study when they enroll in college.

3: KEEPING STUDENTS ON PATH



3A Advisors monitor which program every student is in and how far along the student is toward completing the program requirements.
3B. Students can easily see how far they have come and what they need to do to complete their program.
3C. Advisors and students are alerted when students are at risk of falling off their program plans and have policies and supports in place to intervene in ways that help students get back on track.
3D. Assistance is provided to students who are unlikely to be accepted into limited-access programs, such as nursing or culinary arts, to redirect them to another more viable path to credentials and a career.
3E. The college schedules courses to ensure students can take the courses they need when they need them, can plan their lives around school from one term to the next-and can complete their programs in as short a time as possible.

4: ENSURING THAT STUDENTS ARE LEARNING



4A Program learning outcomes are aligned with the requirements for success in the further education and employment outcomes targeted by each program.
4B Students have ample opportunity to apply and deepen knowledge and skills through projects, internships, co-ops, clinical placements, group projects outside of class, service learning, study abroad and other active learning activities that program faculty intentionally embed into coursework.
4C Faculty assess whether students are mastering learning outcomes and building skills across each program in both arts and sciences and career/technical programs.
4D Results of learning outcomes assessments are used to improve teaching and learning through program review, professional development and other intentional campus efforts.
4E The college helps students document their learning for employers and universities through portfolios and other means beyond transcripts.
4F The college assesses effectiveness of educational practice (e.g. using CCSSE or SENSE, etc.)and uses the results to create targeted professional development.

KEY OBSERVATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

In the SOAA validation interviews conducted by MCSS, and through conversation at the June 2019 Mentor Circle Leads Retreat, the Mentor Circle colleges described their efforts to address ongoing challenges cutting across the four pillars of Guided Pathways. Six key recommendations for Michigan colleges emerged from these conversations, including:

- ✓ *Make concerted and systematic efforts to crack the equity code*
- ✓ *Keep pathway maps current, relevant and accessible to students*
- ✓ *Make the move from pathway maps to student learning plans*
- ✓ *Acknowledge the need to reform developmental education, and act*
- ✓ *Expect both wins and woes from technology tools for mapping and monitoring*
- ✓ *Make learning and assessment active parts of Guided Pathways work*

Make concerted and systematic efforts to crack the equity code

Systematic efforts to disaggregate and analyze data to better understand the equity impacts of Guided Pathways work were reported infrequently. In this category, Jackson College takes a clear lead. In analyzing its data, the college has observed gaps in enrollment for some student groups in programs leading to higher paying fields and has noted that some intake practices work better for some student groups. This has led to ongoing improvement efforts. In the words of a Jackson team lead, “We’re not an institution that stands still very often.”

Several colleges reported that their equity efforts focus on college-wide training offered by an office of diversity and inclusion, with an acknowledgement that these efforts still need to be more systematic. Leadership from the top is important here. At Mott Community College, equity was named a top board priority for 2018-19, resulting in lots of training for faculty and staff to keep the issue top of mind throughout the institution. At Kalamazoo Valley Community College, new presidential leadership has opened more opportunities for cross-college conversations about equity.

Colleges frequently respond to equity gaps with initiatives to support specific student groups. Opening campus food pantries and providing training on other anti-poverty initiatives were cited as part of efforts to address barriers at Bay, Montcalm and Muskegon colleges. These initiatives can also highlight students’ academic challenges. At Mott Community College, a STEM Science grant program struggles to recruit students. “High school is too late to talk to students about choosing STEM,” observed one team leader. At Lake Michigan College, the “Start to Finish” program focuses on students from the struggling Benton Harbor school district and has shown promising results that the college is hoping to scale to additional groups in the future.

Finally, while acknowledging the critical importance of addressing equity, some colleges reported a lack of available bandwidth to tackle equity gaps at this time. At some of the larger colleges, the task of implementing the systemic structural changes associated with Guided Pathways is forcing a delay in opening conversations about disaggregating data on outcomes. At smaller colleges, the equity gaps may simply be harder to find, with homogeneous student populations masking challenges for gender or socio-economically diverse groups.

Keep pathway maps current, relevant and accessible to students

Mentor Circle colleges report that pathway mapping and meta-major design are far from “one and done” initiatives. In some cases, maps have still not been completed for liberal arts programs, though colleges report that their participation in the MiTransfer Pathways has helped to jump start that process. Other colleges are revisiting their maps to reflect program changes since the process began or circling back to add milestone courses and activities to the basic course sequences. Program changes, including elimination of prerequisites, changes in the sequence of courses and reduction

in total credit hours, were frequently reported, although some colleges are still wrestling with these issues in certain programs. Finally, five colleges report making the shift to full-year scheduling based on program maps. In most cases these schedules are view-only, but plans are taking shape to allow students to register for multiple semesters at once in the near future.

