Student Success Network
in the California State University

A Pivotal Year in Addressing Equity:

Progress Toward Outcomes But Systemic Barriers Remain

Annual Report 2022-23
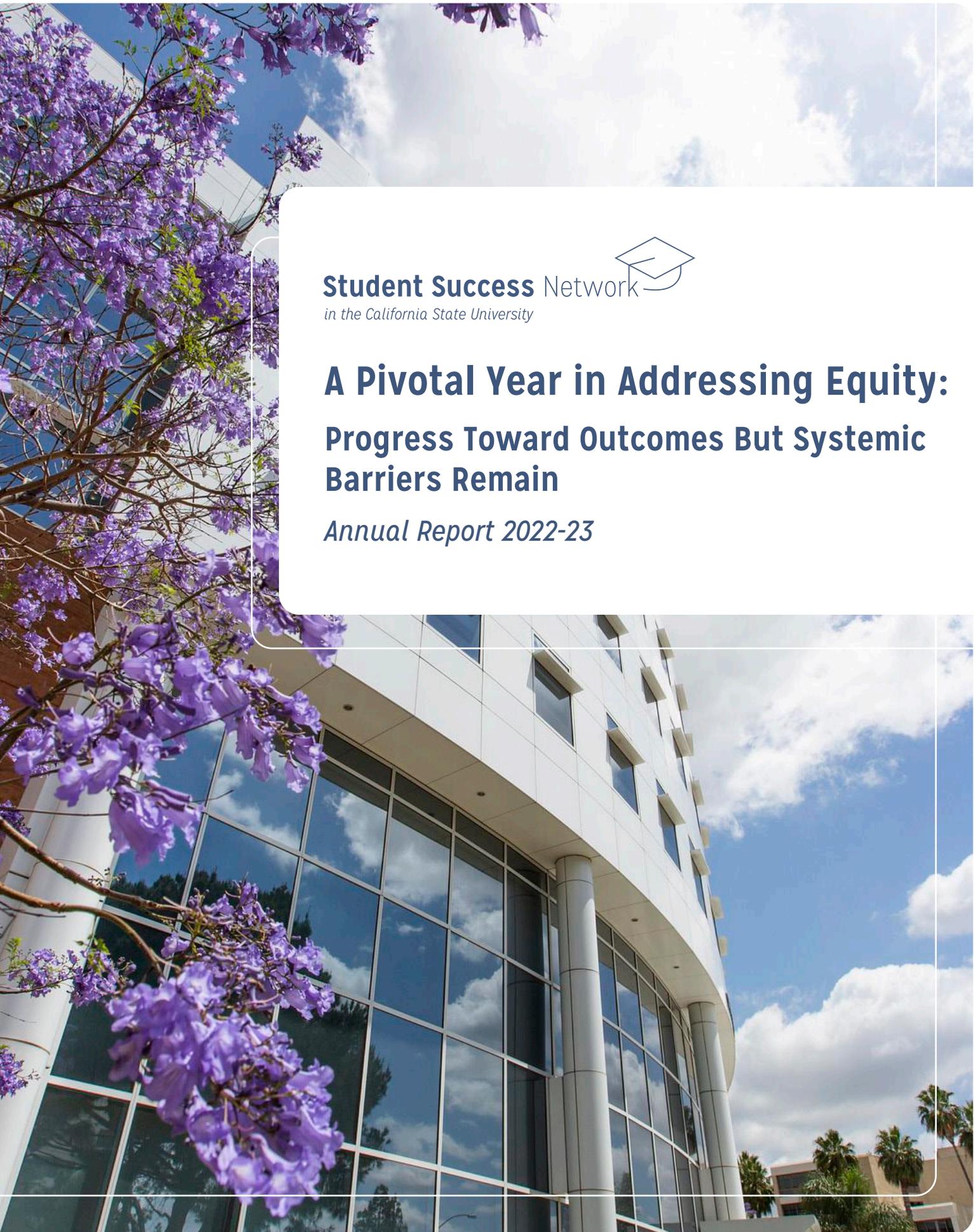
Welcome back!

In its sixth full year, the CSU Student Success Network (Network) reached important milestones during 2022-23 in supporting campuses and middle leaders in increasing equitable student success. We are very proud to report these outcomes, particularly considering the pivots that the Network made and the challenges that CSU students, faculty, staff, and administrators faced during the COVID-19 pandemic.

