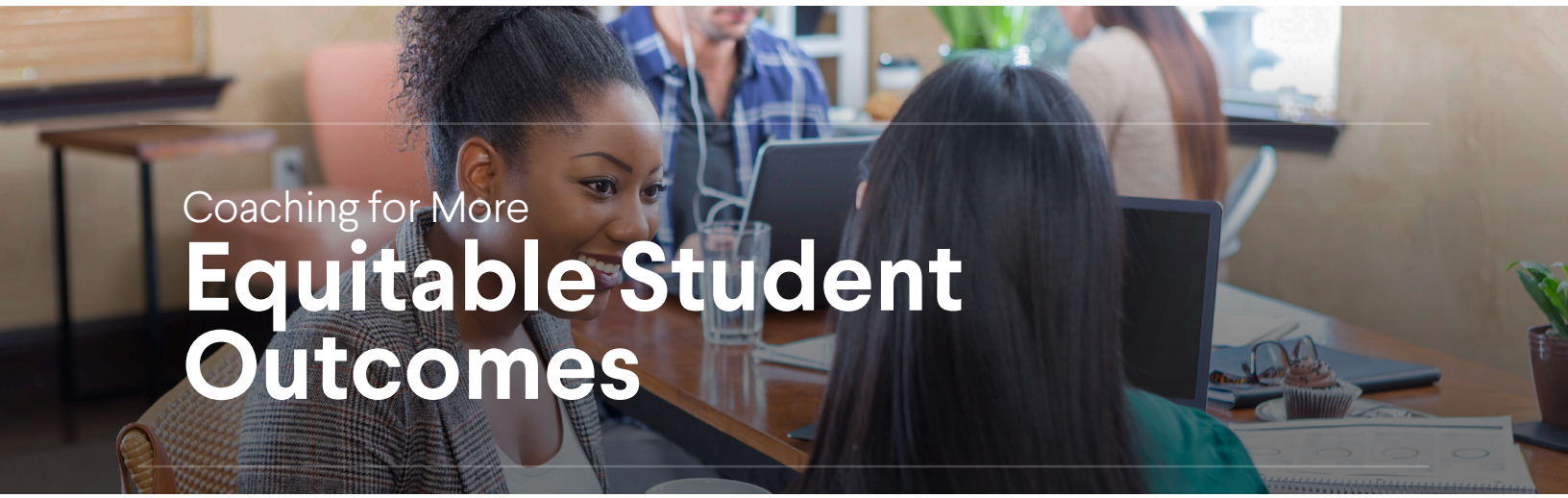

Coaching for More

Equitable Student Outcomes

Student Success Center Coaching Program

Student Success Center NETWORK

JFF

CCRI

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Calls for "success for all" echo across college and university campuses nationally, especially in community colleges that enroll the most diverse student populations in all of higher education. A formula that many institutions are adopting to increase student completion involves improved onboarding, pathways, and advising, and is coupled to student-focused teaching and learning. Comprehensive reform to higher education institutions is still relatively new and fraught with complexity, but the effort to make change is growing. To implement reform, more institutions are using coaches to help college practitioners to make the case for change, decide what to change, and develop plans for how to change.[1]

This brief focuses on coaching for more equitable student outcomes to bring about student success. This brief builds on the work of the Coaching for Change project conducted by our team, the Community College Research Initiatives (CCRI) at the University of Washington. We emphasize the

1 We use the term practitioner in this brief to refer to individuals who work in a wide range of roles in higher education, including faculty, academic and student affairs, campus leadership, staff, and other roles.

importance of equity in comprehensive college reform, including the guided pathways model, to ensure that improved outcomes extend to student groups who have not consistently benefited from past efforts at college improvement. Understanding concepts foundational to equity-focused reform and knowing how to apply them to implementation is critical to improving performance.

