10 years

Ten Years of Advancing Student Success and Equity Across the CSU

Annual Report 2025–26



IMAGE: Cal State Fullerton Commencement, 2026

Student Success Network
in the California State University

A Letter from Education Insights Center's Executive Director

Ten year anniversaries are marked with tin or aluminum, which highlights the flexibility and resilience that an endeavor needs to reach this milestone. As we prepared our tenth annual report, I looked back at the CSU Student Success Network's (the Network) conceptual framework and first ever annual report. In 2015, the Education Insights Center (EdInsights), a self-support research, evaluation, and professional learning center at Sac State, facilitated an iterative and collaborative process with representatives from 12 CSU campuses to conceptualize the Network as a cross-campus, collaborative space focused on student success. EdInsights continues to function as facilitator of the Network in line with our purpose to inform and advance antiracist policy and practice in California's higher education systems.

In our first year as a state-supported effort, the Network's focus was on developing its infrastructure and building out each strand of work. Notably, we established an Interim Advisory Board and recruited the first cohort for the Student Success Labs that went on to become our flagship Middle Leadership Academy (Academy). This last year, the Network's Advisory Board met six times to advance the work of the Network, including giving unanimous approval for a second round of Equity in Action grants. We also welcomed Iqbal Atwal as EdInsights' new Professional Learning Director, a role that is pivotal in working with the Advisory Board Chair, Strand Directors, and staff to facilitate the Network. The Academy leadership team spent the last year using feedback and data from the eight Academy cohorts to strengthen its learning objectives, structure, and participant experience.

These are just a few examples of how the Network has grown and adapted over the past ten years. It has done so amidst tremendous change at every level, including at EdInsights, within the Network itself, across the CSU and higher education, and throughout the broader social and political landscape. In 2025-26, the Network created opportunities for middle leaders to connect, build relationships and skills, and share evidence on: equitable student success policies and practices related to maintaining "servingness," even as federal support for Minority Serving Institutions was eliminated; understanding perspectives on generative AI; and exploring holistic advising reform in alignment with the CSU Student Success Framework. This tenth annual report highlights how the Network has stayed true to its focus while keeping pace with the most pressing issues of our time. Here's to the next ten years!

In solidarity,

Madeleine R. Kerrick, Ph.D.

Madeleine R. Kerrick

Executive Director, EdInsights



A Letter from the Advisory Board Chair

Welcome to the CSU Student Success A Network's tenth annual report, highlighting our accomplishments from the 2025-26 academic year and looking forward to a new year of action and advocacy for CSU students. The previous academic year was my first as chair of the Network Advisory Board, where I was able to see first-hand the passion and power of middle leaders across the system, leaders who have been able to connect through the Network to both inspire and strategize.

In Fall 2025, the Network brought together 110 faculty, staff, administrators, and students to deeply investigate the concept of Servingness in the CSU. What does it mean to truly serve a traditionally underserved student population amid significant changes at the state and federal policy levels? While programs across the system have been forced to adapt as funding sources suddenly shifted to other federal priorities and middle leaders have had to think on their feet to manage operational challenges, what have we done on our campuses to ensure that servingness remains a core part of our identities? The powerful discussions at this convening have reverberated throughout the Network and the system and have had a major impact on our activities, shaping not only the call for teams for our next Middle Leadership Academy but also providing the core of our call for proposals for the second round of Equity in Action (EIA) grants in the spring. This grant program provided $220,000 to 11 CSU campuses across 7 projects, including a five-campus consortium that plans to scale up the CSU Hispanic-Serving Institution Action Research Network. The Network is incredibly proud to use the EIA program to highlight the incredible work of the system's middle leaders.

I encourage you to take a look through the report and read more about these and the Network's other activities, including our spring convening on academic advising and the Asian American, Native Hawaiian, and Pacific Islander Middle Leadership Academy. This is a time of change on all fronts—economic, social, political, and technological—and we all feel the impacts of these changes at every level, from the day-to-day work with students at our desks and in our classrooms, to the difficult decisions in our executive boardrooms, all the way up to the debates of our policymakers. Times like these can feel simultaneously overwhelming and isolating; it is easy to feel discouraged and powerless on your own. That is why we built the Student Success Network: to connect middle leaders, to highlight their work, and to ensure that no one needs to feel like they are in this fight alone. So join us this next academic year as we connect, inspire, and learn together!

