2017-18

Annual Report

Student Success Network

in the California State University

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Report Highlights

The California State University (CSU) Student Success Network complements student success efforts underway in the CSU by offering forums for sustained, cross-campus, cross-role, professional learning opportunities for "middle leaders"—faculty, staff, and administrators at the campus level who work closely with students. Student participation is welcomed and encouraged.

The Network offers several activities: day-long convenings on topics of importance to the campuses, a year-long Middle Leadership Academy that provides professional learning opportunities for cross-role campus teams, and applied research projects focused on issues related to students' experiences. These activities are supported by communications efforts to share learnings with campuses across the CSU.

In its second year as a state-supported effort, the Network released its first two publications, launched the Middle Leadership Academy, supported two convenings hosted by CSU campuses, engaged an external developmental evaluator, launched a blog to share evidence-based information from across the system, and continued to cultivate key relationships within the CSU.

Network activities are free for participants.

About the CSU Student Success Network

The CSU Student Success Network brings together students, faculty, staff, and administrators to collaborate, experiment, and share evidence with each other in support of system goals such as increasing graduation rates, closing critical opportunity and outcomes gaps, and supporting equity-based inquiry and action. The obstacles to success in higher education are more pronounced for students from low-income backgrounds, students of color, and students who are the first in their generation to attend college—demographic groups that together represent a large proportion of CSU students and the state's population.

There are many student success efforts underway at every level in the CSU to support educational opportunities and close opportunity and outcomes gaps. As a complement to ongoing efforts, the Network offers forums for sustained, cross-campus, cross-role, evidence-based, professional learning opportunities. In this second year, teams from 19 campuses participated in at least one Network activity. Some of those teams returned to their campuses to start new initiatives stemming from their experience in the Network; for example, after a convening on data use, two institutional researchers from CSU San Marcos launched a data fellows program to promote data-informed decisionmaking on their campus. The issues the Network takes on are not simple, nor are the solutions clear cut or necessarily the same at different campuses. Through collaboration, experimentation, and the sharing of evidence, the Network strives to support meaningful connections across and within campuses that bridge professional roles and responsibilities.

The Network is facilitated by the Education Insights Center (EdInsights) at Sacramento State. EdInsights is a research and policy center devoted to student success and the public benefits of education; its mission is to inform and improve policymaking and practice for K–12 education, community colleges, and public universities.

Key Activities

Foundational to the Network's Theory of Action is that supporting improvements in student learning, engagement, progression, and completion in the CSU does not need to start with people in formal leadership positions. People who work closely with students, regardless of job title, have the power and relationships to make change from where they sit. Developing and supporting these middle leadership skills is at the heart of the Network.

The Network offers a suite of activities and communications resources to help middle leaders access and use evidence-based strategies that help students reach their educational goals. By creating both physical and virtual spaces for collaboration and information-sharing across various roles and responsibilities in the CSU, the Network works to facilitate the connections that make these advancements possible.

The Network offers four primary activities to support student success:

- **Convenings.** The Network offers opportunities for middle leaders in the CSU to come together across institutions and roles to focus on issues of practice that affect students. During the day-long convenings, participants focus on core problems or challenges, discuss evidence-based strategies and opportunities for progress, and take steps to create action plans. Convenings provide opportunities to cultivate cross-campus, cross-role relationships and access resources that can strengthen student success efforts.

- **Middle Leadership Academy.** The Academy is a structured, year-long, cross-role, team-based, professional learning experience. Teams of faculty, staff, administrators, and students from multiple CSU campuses commit to attending three intensive three-day seminars in which they gain new knowledge, skills, and relationships; identify a common problem faced by students; analyze data together to better understand the problem; identify possible solution(s) grounded in a rigorous understanding of the current evidence; and create, implement, and iterate on possible solutions that can be understood and used by others in the CSU.

  The Middle Leadership Academy is modeled after Leading from the Middle by the Research and Planning Group of the California Community Colleges.

- **Research.** The Network fosters learning about students' experiences and creates new knowledge. Network research is driven by the needs of campuses, and reports are written with a focus on supporting evidence-based improvements to institutional student success efforts.

- **Communications.** The Network provides channels of engagement for members to communicate with one another, and venues for participants to share experiences and lessons learned with the broader CSU community. By disseminating new knowledge and targeted information, the Network works to ensure that middle leaders are empowered with the knowledge and evidence they need to enrich student experiences.

2017-18 Accomplishments

External Network Activities

Organized Convenings. The Network held two convenings in 2017-18: one on transfer hosted by Long Beach and the other on students' experiences in the first year at Northridge. Interest in Network convenings continues to grow, with 70 participants from 14 campuses at the transfer convening and 90 participants from 15 campuses (17 teams in total) at the first-year student convening.

Four campuses attended convenings for the first time this year, bringing the total number of campuses that have participated in Network activities to 19. To support continued learning and provide access to requested resources after the one-day events, the Network piloted using a webinar after the transfer convening. In the webinar, Cal Poly Pomona provided information about how it supports transfer students through its PolyTransfer program. Approximately 40 people participated from nine campuses.