According to an external evaluation conducted this year,[1] the Network has achieved most of its short- and some of its middle-term outcomes. These include (1) **increasing awareness** among participating middle leaders regarding reducing barriers to success on campus for Students of Color, first-generation students, and low-income students, and (2) **changing behaviors** regarding information sharing, relationship building, and coordination to increase equitable student success, including campus projects developed through Network activities.

The report also found that **systemic barriers to equitable student success persist** across the CSU and that **many middle leaders continue to feel ill-equipped to address them** on their own. This suggests that our work remains crucial in supporting CSU staff, faculty, and administrators in working together to address equitable student success on their campus. Making progress in **changing systemic conditions** are longer-term goals that are front and center for the Network over the next years, now that we have evolved from an emergent to an established network supporting CSU middle leaders and aligned with the equity goals of the Chancellor's Office.

> **"If the Network does not exist to keep the fire burning in this important work, with these ideas, strategies, and innovative approaches, then we have nothing in the CSU to keep us thinking and talking about them."**
>
> – Middle Leader & Network Participant

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[1] Many of the quotes and data in this annual report are drawn from an internal preliminary draft report from the Network's external evaluator, Informing Change, CSU Student Success Network Mid-Point Impact Report (June 2023).

We thank the many students, faculty, staff, and administrators who participated in, facilitated, or directed our activities during 2022-23. We are grateful to our Advisory Board members, who helped guide our work. We also thank our institutional partners who make our work possible, including the State of California, the Chancellor's Office, The Kresge Foundation, Sacramento State University (where we are housed), and all 23 campuses of the CSU.

Wherever you are working in the CSU, we invite you to join us.

Sincerely,

The Network Leadership Team

Ioakim Boutakidis, Ph.D.
Interim Academy Director

Dylan Lohmeyer
Interim Operations Director

Kalifa Madden
Communications Manager

Madeleine Kerrick, Ph.D.
Research and Evaluation Director

Larissa M. Mercado-López, Ph.D.
Conference Director

Shonda Goward, Ed.D.
Convenings Director
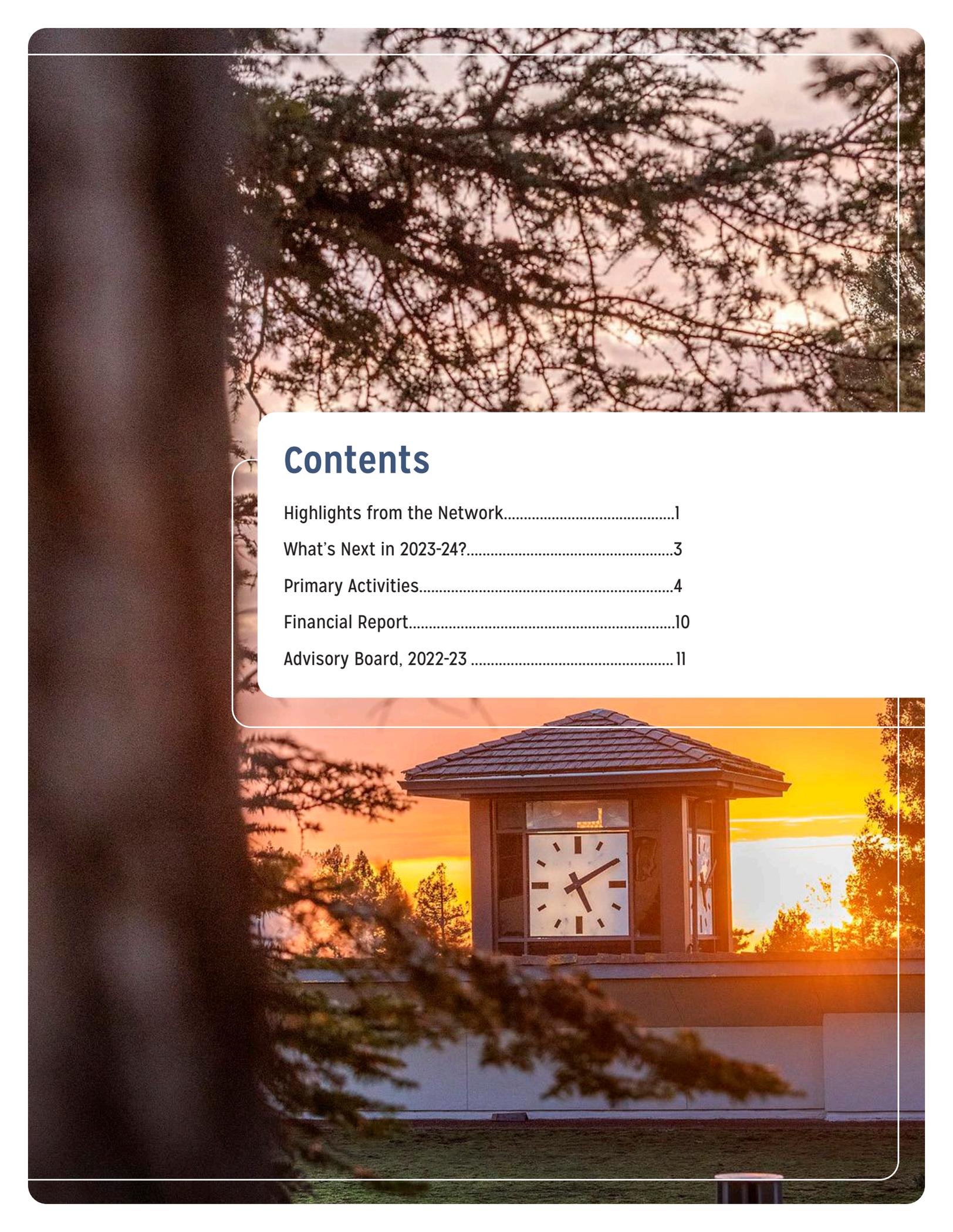
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Highlights from the CSU Student Success Network