Sincerely,

Adam Petersen, Ed.D.

Adam Petersen

Advisory Board Chair, CSU Student Success Network

Assistant Dean, Office of Undergraduate Studies,

Cal State San Marcos



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Middle Leadership Academy (Academy)

During 2025–26, the Middle Leadership Academy (Academy) engaged in a development year focused on strengthening the Academy's learning objectives, structure, and participant experience. Led by Dr. Ellie Ertle, Interim Vice Provost for Undergraduate Education and Academic Success at Chico State, the redesign process engaged the Academy leadership team in reviewing participant feedback, examining prior Academy data, and identifying opportunities for improvement.

Key areas of focus included:

- **Academy redesign:** The leadership team met twice in person and worked throughout the year to redesign the Academy as a yearlong experience with three in person sessions and virtual connection between sessions.
- **"Servingness" as a central focus:** The redesigned Academy uses servingness as a throughline, connecting Academy learning more intentionally with the Network's broader work and reinforcing a sustained focus on equitable student success.
- **Data informed team projects:** Campus teams will identify a servingness concern and use data, evidence, and promising practices to better understand the issue and develop strategies for institutional change.
- **Application and participant experience:** The team redesigned the application process and timeline to better align team selection with the goals and learning objectives of the Academy.
- **Facilitator development:** A more robust facilitator recruitment, onboarding, and training process was created to strengthen facilitators' capacity to guide equity focused change. This work also creates opportunities to build a broader pool of experienced facilitators who may support future Network activities.

The redesigned Academy will launch in 2026–27, providing campus teams with a more sustained structure for learning, collaboration, and action.

AANHPI Middle Leadership Academy (AMLA)

The Asian American, Native Hawaiian, and Pacific Islander Middle Leadership Academy (AMLA), a partnership between the CSU AANHPI Student Achievement Program (CSU ASAP) and the Network, held its second Academy experience in Winters, California, during summer 2026. A total of 97 participants representing all 22 campuses took part in the June and July sessions. Campus teams included students, staff, faculty, and administrators working together to advance equitable outcomes for diverse AANHPI student populations.

Highlights included:

- **Campus progress and strategy development:** Teams reflected on progress made during the previous academic year and refined strategies for advancing equitable student success, including efforts serving first generation and other underserved AANHPI students.
- **Data and evaluation:** Teams strengthened plans for collecting data, documenting outcomes, and communicating the impact of campus initiatives to CSU stakeholders.
- **Middle leadership development:** AMLA expanded its emphasis on the Network's Middle Leadership framework. Dr. Ellie Ertle and Dr. Madeleine Kerrick introduced participants to middle leadership concepts and facilitated activities focused on organizational structures, positionality, and leading institutional change.
- **Applied learning:** Participants engaged in case study clinics and cross campus discussions focused on common institutional challenges, providing opportunities to examine strategies and learn from colleagues across the CSU.
- **Leadership perspectives:** Presidents Emeriti Ellen Junn and Leroy Morishita participated in a Fireside Chat focused on leadership journeys, cultural identity, collaboration, positionality, and sustaining student success efforts within complex institutional environments.
- **Systemwide connection:** Representatives from CSU ASAP, the California Commission on Asian and Pacific Islander American Affairs, and Sacramento State's Central Office for the Advancement of Black Student Success contributed perspectives on systemwide priorities and opportunities for continued collaboration.

The 2026 AMLA built upon the inaugural Academy by deepening connections across campuses, strengthening middle leadership capacity, and supporting teams as they moved from program development toward implementation, evaluation, and sustained impact.

AANHPI Middle Leadership Academy (AMLA), cont'd.

The 2026 Comprehensive AMLA Evaluation Report identified several lessons and key takeaways shared by participants:

"I learned that we are not alone in this work and that connecting with colleagues across CSU campuses provides valuable perspective, encouragement, and practical strategies."

"I gained a better understanding of how to navigate campus leadership and institutional dynamics, including the importance of building relationships, managing up, and knowing when to seek support."

"I learned the value of using data and evaluation to inform our work, while ensuring that data are used meaningfully to understand and improve outcomes for AANHPI students."