Launched the Middle Leadership Academy. In November 2017, the Network held the first of three intensive Academy seminars, followed by sessions in February and June. The Academy blends leadership development with a close examination of existing research and promising practices to create opportunities to connect with other middle leaders on shared problems of practice. For this pilot year, the Academy provided professional learning for cross-functional teams from nine campuses—teams that were leading the implementation of math reforms on their respective campuses. Presentations by math reform experts from the College of Coastal Georgia and the California Acceleration Project provided Academy members with a cross-system perspective on these initiatives.

Conducted and Disseminated Applied Research. The Network published two research studies in 2017-18. The first, "From Scatterplot to Roadmap," examined the current state of student success reform efforts on all campuses in the system. To provide a deeper look at some key issues, representatives from four campuses participated in interviews. The report provided contextual information about possibilities for and obstacles to coordinated systemic integration of student success efforts. The report was published in August 2017.

The second report, "Get Me from Point A to Point B," explored students' experiences in the CSU. The study included a survey and focus groups with students at three campuses. The study investigated the personal and institutional obstacles that students experience as they navigate through college on the pathway to timely graduation. The report was published in February 2018.

Internal Network Activities

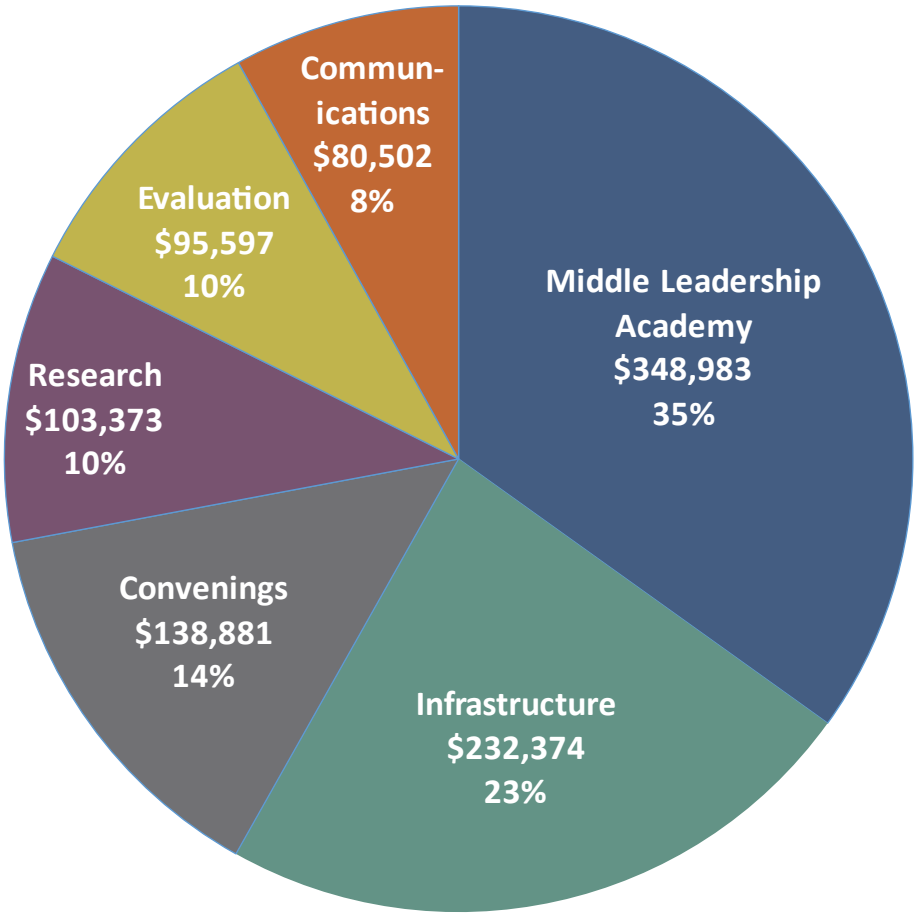
Retained an External Evaluator. As part of the Network's commitment to transparency and evidence-based decision making, it contracted with HTA Consulting for a developmental evaluation. The evaluator reviewed the Network's foundational documents and attended all Network activities to provide a detailed illustration of the Network's progress and to inform continuous improvement. The findings included the following: 1) participation rates increased over time for all activities, 2) participants found the convenings and Academy useful for helping them develop an action plan and to improve their professional development, and 3) the Academy helped participants build confidence in their ability to implement change at their campus.

The evaluation also helped to make clear the need for a different approach, one focused less on the logistics of specific Network events than on the broader issues around Network development, such as coherence across its activities, a better understanding of what it means to be a member of the Network, and the connection to campuses and participants. Therefore, the Network changed the scope and decreased the budget for the evaluation. Given the change in direction for the evaluation, the Network intends to secure a new evaluator during the upcoming fiscal year.