Key Outcomes from the First Five Years

An external evaluation of the Network found that over 2,000 staff, faculty, and administrators from all 23 CSU campuses have participated in, or facilitated, Network activities during our first five years.[2] Sacramento, Fresno, Fullerton, Long Beach, Pomona, Bakersfield, and San Marcos had the highest number of participants. Across the campuses, classified staff accounted for 38% of participants, followed by 35% for administrators and 20% for faculty.

Short-term objectives: Awareness. The evaluation found "strong evidence" that the Network is **changing awareness and building these leadership skills:**[3]

- Participating middle leaders are increasingly aligned in their understanding of the systemic challenges to student success in the CSU.

- They are developing new relationships across campuses and are retaining those connections.

- They are finding "like-minded" colleagues within and across campuses.

- They are seeking opportunities to engage in discussions with others about equity, and they are discussing barriers to equity on their campuses.

Mid-term objectives: Actions on Campuses. The report found that the Network has facilitated the implementation of many **equity-focused projects.** Of 32 campus projects audited that had been developed through the Network, two-thirds (21) had been implemented. In addition, the evaluation found "some evidence" that the Network is **changing behaviors which support leadership actions** on campuses:

- Participating middle leaders are using a common language to define equity and to describe barriers to student success.

- They are communicating with one another at least three times per year informally outside Network gatherings.

- They have taken action to raise awareness among colleagues of systemic barriers to student success.

- They are applying research and evidence produced by the Network to advance institutional change efforts.

Long-term objectives: Systemic Change. Even though the Network is only emerging from its early years, the evaluation found "some evidence" of potential **changes to systemic conditions** in the CSU:

- Participating middle leaders have been promoted within the CSU system to positions with wider decision-making power (e.g., director, dean, provost).

- Campuses are applying research and evidence produced by the Network to advance institutional change efforts. In particular, the Network's research, Knowledge Center, and other resources are

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[2] Informing Change. (June 2023). CSU Student Success Network mid-point impact report. Preliminary draft, internal only.

[3] Evaluation findings are based on surveys, interviews, testimonials, and other data collected over the Network's first five years.

supporting equity programming across CSU campuses, with middle leaders using these resources "to inform or enhance department programs and other student support initiatives."

- Student-focused innovations shared at Network events (e.g., transfer centers) have begun to scale across the system.

- Data and research are being used regularly in decision-making processes.

Nonetheless, the report also found that **systemic barriers to equitable student success persist** across the CSU, and **many middle leaders continue to feel ill-equipped to address them** on their own. These barriers include:

- administrative and faculty resistance to equity-supportive shifts;

- campus politics and hierarchies that get in the way of collaboration between staff, faculty, and administrators;

- logistics and capacity limitations such as time allocation and workload; and

- personnel turnover.