Image: AMLA Group Photo

Convenings

During 2025–26, the Network hosted two timely convenings that brought CSU middle leaders together to learn from colleagues, explore emerging challenges, and identify strategies for advancing student success. Led by Interim Convenings Director Dr. Larissa Mercado-Lopez in partnership with Network Fellow Melinda Karp, the convenings focused on "servingness" in the fall and holistic advising in the spring.

Key highlights included:

Beyond Designation: Thinking Intentionally about Servingness in the CSU: Held November 5, 2025, the convening brought together approximately 101 participants to examine what it means for institutions to move beyond designation toward intentionally serving students. Two panels featured CSU students, staff, faculty, and administrators leading work related to Hispanic Serving Institutions (HSI), Asian American and Native American Pacific Islander-Serving Institution (AANAPISI), and Black Serving Institution efforts. Participants explored approaches to operationalizing servingness, using data to support this work, and applying servingness concepts within their own campus contexts. Following the convening, the Network published a Tips and Strategies Memo highlighting actionable approaches for institutionalizing servingness and advancing racial and educational equity.



Participants shared the following about the "most valuable part of the event":

> **"The emphasis on 'servingness' and 'MSI.' I've been in the CSU for 17 years and I haven't heard those explicit terms."**

> **"The opportunity to network and engage with individuals who do similar work as they best understand the challenges, trials, and tribulations. There is a sense of validation related to how your own experiences are realized and viewed by others."**

> **"I appreciated the breakout sessions interactions... The topic is so important. Despite the designation, the framework is critical in our daily work."**

Convenings, cont'd.

Supporting Students Together: Strengthening Student Advising in the CSU: Held April 21, 2026, the spring convening brought together at least 90 participants to explore holistic advising in support of CSU goals related to retention, degree completion, career preparedness, and post-graduation success. Leaders from San Francisco State and Sonoma State shared campus approaches to centralized advising, coordination with career centers, data literacy, digital tools, and change management. Participants engaged with presenters and considered how their own campuses could strengthen coordination and build more holistic, data informed advising systems. The Network subsequently published a blog featuring insights from the convening Q&A.

Participants shared the following about the "most valuable part of the event":

> **"Strategizing how we can support students and hearing how other campuses do this, especially with campuses that started similarly to ours."**

> **"The breakdown of the systemic approach both Sonoma and SF had and how those changes to their approach came to be. Sparked the desire to reevaluate our system with data."**

One participant summarized the Network's broader value:

> **"The Student Success Network continues to be on the cutting edge of providing the most up to date information and training modules to current and aspiring professionals in the field of higher education."**

Looking ahead, the Network will continue conversations about holistic advising in 2026-27, with a particular emphasis on career advising in response to participant feedback and questions raised during the spring convening.



Evaluation

The Network evaluated two events in the 2025-26 fiscal year including the following Convenings:

- "Beyond Designation: Thinking Intentionally about Servingness in the CSU," in November 2025.
  - **Post-event survey: 101 surveys distributed, 17 respondents**
- "Supporting Students Together: Strengthening Student Advising in the CSU," in April 2026.
  - **Post-event survey: 90 surveys distributed, 36 respondents**

Our evaluation team also worked on the following activities:

- finalizing and releasing the 2022 Equity in Action Grant final report;
- analyzing LGBTQIA2S+ Communities of Practice co-leads focus group data and drawing upon findings in reports and blogs; and
- wrapping up the seven-part Academy Impact Brief publication series and ending the series with a reflection paper on building cross-campus collaboration across the CSU.

Research

The Network Advisory Board Research Subcommittee spent the year planning the launch of an open access, peer-reviewed society journal to be run by the Network. The journal will operate as a platform to share work and research happening across the CSU system, about the CSU system, that may otherwise go unseen outside of the office, project, or department for which it was created. Middle leaders from across the CSU will have the opportunity to contribute as authors, reviewers, development coaches, and editorial board members. The stated purpose of the journal is as follows:

- Using an action research frame, The Middle Leader journal advances knowledge about evidence-based, problem-solving practices that enhance student success in the CSU by providing a platform for middle leaders to collaboratively engage with, learn from, and share knowledge across the system.

Details regarding calls for papers and opportunities to serve on the journal are forthcoming. The journal will launch in 2027.