We begin this brief by describing the Student Success Center Network (SSCN) Coaching Program, the Coaching for Change project, and how we are supporting Student Success Center (SSC) executive directors in their efforts to implement coaching programs within their states. We define concepts and terminology pertaining to diversity, inclusion, equity, and equity-mindedness that are critical to engaging practitioners in efforts to reform their colleges. We then explore roles that equity-minded coaches can play in modeling, mentoring, and guiding colleges toward more equitable student success. We provide resources that employ the equity-mindedness framework and other approaches to equity-focused reform at the conclusion of the brief.

What is the Coaching for Change Project?

Our CCRI team has been working with JFF to support the SSCN Coaching Program since 2017.[2] Starting in 2017, during JFF's coaching pilot program, we provided support to 10 SSCs to develop, modify, enhance, and document coaching that enables colleges to more fully and successfully implement change. In 2018, CCRI took another step forward with the SSCN by providing applied research and technical assistance to five SSCs that committed to strategic implementation, growth, or modification of a coaching program in their state. By creating a learning community of SSCs and documenting the lessons they are learning through all phases of implementation, our team is helping the SSCN to disseminate strategic information about why, what, and how coaching is being done to increase student success. Ultimately, CCRI's goal is to support the efforts of SSCs to create, expand, and improve their coaching programs.

CCRI's theory of change for the Coaching for Change project suggests that evidence-based coaching requires that individuals identified as coaches guide colleges in the complex process of organizational change by helping them transform policies, practices, processes, and culture to achieve more equitable student outcomes.[3] Coaches are practitioners who facilitate improved organizational performance and are comfortable moving between data, theory, and practice. Coaches play a critical role in supporting the organizational change process by helping facilitate an understanding within the

2 The SSCN is comprised currently of an SSC in 16 states. These SSCs seek to raise awareness of the ways in which higher education institutions and systems, primarily focusing on community colleges, can improve student success. The guided pathways model is a primary approach advocated within the SSCN to improve success for all students.

3 Different terms are used by SSCs to describe coaches, including guides, mentors, facilitators, and navigators, and we respect the right of SSCs to choose these various titles to fit the goals of their coaching programs. We use "coach" in this brief merely to simplify terminology—not to promote a one-size-fits-all label.

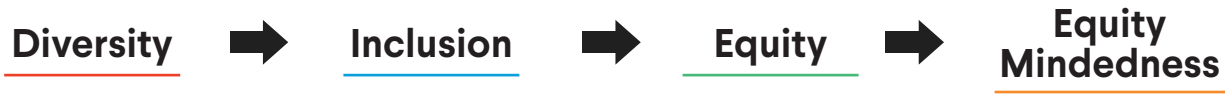
college about why to change (problem, context, goals, and outcomes), what to change (policy, practice, college, and culture), and how to change (learning, leading, scaling, and sustaining) (Bragg et al. 2018). Enabling coaches to use an equity lens to assist college practitioners in implementing change is the primary focus of this brief.

Key Concepts and Definitions

To begin, we define the concepts of diversity, inclusion, equity, and equity-mindedness because of their importance to comprehensive college reform and coaching that assists colleges to close equity gaps and positively impact student outcomes. Each term has a unique history and evolutionary path, beginning with the term "diversity," followed by "inclusion" and later "equity" and equity-mindedness, providing a continuum from diversity to equity-mindedness that is important to increasing student success *(see Figure 1)*. When coaches understand these concepts and know how to apply them to college reforms such as guided pathways, they can help colleges to bring about transformative change that is informed and intentional. Moreover, by applying these concepts to guided pathways, it may be possible to better identify and address systemic and structural barriers that impede the success of racially minoritized students, and therefore student success (Bragg, Wetzstein, and Bauman 2019).[4]

4 We use the term "racially minoritized" versus "minority" or "students of color" as Benitez (2010, 131) did, to acknowledge "the process [action vs. noun] of student minoritization," and the institutional and historical social construction of marginality.

Figure 1: The continuum from diversity to equity-mindedness.