This finding suggests that the Network's strategies remain crucial in supporting middle leaders in advancing equity on campus. As identified in "What's Next," we are shifting our activities, research, and tools toward providing tangible methods for addressing systemic barriers.
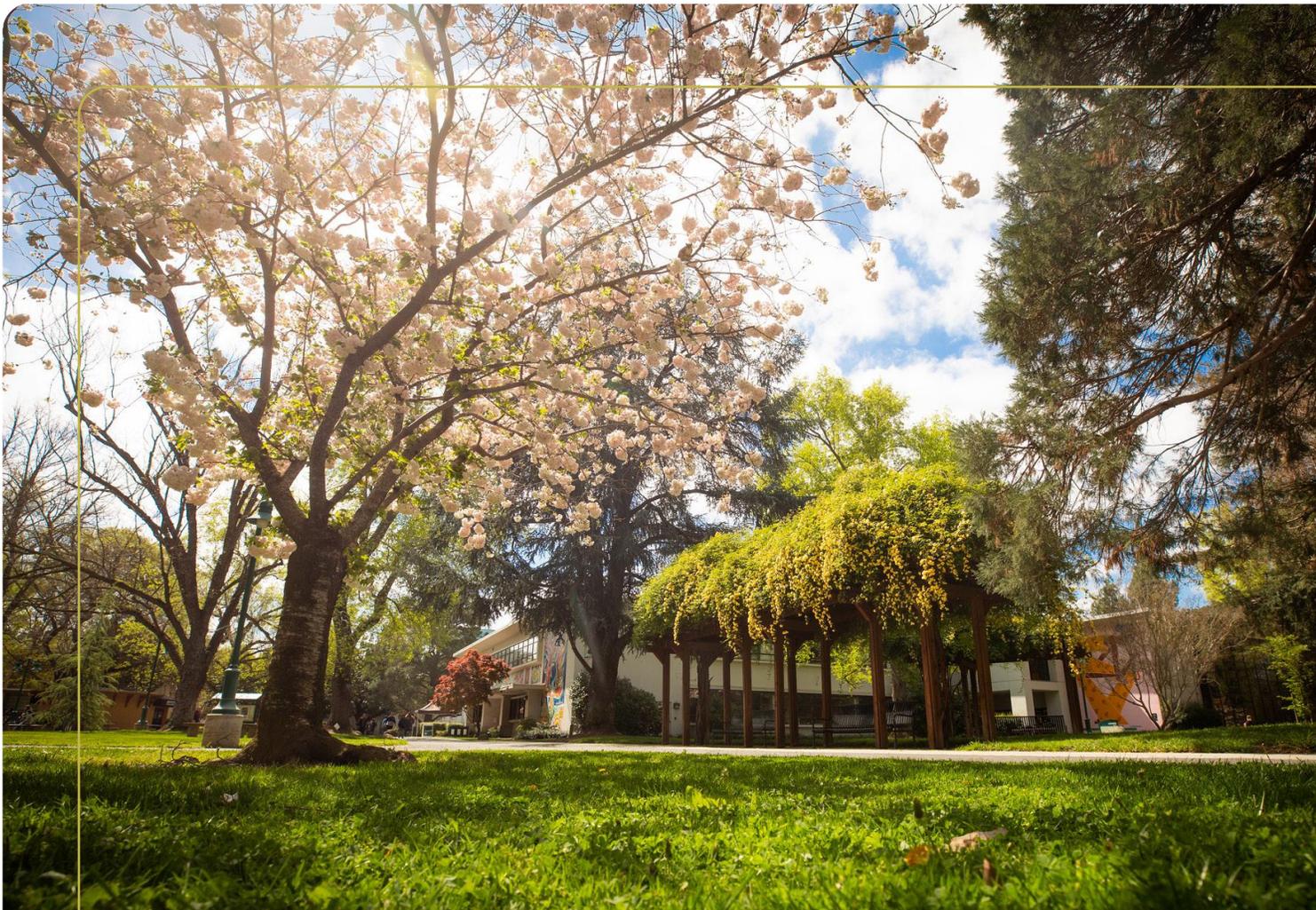
What's Next in 2023-24?

The upcoming academic year is a pivotal year for the CSU system as well as for the Network. The university is welcoming a new chancellor, Dr. Mildred García, the first-ever Latina appointed to lead the nation's largest and most diverse four-year university system. The CSU and its students are emerging from the shutdowns and other difficulties associated with the COVID-19 pandemic. In addition, CSU campuses are facing enrollment and budget challenges as they work to increase success rates and achieve the goals of Graduation Initiative 2025.

The **Network is likewise facing a year of transition**, as we pivot to support CSU campuses and middle leaders in addressing systemic barriers to equitable student success. Our vision and our mission will remain the same, and we are excited to continue to provide structured spaces for CSU colleagues to:

- share ideas, research, data, practices, and tools;

- build leadership skills;

- develop equity projects for their campus; and

- use their relationships and skills to implement change.