Equity in Action Grant Program

The Equity in Action (EIA) Grant Program puts resources directly back into the CSU system to help middle leaders identify, understand, and disrupt inequities affecting students' opportunities to learn, engage, progress, and complete their educational goals. Rather than supporting research alone, EIA emphasizes putting evidence into action and learning from those efforts to inform meaningful institutional change.

This year, the Network received an incredible response: 59 proposals from 16 CSU campuses, demonstrating the depth of commitment and innovative thinking taking place across the system.

Projects were considered through two funding opportunities. Scaling Grants of up to $100,000 help established initiatives expand their reach or impact and were awarded to Sacramento State in partnership with CSU San Marcos, Cal Poly Humboldt, CSU Channel Islands, and CSU San Bernardino. Pilot Grants of up to $20,000 were awarded to the following campuses to support new or smaller scale innovations: Cal Poly Pomona, Cal Poly San Luis Obispo, Chico State, Stanislaus State, CSU Dominguez Hills, and Sonoma State. The 2026 grant competition also prioritized collaboration across campus divisions and institutions, as well as projects that provide direct support to students.

Together, these awards represent investments in both promising new ideas and established approaches with the potential for broader impact. Just as importantly, the projects will contribute to a growing body of knowledge about what it takes to implement and sustain equity focused change across the CSU. Funded teams will document their progress and outcomes so that lessons from their work can inform continued learning across the system.

We extend our congratulations to all of this year's funded teams and our sincere appreciation to every campus team that submitted a proposal. We look forward to learning alongside our 2026 grantees and sharing their progress as they put Equity in Action across the CSU.

2026 Scaling Grant Award

Sacramento State

In partnership with...

California State University San Marcos

Channel Islands, California State University

Cal Poly Humboldt

California State University San Bernardino

2026 Pilot Grant Awardees

Cal Poly Pomona

California State University Stanislaus

Cal Poly San Luis Obispo

CSUDH, California State University, Dominguez Hills

California State University Chico

Sonoma State University

Communications

In 2025–26, the Communications team continued to strengthen how the Network connects middle leaders, shares learning, and elevates perspectives from across the CSU. Communications remained an important tool for helping the Network respond to a changing higher education landscape while keeping student success at the center.

Key achievements and areas of focus included:

- **Network Storytelling:** The Network continued to elevate diverse perspectives through Voices blogs and publications addressing timely topics including generative AI, justice impacted students, LGBTQIA2S+ students, cross campus collaboration, and equitable approaches to reenrollment. The Network published 15 Voices Blogs, including a four-part series about GenAI on CSU campuses that gauged diverse perspectives from students, staff, and faculty.
- **Digital Engagement:** The Network continued to grow its digital presence, particularly on LinkedIn, gaining more than 231 followers since expanding its social media and communications capacity. Education focused content, Voices blogs, and convening resources generated particularly strong engagement. Direct outreach expanded to over 2,470 middle leaders across the 22 campuses. The Network's monthly newsletter has a 37% open rate, reflecting its value and usefulness to recipients. The average email open rate for the education industry, including higher education, varies by source but generally falls between 25% and 35% so we are well above average.



Communications, cont'd.

- **Sharing Resources and Opportunities**: Newsletters, targeted emails, social media, and website improvements connected middle leaders with Network publications, convenings, Equity in Action projects, Advisory Board opportunities, and other resources.
- **Responsive Communications:** The team continued to adapt its content, messaging, and outreach strategies in response to a changing higher education environment, while creating opportunities for middle leaders to learn from and connect with one another across the CSU.

Together, these efforts position communications as more than a vehicle for sharing information. They help create the connective infrastructure of the Network, making knowledge visible, elevating middle leader expertise, and creating more opportunities for people across the CSU to learn from and connect with one another.