Ensuring that program maps are accessible to both students and advisors presents logistical challenges ranging from a lack of resources for web design to student information systems that seem to inhibit rather than enable pathways implementation. Along with dedicated systems like those available from EAB, Hobsons and other vendors, colleges are making creative use of the student planning module in Ellucian Colleague as well as degree audit systems to store program maps and student plans.

Make the move from pathway maps to student learning plans

Nearly all of the Mentor Circle colleges have now added opportunities for students to explore and choose a program or pathway either during the intake process or within a mandatory or recommended first-year experience (FYE) course. Macomb Community College and Lake Michigan College are experimenting with moving this exploration process online with career exploration and decision-making modules.

Although ideally students would be able to develop a full program plan at their initial advising session, some colleges have compromised by having students make the plan during an FYE course or by encouraging or requiring students to come back for a second advising session within their first or second semester to see the full extent of the plan.

A few colleges report that they may not want to scale the practice of sharing a full program plan with all students, citing not just a lack of advising resources but a philosophical hesitation to showing students a full plan too soon. Reasons stated for this hesitation range from the perceived likelihood that students will soon change their mind about the programs they initially select, to the chance that they will be discouraged when they see the full extent of the program requirements, to the difficulty of developing a plan for transfer before a destination has been identified. Some report that they share full plans with college-ready students, but the complexity for students who need developmental education makes it too difficult to create a plan beyond the first couple of semesters. While these challenges are real, there are alternative actions the college might take to mitigate them (strengthen decision-making tools, streamline programs to limit credit hours, participate in statewide transfer pathways, reform developmental education) instead of refraining from sharing full program plans with all students as early as possible.

Acknowledge the need to reform developmental education, and act

National consensus continues to support practices like adopting mathematics pathways, redesigning delivery of developmental courses and using multiple measures, including high school GPA, to establish college readiness. This increases the number of students able to complete college-level courses in English, mathematics and other core subjects within one or two semesters of enrollment, boosting their chances of completing their programs of study, earning credentials and transferring or entering the labor market in a timely manner. SOAA results indicate that Mentor Circle colleges are coming to grips with the need to act on this information.

The colleges have all been active participants in the MCSS-led Right Math at the Right Time initiative to strengthen the implementation of mathematics pathways across Michigan colleges and universities. As a result, with few exceptions, the Mentor Circle colleges indicate high rates of alignment of introductory college-level mathematics courses within programs of study on the 2019 SOAA. They also report significant levels of commitment to co-requisite remediation for college-level composition. Accelerating delivery of developmental math and revising placement practices to reduce reliance on ACCUPLACER are moving more slowly. A slight decrease in ratings on the SOAA from 2017 to 2019 suggests that colleges may be developing a more nuanced understanding of the efforts needed to provide intensive support for all students to succeed in college-level courses as soon as possible (practice 2D).

To measure progress on developmental education reform, MCSS and the Mentor Circle colleges are using AACC's Voluntary Framework of Accountability (VFA), which tracks leading indicators for success associated with Guided Pathways. These metrics, dubbed "early momentum metrics" by CCRC researchers, include the percentage of students who complete a college-level course in English or mathematics in the first year of enrollment. Two 2019 reports -- one using data from 172 colleges in the 2011 VFA cohort[3] and one based on student transcripts from new students from 2010-2012 at 75 colleges in three state systems[4] -- strongly suggest that completing these gateway courses early on is significantly correlated with higher rates of persistence and credential completion.

Expect both wins and woes from technology tools for mapping and monitoring

Most Michigan colleges are relying on one or more software solutions to create and store program maps and student plans, as well as to monitor students' progress and intervene when students get off track. Colleges are embedding tools from companies like Emsi or links to the U.S. Department of Labor's O*NET in their program maps to provide labor market information. For example, Grand Rapids Community College has linked to Emsi's Career Coach and reports seeing an increase in its use. However, as one lead from Grand Rapids Community College noted, "We need these tools to provoke action from students." Tracking the impacts of any software on student decision-making and behavior will be important as colleges plan interventions to support students' early engagement with programs of study.