We enter 2023-24 as a larger and more seasoned network with a track record of successes. For the first time, our Advisory Board welcomes the guidance of a chair, Dr. Shonda Goward, associate vice provost of undergraduate advising and success at San José State University. Dr. Goward has been an advocate and leader for student success throughout her career. The board this year is larger and represents 15 campuses plus the Chancellor's Office, with two additional campuses represented through strand directorships.

> "The experience was the boost our team needed to continue advancing first-gen student success. Investing in middle leaders ... is crucial as we continue addressing equity issues on campus."
>
> - Middle Leader & Network Participant

In 2022-23, the Network adopted a new strategic plan, and for 2023-34 we are transforming our activities and research to focus on **tangible ways to address systemic change**, including supporting high-impact practices already being used in the CSU, with the understanding that these approaches will vary across the 23 campuses. As Dr. Goward has said, the CSU already has a track record in pivoting policy and practice based on the needs of students: "Our experience with COVID has shown that **the CSU can be new and nimble in serving our students**. A lot of people want to go back to the way things were before, but that didn't work for lots of students. We need to continue to be new and nimble in how we work together to focus on equitable student success."

Primary Activities and Outcomes

Middle Leadership Academy

The Middle Leadership Academy, the flagship program of the Network, is unique in the CSU in offering campus teams of faculty, staff, students, and administrators **a year-long, hands-on opportunity** to plan and undertake a substantial equity project on their campus. The Academy creates structured time for these colleagues to work collectively to:

- engage with student data;

- map out plans for equitable change;

- reach out to other stakeholders on their campus to shape these plans; and

- overcome resistance in implementation.

During 2022-23, the Academy provided an **individualized online launch meeting** for each team and three **in-person sessions** for all teams (in San Diego, Sacramento, and Pomona) that resulted in a final presentation of their projects to the larger group to receive feedback from colleagues. This year, there was one cross-campus team representing five campuses and focusing on creating a collaborative community of practice among all 23 CSU campuses to share practices, materials, and approaches around transitional academic programming for first-year and transfer students.

> **"It would have been extremely difficult to make this progress at this rate without the opportunity to participate in the Academy."**
>
> – Middle Leadership Academy Participant

This year, the Academy updated and standardized its curriculum and procedures, including: a primer that articulates the purposes of the Academy and alignment with GI 2025; **a new syllabus** identifying alignment between learning outcomes and activities; **new curricular components** specific to project and leadership development; a guide to **team roles and responsibilities**; a contract to clarify facilitator responsibilities; and improvements of in-session and exit **assessments**.

Outcomes from the Academy

Twelve teams participated in the Academy in 2022-23, with about 50 participants at each session. In surveys, four out of five respondents (82%) said they were either "quite" or "extremely" satisfied with their overall experience at this year's Academy. In terms of leadership development, the share of respondents who said they **think of themselves as leaders** increased during the year, as did the share who said they are **capable of motivating others** toward a common goal.

In terms of actions taken on campus, **83% of respondents said they had begun implementing their equity project** on their campus by the end of the academic year. Respondents identified the following Academy elements as most helpful in facilitating project development and implementation:

- time dedicated to work together with their campus team;

- the Academy's logic model;

- guided activities that encourage critical thinking about projects;

- developing and delivering a pitch for their project to other teams and receiving feedback from the teams; and

- coaching and facilitation during the sessions to maintain focus.

Respondents said their **relationships with campus team members had improved** as a result of the Academy, in terms of better collaboration, more equitable interactions across roles, and increased communications beyond their Academy projects. They also described the following changes on their campus:

- **new collaborations** across campus divisions and with faculty and students;

- better leveraging of **buy-in and support**, including commitments from leadership, advocacy by students, and peer mentorship; and

- provision of resources to faculty to **decrease equity gaps.**

Student Success Conference

The Network's Student Success Conference, held every fall, is the only annual Conference focused on the CSU that brings together faculty, staff, administrators, and students across roles and campuses to **share evidence, practices, and actionable research in support of equitable student success**.

From Oct. 11-14, 2022, we held our third annual Conference under the theme, Sustaining Momentum for Equity and Change in the CSU.

The Conference featured three Conference-wide plenaries and 21 sessions. The plenaries were focused on re-engaging students and supporting returning learners; the equitable success and well-being of LGBTQ+ students in the CSU; and the state of gender centers in the CSU. We also hosted a pre-Conference event, in collaboration with our Convenings team, featuring Dr. Tia Brown McNair, who discussed strategies for becoming a student ready campus through the use of evidence-based, equity-focused practices.