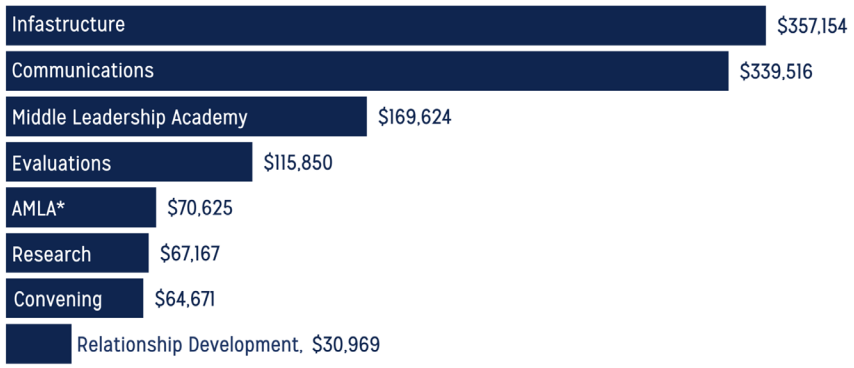
Stay Connected Through Our Monthly Newsletter

Subscribe to the CSU Student Success Network for monthly updates featuring student success resources, CSU campus initiatives, new blogs and research, professional learning opportunities, and ways to engage with colleagues across the system. **Scan the QR code to subscribe and receive the latest Network news directly in your inbox.**

Financial Report

The Network received $1.1 million from the State of California for fiscal year 2025-26 and total expenses were $1,215,218 for the year. Carryover funds were used to cover the coverage.* The Network plans to continue using carryover funds where appropriate to support its key goals, including expansion of current activities and increasing staff capacity. Infrastructure costs support all core Network functions and include salaries and benefits, general meeting expenses, supplies, and services. While the Equity in Action Grant request for proposals and awardee notifications went out in 2025-26, awards were sent out in 2026-27 and will be reflected in spending for that fiscal year.

Figure 1. Network Spending Itemized by Strand, 2025-26



The total spending for the 2025-26 fiscal year was $1,215,218.

*Funding for the Network's AMLA work was provided by CSU ASAP and not paid for by the Network's allocation or carryover.

Advisory Board, 2025–26

The Network brings together a community of collaborators committed to advancing student success across the CSU. Its work is guided by an Advisory Board composed of representatives from CSU campuses and the Chancellor's Office who serve in a range of roles. The Board meets throughout the year to provide oversight and direction for Network activities. All 22 campuses have had at least one Advisory Board member serve as a Network liaison.

First Name	Last Name	Title	Campus/Entity
Brianne	Davila	Associate Dean and Professor of Sociology	Cal Poly Pomona
Jennifer	Eichstedt	Professor, Department of Sociology	Cal Poly Humboldt
Ellie	Clifford Ertle	Interim Vice Provost of Undergraduate Education & Academic Success	Chico State
kyzyl	fenno-smith	Associate Librarian, Department of Information Studies	Cal State East Bay
Lisa	Guzman	Project Director	CSU San Bernardino
Doreen	Wright	Assistant Vice President for Student Affairs	CSU Channel Islands
Duan	Jackson	Systemwide Director, Student Advising Initiatives	CSU Chancellor's Office
Susanna	Jones	Professor and First-Year Experience Faculty Director	San Francisco State
Nadine	Kelley	Associate Vice President, Student Affairs and Dean of Students	Sacramento State
Michelle	Lopez	Senior Assistant Dean for Student Success	San Diego State
Larissa	Mercado-Lopez	Department Chair and Professor	Fresno State
Adam	Petersen	Assistant Dean, Office of Undergraduate Studies	Cal State San Marcos
Jessica	Stern	Dean, College of Humanities and Social Sciences	Cal State Fullerton
Arnab	Mukherjea	Professor of Public Health	Cal State East Bay
Svetlana V.	Tyutina	Professor of Spanish, Graduate Program Director	Cal State Northridge
Emily	Acosta Lewis	Communications and Media Professor	Sonoma State
Aimee	Arreygue	Director, Student Success Center	Cal State Dominguez Hills

Acknowledgements

The design of this report was inspired by the traditional ten-year wedding anniversary gift of aluminum and tin. This gift is widely acknowledged in both the United Kingdom and the United States. As the CSU Student Success Network (Network) reached this milestone, the element of aluminum fits appropriately with this anniversary as it highlights the flexibility and resilience the Network has undergone through the various obstacles that have been presented over the past decade. Visual design and layout by Benjamin Ferguson.

The Network would like to thank the following authors who contributed to the report: Iqbal Atwal, Ellie Clifford Ertle, Jeanine Cunningham, Laura Diep, Madeleine Kerrick, Larissa Mercado Lopez, Arnab Mukherjea, and Adam Petersen.

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