Diversity

By **diversity**, we mean the representation of individuals and groups according to socially constructed norms and characteristics. Diversity embraces the notion that individuals are members of groups that have different histories, backgrounds, and experiences that need to be considered in improving education. The concept is "all-inclusive and recognizes everyone and every group as part of the diversity that should be valued" (MP Associates and Center for Assessment and Policy Development 2013, 3). Identifying individuals and groups by their race, ethnicity, income, gender, sexual orientation, age, language, and immigrant status, including the ways identities intersect, is valuable to providing a fuller and deeper understanding of the individuals and groups represented in higher education. Representation is not only important to distinguishing individuals and groups from one another but in valuing individuals as part of groups. When referencing diversity, institutions often point to managing diversity such that campuses more fully and fairly reflect the composition of the students and staff who live in their communities, states, and regions of the country (Dancy II 2010).

Inclusion

The concept of **inclusion** envelops the notion of diversity but goes beyond diversity by recognizing that representation is important but insufficient to advance student success for underserved populations. Inclusion is about "authentically bringing traditionally excluded individuals and/or groups into processes, activities, and decision/policy making in a way that shares power" (MP Associates and Center for Assessment and Policy Development 2013, 3). Applied to higher education, if diversity is about who is participating in college, inclusion is about how they are participating and whether their participation provides authentic engagement. This idea extends the notion of diversity from representation to collective action that recognizes individuals and groups for who they are, what they bring to the college experience, and how they are most enabled to achieve success. Inclusion is not about assimilation into institutional norms but about changing institutions so that individuals and groups are empowered to succeed.

Equity

Taking into account notions of diversity and inclusion, **equity** goes further than these two concepts by focusing not only on what individuals and groups bring to college but what they get out of it. For years, higher education has considered access an important dimension of college with community colleges considered the door to higher education for underserved populations. This historic focus on access predominates the policies and practices of these colleges, to an extent that student outcomes assumed lesser priority with deleterious institutional results in many cases. By focusing on equity, it is incumbent on colleges to ensure that students who access college have every opportunity to achieve their desired outcomes, which means inequitable outcomes for racially minoritized students and other underserved students are unacceptable and must be rectified. An emphasis on equity that pays close attention to matters of race and racism, also known as racial equity, can be achieved when the outcomes of college policies, programs, and practices can no longer be predicted by racial identity.

Racial justice goes even further to eliminate policies, practices, attitudes, and cultural messages that reinforce differential outcomes by race (MP Associates and Center for Assessment and Policy Development, 2013). Recognizing that success for all students is important but elusive if racially minoritized students cannot achieve equitable outcomes, colleges must do the challenging work of reflecting on and addressing how they perpetuate inequities and work toward repairing and restoring justice for disaffected students. We believe that a focus on racial equity—informed with disaggregated data use—is paramount to achieving success for all students; however, it does not presume that improvements assumed to work for all students—what we might call race-neutral (or color-blind) improvements—will necessarily improve outcomes for racially minoritized students. Race-neutral reforms that tend to predominate college improvement agendas often fail at enabling practitioners to recognize longstanding policies and

practices that perpetuate inequities. Transformative change that promotes equity identifies inequities and ensures improved policies and practices to address inequities, which is foundational to the success of all students.

Equity-Mindedness

An important extension to the notion of equity is the concept of **equity-mindedness** that focuses on the ways individuals think, act, and engage in racial-equity work. By equity-mindedness, we refer to how practitioners who attempt to reform higher education systems, policies, cultural norms, and everyday practices that appear to be race-neutral actually act to resolve inequities for racially minoritized student groups (Bensimon, Dowd, and Witham, 2016; Witham et al. 2015). In operationalizing this definition of equity-mindedness, researchers at the Center for Urban Education at the University of Southern California offer a set of five *Guiding Principles for Equity by Design* (Center for Urban Education 2019) to enable practitioners to assess their current understanding of and commitment to racial equity. These principles focus on the importance of clear language and key concepts that enable institutions to advance toward more equitable policies and practices. Being able to acknowledge and understand the differences in students' learning contexts as uniquely important and compelling, rather than treating all students the same, is an especially important principle in racial equity work, suggesting the importance of cultural competence, including culturally responsive pedagogy and critical pedagogy (Howard 2010). Finally, colleges must recognize that change that is truly transformative must happen on multiple levels, extending from individuals to units, institutions, and systems.