> "**The work that we've done at the CSU Network has been very responsive to the issues that campuses are going through. That includes the Conference this fall, which addressed equity and inclusiveness in some of the best ways that I've seen anywhere.**"
>
> – Middle Leader & Conference Participant

Outcomes from the Conference

About 296 people attended our Sustaining Momentum Conference, representing nine CSU campuses, the CSU Chancellor's Office, the California Community Colleges, and various nonprofit organizations. In surveys, respondents reported high satisfaction related to our conference goals. For example, 95% of participants reported that the Conference was "highly," "quite," or "moderately" **useful in identifying connections** across student success efforts throughout the CSU. Nine out of ten (89%) said the Conference was "highly," "quite," or "moderately" **useful in addressing goals for equity** in their work.

Respondents said they planned to use lessons learned to better support students within their role, including through academic support, advocacy, assessments, and examining current policies. They also planned on sharing information learned from the Conference with others, including supervisors, colleagues, and advocates. Nearly all respondents reported **high likelihood that they would attend another Network Conference**, whether the event was free, not free, virtual, or in person.

Convenings

The Network provides Convenings to **share knowledge and practices on pressing issues**. In 2022-23, the Network began a series of online and in-person Convenings focusing on how we as practitioners can use the literature on equity and our own campus data to support evidenced-based, equity-minded practices in our day-to-day work.

- Our fall Convening, which was held online Oct. 11, 2022, in conjunction with the Network Conference, featured Dr. Tia Brown McNair discussing strategies for **becoming a student-ready campus** through the use of evidence-based, equity-focused practices.

- Our spring Convening was held in person on March 2 and 3, 2023, in San Diego, and it focused on **strategies for implementing change** on your campus from where you sit and **assessing the**

changes you've made. Dr. Erin Jacobs, director of student success analytics at San Diego State University, was a featured speaker for this two-day event.

- A [third Convening](#) in the series will be held online Sept. 8, 2023, with four speakers representing CSU Dominguez Hills leadership. They will be discussing **how to use change management strategies** to move equity plans forward, even on campuses without complete buy-in and from positions of constrained authority.

Outcomes from the Convenings

Fall Convening. Our fall Convening on becoming a student-ready campus brought 116 participants online for the event. In surveys, participants reported that Dr. Brown McNair was inspiring, but they felt that the prospects of **creating change in the face of inertia** and the status quo were daunting. In surveys five months later, however, more than a third of respondents (35%) reported that they had **advocated for additional supports** to create a more student-ready campus. Thirty-one percent said they had engaged with and **shared equity-based resources with colleagues**. One in five (21%) said they had **applied recommendations from the Convening** to their daily work.

Spring Convening. Seventy-eight people attended our spring Convening on strategies for building and assessing changes in equity-focused programs. This Convening scored well on giving people **concrete tools with which to do this work**, with planned actions including: using the logic model to develop, implement, and assess programs with equity priorities; collaborating with colleagues to expedite progress with campus equity plans; and engaging with campus data to identify issues, inform planning, and support students. Participants also reported **several barriers they expected to face**, including "pushback for the data request," buy-in from campus leadership, and budget and human capacity.

> "**I don't foresee any obstacles with collecting the [campus] data, but I foresee obstacles in having leadership take the data seriously.**"
>
> – Middle Leader & Convening Participant

Knowledge Center and Applied Research

During its second full year, the Knowledge Center published a [memo on disaster management](#) as a followup to a [Convening that was held on this topic](#) the previous year. We also developed a memo about **moving from research to practice in creating equity interventions** that we plan to publish in fall 2023, in alignment with the Convening series on using evidence-based practices.

We also published the first two blogs in a series on **first-generation students**, with the [first blog](#) (Nov. 2022) examining the function and meaning of the first-gen label. The [second blog](#) (Apr. 2023) focused on how to create a student-ready institution for first-gen students. A third blog in the series is planned for fall 2023.

The Network published a new research brief, CSU Leaders Navigating the Pandemic and Racial Injustice (Sept. 2022). Drawing from interviews with CSU leaders, the report found that **campuses made rapid and radical changes in policy and practice in response to the COVID-19 pandemic**, but equity efforts remained primarily in the planning stages, with fewer actions reported compared with the pandemic. These findings highlight that **campuses need to address equity with the same level of responsiveness with which they responded to the COVID-19 pandemic**.

The Network also made progress on a research brief focusing on CSU bachelor's degree programs for **currently incarcerated students**, to identify the key characteristics, strengths, and challenges of programs working with justice-involved students before and following their release, **to inform potential replication** by other CSU campuses. Publication of the brief is planned for spring 2024.