In monitoring students, some colleges are adapting systems designed to track course enrollment and Satisfactory Academic Progress (SAP) for financial aid. Features of student information systems like Ellucian's student planning module are also helpful but can present challenges when systems don't work together seamlessly. Jackson College and Lake Michigan College are both using degree auditing software to track student progress on their plans. However, at small colleges like West Shore, it has proved easier for administrators to produce reports manually while waiting for new software to be implemented. It's important to note that software cannot do the job alone. Once a new early-alert system like Starfish or EAB comes online, extensive training is required for faculty and advisors to work together to produce and respond to alerts effectively.

Make learning and assessment active parts of Guided Pathways work

The final pillar of Guided Pathways, "Ensuring that Students are Learning," remains the least developed in the national field, with its clear alignment with accreditation requirements serving as both an asset and a challenge to implementation and evaluation. With few exceptions, Mentor Circle colleges report that practice 4A, "align program learning outcomes with requirements for success in further education and employment," is close to or fully scaled, likely due to the additional attention these outcomes receive in the accreditation process. Other practices in this pillar focus on the importance of active learning and alternatives to standard grading, but the practices as described don't necessarily resonate with colleges, leading to lower ratings in these areas. For example, most Mentor Circle colleges report not using portfolios to document student learning outside of a few specific programs, and mandatory hands-on experiences tend, with a few exceptions, to still be limited to programs with clinical requirements.

College leads report that active and collaborative learning, along with assessment strategies, are frequent topics for faculty professional development. However, these workshops are not always explicitly linked with Guided Pathways efforts. As CCRC and the Pathways Collaborative continue to refine the language and practices that define this pillar, college teams may begin to better understand the important roles of learning and assessment in Guided Pathways.

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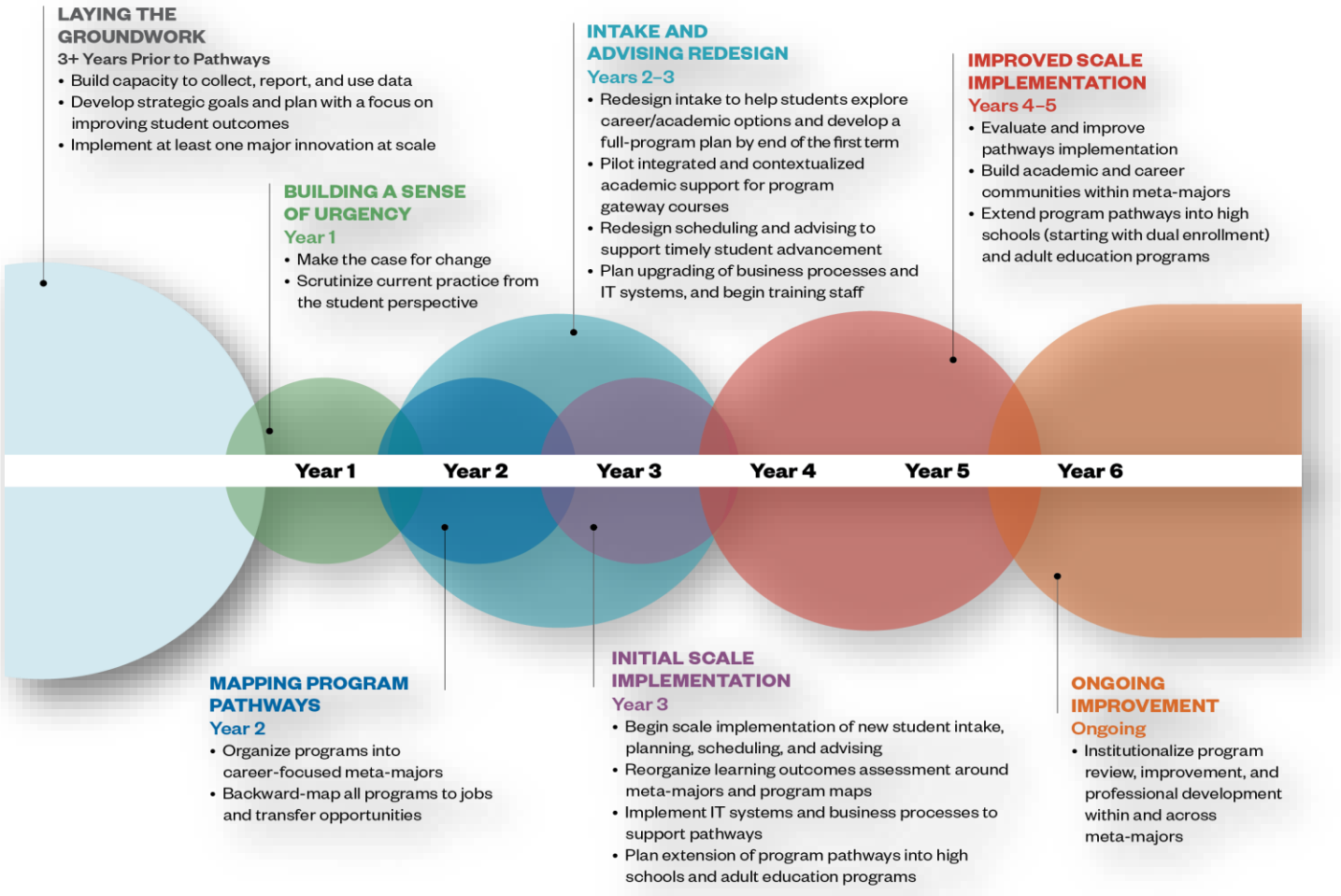
[3] American Association of Community Colleges (2019, April). *Voluntary Framework of Accountability: Driving Success.* Retrieved from file:///C:/Users/jschanker/Downloads/VFA_Summary_Report_2019(4).pdf.