Guiding Principles for Equity by Design

1. Clarity in language, goals, and measures is vital to effective equitable practices.
2. Equity-mindedness should be the guiding paradigm for language and action.
3. Equitable practice and policies are designed to accommodate differences in the contexts of students' learning—not to treat all students the same.
4. Enacting equity requires a continual process of learning, disaggregating data, and questioning assumptions.
5. Equity must be enacted as a pervasive institution- and system-wide principle.

Sources: Bensimon, Dowd, and Witham 2016; and Witham et al. 2015.

Indeed, it is challenging to think that improvements to colleges will be effective for all students if they do not intentionally and strategically integrate diversity, inclusion, equity, and equity-mindedness. In the case of guided pathways that call for the use of evidence to improve student success, it is important to systematically analyze ways that the model addresses inequities among diverse student groups, including racially minoritized groups (Bragg, Wetzstein, and Bauman 2019). Without this deliberate analysis, practitioners who implement guided pathways may not know how to simultaneously improve outcomes and rectify inequities that impede student success. When coaches understand key concepts and terms, and support practitioners in doing the same, colleges are able to better understand inequities that racially minoritized student groups face and implement improvements to address them.

Acknowledging that much more needs to be known about the diversity-to-equity-mindedness continuum, coaches can play a critical role in helping practitioners to recognize their own disposition toward equity and equity-mindedness. They can help practitioners to better understand how to develop comprehensive reforms that reduce racial inequities and improve student success. Coaches can help practitioners to understand patterns and dynamics at play in colleges that contribute to inequities for racially minoritized students, and help them work toward solutions. Ultimately, coaching that prioritizes equity-mindedness among practitioners is bound to provide a clearer sense of purpose, action, and advocacy for systemic change toward racial justice.

How Equity-Minded Coaches Help Colleges Build More Equitable Student Success

Moving colleges from making plans to change—including reviewing disaggregated data to confronting racial inequities—requires a combination of coaching knowledge and skills pertaining to diversity, inclusion, equity and equity-mindedness, as well as organizational change. Using equity-mindedness as a guiding framework for coaching, coaches are in a unique position to support colleges in using data, reflection, and analysis to take strategic approaches to addressing inequities in student outcomes in race-conscious ways.

Equity-minded coaches shed light on patterns associated with organizational practices that help colleges to identify, make transparent, and address inequities in the outcomes achieved by different student groups. Thus, coaching for equity, or equity-minded coaching, addresses where coaches look, what they see, who they listen to, and what they say when supporting colleges in reform work (Aguilar 2015). Equity-minded coaches adopt the principles of equity-mindedness in their own practice to support colleges in examining, understanding, and addressing outcomes at the student- as well as the college-level.

Equity-minded coaching utilizes dimensions of organizational change, which are often deracialized and acultural, in combination with the principles of an equity-minded practitioner (Malcom-Piqueux and Bensimon 2017) to provide critical and culturally informed support to colleges implementing comprehensive college reform. Equity-minded coaches understand the unique social, cultural, and political challenges organizations and their members face in addressing equity. They are able to offer feedback, resources, and strategies to address organizational structures and processes, as well as the values, beliefs, and assumptions of practitioners who are employed by the organization.

The framework for equity-minded coaching is derived from research and theoretical writing in a variety of fields, including organizational change (Morgan 1986; Kezar 2001; Fullan 2001), adult learning (Mezirow 1981; Mezirow 2000; Cox 2015), organizational learning (Argyris 1978; Fiol and Lyles 1985; Kezar 2005), and organizational coaching (Hackman and Wageman, 2005; Knight 2009; Ciperon 2015; Cruz and Rosemond, 2017). The intersection of equity-minded coaching is articulated through coaching practices that support and challenge colleges to think meaningfully about the *why*, *what*, and *how* of equity in campus-wide reforms and organizational change.