Evaluation. The Network retained the services of an external organization, Informing Change, to conduct a five-year retrospective evaluation of the Network's impacts. Preliminary findings from this evaluation are described in this annual report, and final findings will be available in 2023-24. During 2022-23, we also published **Implementing Systemwide Changes in the CSU**, an evaluation of the Academy's first year, which found that the Academy served as:

> **"**
> **"I have used Network data from previous [C]onvenings and MLA [Middle Leadership Academy] projects to advance the work that our 2022–2023 MLA team is doing to support student success. These resources have provided a template to refer to as our MLA team solidifies our final plans for implementing a project at Chico State."**
>
> – Middle Leader & Network Participant

- **a catalyst for implementation of Executive Order 1110**, which mandated the elimination of remedial courses in English and math in the CSU;

- **an enabler of middle leadership** in driving the creation and implementation of proactive campus plans regarding Executive Order 1110; and

- **a creator of inter-campus linkages** that were a boon to problem-solving and the sharing of innovations.

Equity in Action Grant Program

The Equity in Action (EIA) Grant Program is a pilot program that supports action research and evaluation conducted by middle leaders on CSU campuses. The one-time grants were available to faculty/lecturers, staff, and middle-level administrators **to identify, understand, and disrupt inequities on campus** and to identify, understand, and advance opportunities for students to learn, engage, progress toward, and complete their courses of study.

The Network funded 20 projects from 13 campuses to begin June 1, 2022. All funded projects are underway and all grantees have submitted interim reports. In their reports, 70% of grantees reported that **progress is going as planned**, with the remaining 30% reporting that progress is slower than originally predicted. Three out of four grantees (75%) indicated that, based on early signs, they expect their projected outcomes to be achieved. For example, some grantees reported early outcomes related to an **increased sense of belonging, lower DFW** (D-F-Withdraw) rates, **higher academic performance**, and **better retention** for participants in EIA-funded programs compared with peers.

Communications

The communications team supports all Network activities and goals through an active social media presence on Twitter and LinkedIn, direct **outreach to 2,125 middle leaders** in the CSU, video and blog posts on our website, and branding. During 2022-23, the Network published and circulated nine Voices blogs, two video interviews with CSU middle leaders, one Knowledge Center memo, one Tips and Strategies memo, and two research reports.

In addition, the Communications team worked with the Conference team to develop a **social media toolkit** to support a stronger social media presence for Conference presenters in promoting their sessions. The toolkit provided announcement templates for social media platforms such as Twitter, LinkedIn, and Facebook, as well as official Conference hashtags.

You

Dr. Sabrina Sanders @SabrinaKSanders • Nov 22, 2022
Excited about the work to reengage #somecollegenodegree #students back to @DominguezHills to return to #college and move to #degreecompletion! It's about #studentsuccess for all students, including those who have paused their enrollment.

@CSU Student Success Network @CSU_SuccessNet • Nov 22, 2022
New Voices: At this year's Network conference, three #CSU teams reported on their efforts to enroll and re-engage former students. We recap learnings from the @DominguezHills panel here: bit.ly/csudhstrat

Student Success Network
(((voices)))

You reposted

Dr. Shonda Goward
@shondagoward

Going to bed with a full heart. 80 people from all levels and all around the CSU came together to think differently about how to do the work of being student ready. Grateful.

@CSU Student Success Network @CSU_SuccessNet • Mar 2

Cheers to #studentsuccess! The @CSU_SuccessNet x @EdInsightsCtr team + @MelindaKarp @shondagoward gathering today at our spring convening dedicated to building @equity-fcoused programs to improve equitable outcomes for students in the #CSU.

Financial Report

The Network received $1.1 million from the State of California for fiscal year 2022-23 and spent $1,259,584. Using carryover funds from prior years, the Network was able to execute in-person activities at full capacity. The Network plans to continue using its carryover funds in a variety of ways, including expansion of its current activity offerings and increasing staff capacity to support communications, evaluation, infrastructure, and research efforts.

All Network activities are free of charge to participants including travel, food, and lodging costs. Infrastructure costs support all core Network functions, and include salaries and benefits, general meeting expenses, supplies, and services.