[4] Belfield, C.R., Jenkins, D. and Fink, J. (2019, July). *Early Momentum Metrics: Leading Indicators for Community College Improvement.* Retrieved from file:///C:/Users/jschanker/Downloads/early-momentum-metrics-leading-indicators.pdf.

NEXT STEPS FOR MCSS AND THE COLLEGES

Researchers at CCRC have described Guided Pathways implementation as an ongoing effort that can take 6-10 years. Based on the chart below, current activities at most of the Mentor Circle colleges would fall somewhere between years 2 and 4, with significant work still to be done on practices related to advising, developmental education redesign and institutionalizing systems for monitoring student progress. In the final year of MIGPI 2.0, MCSS will focus on activities related to improved scale implementation and support for increasing the prevalence of students with individualized program plans across the colleges. MCSS will also engage colleges from both the Mentor Circle and Study Circle in an in-depth evaluation of the Guided Pathways Institute in the first half of 2020. More information about MIGPI institutes can be found on the Michigan Guided Pathways website.

In addition to the Guided Pathways institutes, Michigan colleges have access to several resources to support their student success and Guided Pathways efforts, including networking meetings, peer mentoring and other initiatives from MCSS. More information can be found on the Michigan Community College Association (MCCA) website's Events page.



Community College Research Center, April 2018

MCSS Mentoring Network

In 2019 MCSS launched a new peer-to-peer network, the MCSS Mentoring Network, which connects administrators, faculty and staff with peer mentors who will work with them to help address challenges in implementing Guided Pathways practices. Development of resources and training materials for the program is supported by a grant from Jobs for the Future (JFF) through fall 2020.

Student Success Summit

The annual Student Success Summit is a two-day event that attracts over 350 faculty, staff and administrators from all 28 community colleges in Michigan. This event, which has been hosted for over 10 years, is the largest convening of community college personnel in Michigan. The summit features nationally recognized speakers and more than 20 breakout sessions featuring student success work at colleges across the state.

Michigan Student Success Network Meetings

Meetings of the Michigan Student Success Network are held quarterly and focus on a variety of student success topics. Colleges can send teams to learn from national leaders in community college student success and network with colleagues from Michigan and across the country.

Regional Faculty Conversations

Each May, the MCSS hosts the Regional Faculty Conversations at three locations across Michigan. These conversations are designed to engage faculty in conversation about student success and their role in improving student outcomes.

Michigan Transfer Network

The new Michigan Transfer Network at www.mitransfer.org is an excellent resource for colleges who are supporting students who plan to transfer to a Michigan institution. The public website includes information about course-to-course equivalencies, the Michigan Transfer Agreement, articulation agreements and transfer guides. The secure site provides additional resources, including robust reports, to help colleges improve transfer.

Upcoming Initiatives

MCSS plans to lead the colleges in several new initiatives that focus on deep engagement in specific Guided Pathways practices that show promise for increasing equity, including supporting student economic stability, clarifying and navigating transfer pathways, transforming the design and delivery of developmental education and embedding active learning into program gateway courses.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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The MCSS provides state-level support to Michigan's 28 community colleges by serving as a hub connecting leadership, administrators, faculty and staff in their emerging and ongoing efforts to improve student outcomes, emphasizing linkages between practice, research and policy. Funding for this work and other activities of the MCSS are provided through a generous grant from The Kresge Foundation and the support of Michigan's 28 public community colleges. To learn more about our work, please visit our website.