As many researchers have noted, organizational change is complex and one size does not fit all types of organizational change (Bolman and Deal 2017; Kezar 2001). Put broadly, organizational change is the process through which organizational practices, policies, structures, and norms are reconsidered, modified, or transformed. Conditions for organizational change can be thought of through four domains: data use, critical analysis, organizational learning, and systems thinking. Evidence of how these domains are used to center equity-mindedness in college change models can be seen in the carefully considered and coordinated approaches of the Equity Scorecard ™ (Bensimon and Malcolm 2012) and Pathways to Results (Bragg, Bennett, and McCambly 2016). Knowing how equity-minded coaching applies to these four domains can be instrumental to helping colleges bring about change.

The first domain for coaches to consider in the organizational change process is *data use*, a concept that comprises the interpretive process that involves noticing or recognizing data, making meaning of it, and constructing implications for action (Coburn and Turner 2011). Coaches need to be comfortable with using data so that they can assist college practitioners in understanding its importance. Equity-minded coaches also understand how more intentional uses of data—specifically disaggregating data—and the ways in which data is considered can illuminate and inform outcomes specific to equity. The second domain of *critical analysis* is defined as a methodology that acknowledges the design and implementation of institutional policy (Allan, Iverson, and Ropers-Huilman 2010) and practice as a political and value-laden process. Many coaches are able to analyze reform activities through objective-based rubrics and reports, but equity-minded coaches take into consideration the factors of race, identity, and justice when considering measures of institutional progress and reform achievement. The

third domain of *organizational learning* oftentimes works in tandem to the other domains. Organizational learning is broadly defined as the learning processes that take place between individuals and groups at various levels of the organization. All coaches should be well versed in reflective practice techniques that lead to organizational learning, but equity-minded coaching expands the learning process to surface language, assumptions, and norms that undermine equitable outcomes in all aspects of reform. The fourth domain of organizational change that requires sy*stems thinking*. *S*upporting a holistic view of systems that operate with interrelated constituent parts, systems thinking is concerned with how systems work over time and within the context of larger systems, such as colleges and universities operating within a networked state system of higher education. Coaching that incorporates systems thinking is informed by the understanding that institutional challenges are complex and situated within layers of society and community. Equity-minded coaching furthers systems thinking by routinely considering the roles of structural and institutional racism in obfuscating institutional challenges and implementing practice-centered solutions that benefit racially minoritized groups. Coaching that understands organizational activities and decisions in all four domains through the principles of equity-mindedness supports practitioners in managing and exploring the complexity of the organizational change process—and potentially considering equity implications and opportunities in ways that were not considered before.

Coaching that understands organizational activities through the principles of equity-mindedness supports practitioners in exploring the complexity of the organizational change process, considering equity implications and opportunities in ways that were not considered before.

The vision of equity-minded coaching is not merely focused on those who consider themselves coaches working under the title of equity but is more widely applicable to coaches in all coaching capacities (data coaches, instructional coaches, etc.). Equity-minded coaching as an integrated approach within coaching programs provides for reform efforts and strategies that operationalize equity in diverse,

systemic, and innovative ways.

The salience of race in producing inequitable outcomes may be a familiar discussion for some, but how these outcomes converge at the intersection of professional practice and social identity often include difficult and sometime personal revelations for practitioners. For coaches that identify as white and have limited awareness of systems or conditions that impact racially minoritized groups, these are challenging conversations. Using critical reflection to navigate these difficult—but necessary—conversations, can be helpful to coaches and practitioners who are part of the racial majority (Gerhard 2018). What's more, equity-minded coaches can play an important role in helping practitioners to engage in critical reflective practice that enables them to understand and empathize with student experiences and perspectives that are inconsistent or sit in opposition with their own worldview. Equity-minded coaches understand how resistance, retrenchment, and "white fragility" (DiAngelo 2018) are situated within race-conscious reform efforts and are willing and prepared to address the complexity of cultural power and privilege at the personal and institutional levels. Through the continuous use of equity-minded coaching practices and equity-mindedness as a guiding framework, coaches may bring racial inequities to light in ways that contribute to transformative change.