Figure 1. Expenditures, Fiscal Year 2022-23

Total Spending

Category	Amount
Academy	$364,040
Infrastructure	$334,261
Communications	$143,354
Convenings	$143,091
Research	$113,676
Evaluation	$86,971
Conference	$74,191

Total 22-23 Expenses: $1,259,584
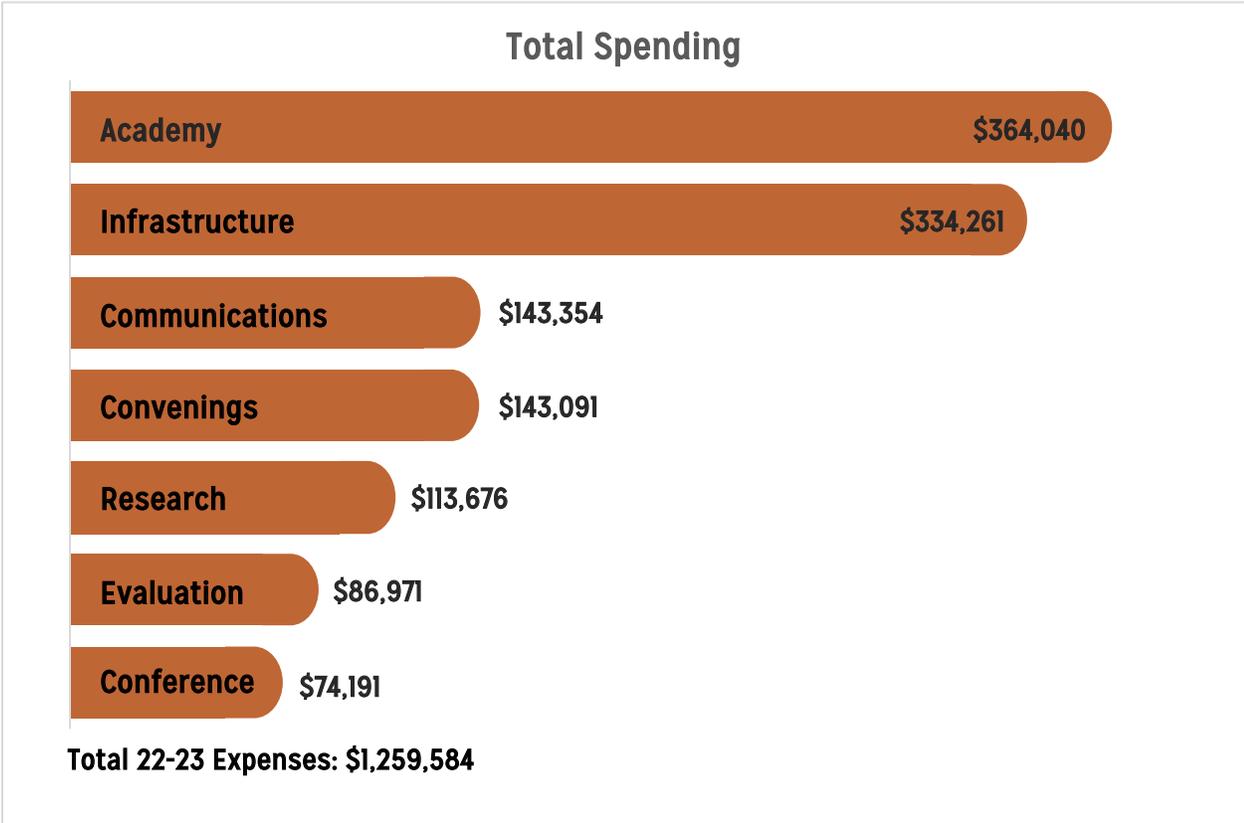
Advisory Board, 2022-23

The Advisory Board for 2022-23 represented 10 campuses and the Chancellor's Office, providing feedback and guidance on Network priorities and focus areas.

Chancelor's Office

Duan Jackson
Systemwide Director, Student Advising Initiatives

Channel Islands

Ernesto Guerrero
Assistant Vice President for Student Success & Retention

Chico

Ellie Ertle
Associate Dean, Undergraduate Education

Dominguez Hills

Jonathan Molina
CSSA Vice President of Finance

Humboldt

Mary Virnoche
Professor of Sociology

Long Beach

Catherine Ward
Chief of Operations, Office of the Provost

Monterey Bay

Katherine Kantardjieff
Provost and Vice President of Academic Affairs

Pomona

Victoria Bhavsar
Director, Center for the Advancement of Faculty Excellence (CAFE)

San Diego

Michelle Lopez
Assistant Dean for Student Success

San Marcos

Adam Petersen
Director of Strategic Initiatives for Academic Success

Student Success Network
in the California State University

Education
Insights Center
Advancing Research and Policy
for K-12 and Postsecondary Education

Education Insights Center/CSU Student Success Network
California State University, Sacramento

6000 J Street, MS 6147
Sacramento, CA 95819

studentsuccessnetwork@edinsightscenter.org

http://csustudentsuccess.net

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