Improved Administrative and Financial Systems. The Network hired its first and only dedicated staff person—a finance and operations coordinator who is responsible for creating and managing budgets across project work strands, providing up-to-date reporting to staff and the Advisory Board, and developing effective administrative and financial practices. This replaced the operational support services provided in year one by Sacramento State's College of Continuing Education.

Financial Report

The Network received $1.1 million from the State of California for fiscal year 2017-18. At the time of publication, the Network has spent nearly $1 million (90.9%) of the allotted funds. Any funds remaining at the end of the fiscal year will rollover and may be used in future years.



Figures are based on the best estimate at the time of publication. University Enterprises, Inc., Sacramento State's nonprofit auxiliary organization, has not yet provided reconciled financial records for June 2018.

Infrastructure costs are defined by the Network as expenses incurred to support backbone operations such as salary costs, Advisory Board meeting expenses, and office supply costs.

Advisory Board

About the Advisory Board

All major decisions of the CSU Student Success Network are guided by an Advisory Board—a group of leaders from 11-13 campuses across the CSU who represent a range of roles and responsibilities. Advisory Board members meet in person twice per year, and participate in conference calls and other ad hoc conversations about key Network decisions in between meetings.

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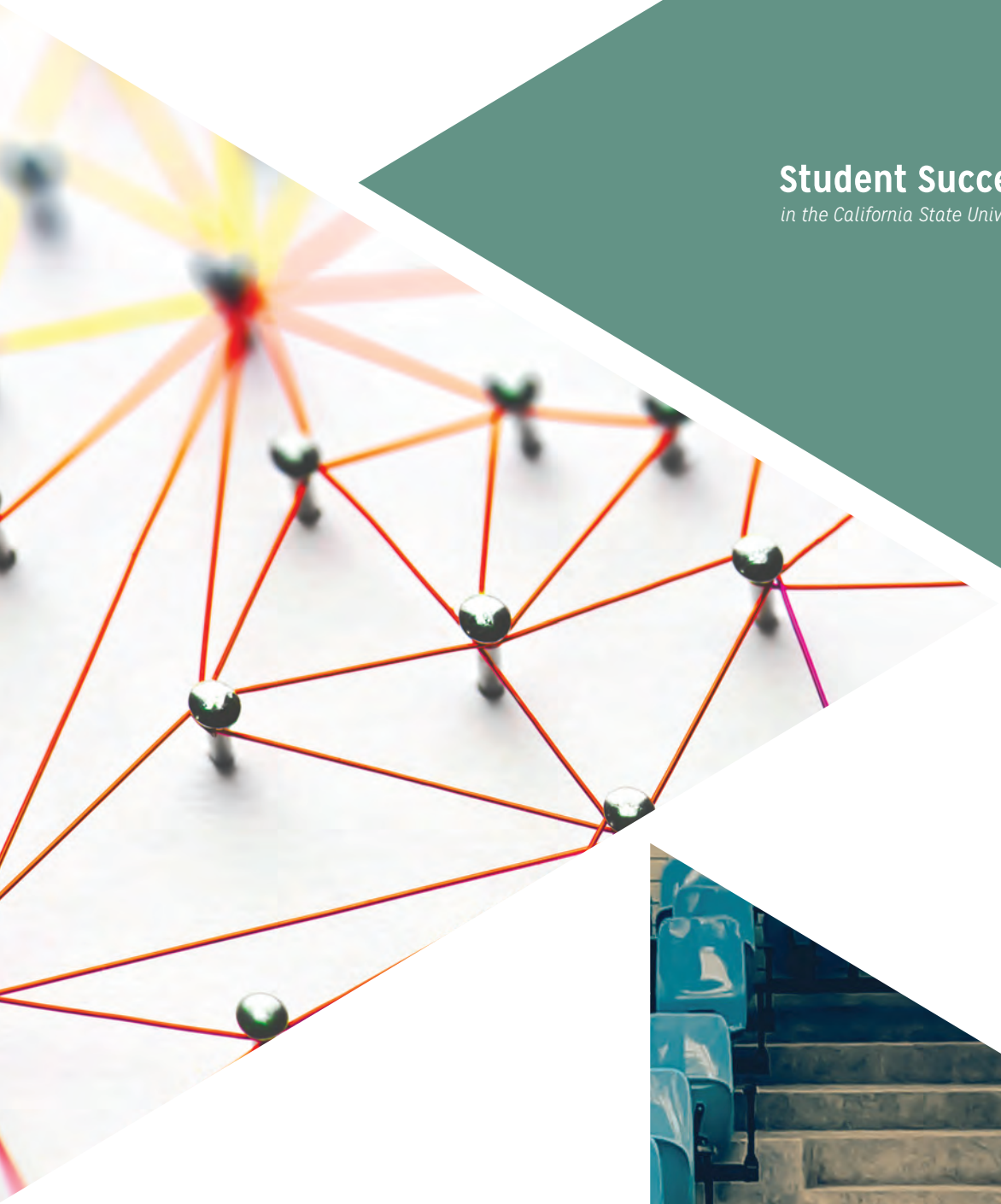
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