It is important for coaches to understand that organizational change—and, more so, transformative change—is complex and that a variety of strategies to address different organizational types and contexts must be carefully considered and employed. Rather than using a single methodology, a multi-theory approach to organizational change stands a better chance of bringing transformative change to fruition and supporting sustained and adaptive change over time (Kezar 2014. Within each domain of organizational change are coaching practices that can be employed to further equity-based discussions and perspectives. Coaching practices refer to the activities, approaches, and techniques a coach utilizes in supporting organizations through the efforts that practitioners, students, and other stakeholders make to bring about change. Not all practices may be effective or relevant in every institutional context, but an awareness of the practices and an understanding of proficiency in those practices is a first step in growing equity-minded coaching capacity and preparing to support transformative change.

As Mintzberg et al. (1998 suggest, those involved in organizational change are often motivated by the particular challenges

of the organization rather than being pulled by general concepts or theories. SSC leadership and coaches looking to increase equity-minded coaching capacity and proficiency should spend time considering the diversity-to-equity continuum, and how the framework and principles of equity-mindedness relate to the particular role and responsibilities of coaches within their specific state networks. In light of those considerations, SSC leaders and coaches should consider why colleges have or have not chosen to explicitly incorporate equity within reform efforts; what college structures, policies, and practices might benefit from equity-minded coaching; and how coaches can increase equity-minded proficiencies in ways that are specific and strategic for their college partnerships. With a solid foundation of awareness and knowledge, coaches can advance their equity-minded coaching practice by integrating coaching insight, considerations, resources, and observations that center the value of racial equity within reform efforts and interactions.

Tools and Resources for Supporting Equity-Minded Coaching

To further support and encourage equity-minded coaching, CCRI has developed a suite of equity tools that assist coaches and the SSCN in understanding, preparing for, and applying equity-minded coaching practices. These tools are introduced briefly below, and full copies can be downloaded from CCRI's website, https://www.washington.edu/ccri/research-to-practice/c4c/, for use by SSC leadership and coaches:

CCRI Tools for Equity-Minded Coaching

Rubric of Equity-Minded Coaching Domains and Practices

The rubric dives deeper into equity-minded coaching with nine equity-minded coaching practices within four domains of organizational change, and provides example coaching questions, select resources, and recommended readings. This tool has been developed for new or seasoned coaches considering, preparing for, or incorporating equity-minded practices into their coaching work. The rubric may also be used for SSC leadership to reflect on, clarify, and consider what may be needed to build organizational capacity for equity-minded coaching within their specific state.

Glossary of Terms for Equity-Minded Coaching

To compliment the Equity-Minded Coaching Rubric and the Equity-Minded Coaching DOs and DON'Ts tools, CCRI has curated a complementary glossary to support a common understanding of the many terms that the tools provide. The glossary provides definitions for 30 key terms related to equity, equity-mindedness, and organizational change.

Equity-Minded Coaching DOs and DON'Ts

Distilling down the more extensive Equity-Minded Coaching Rubric, this tool highlights key practices and concepts for SSC leadership and coaches interested in building equity-minded coaching capacity. The tool is designed as an introduction to equity-minded coaching and should be used to initiate dialogue, reflection, and further exploration about how coaches and SSCs can incorporate equity into everyday practice, partnerships, and organizational structures.

Discussion Protocol, Practices, and Resources

This tool has been developed for new coaches preparing to structure coaching discussions with individual college leaders or leadership teams as well as SSCN executive directors working with coaches to prepare for and reflect on best ways to support college equity initiatives through dialogue and verbal feedback. The tool includes information on discussion protocols; an exercise to explore the Validate, Clarify, Stretch, and Sustain protocol; select protocol resources; and recommended readings to explore protocols further. SSC leadership may also choose to use this tool as an exercise to be completed with a cohort of coaches as part of a group onboarding or professional development process. Coaches can work together to explore when and how discussion protocols may be of use in various coaching environments.

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