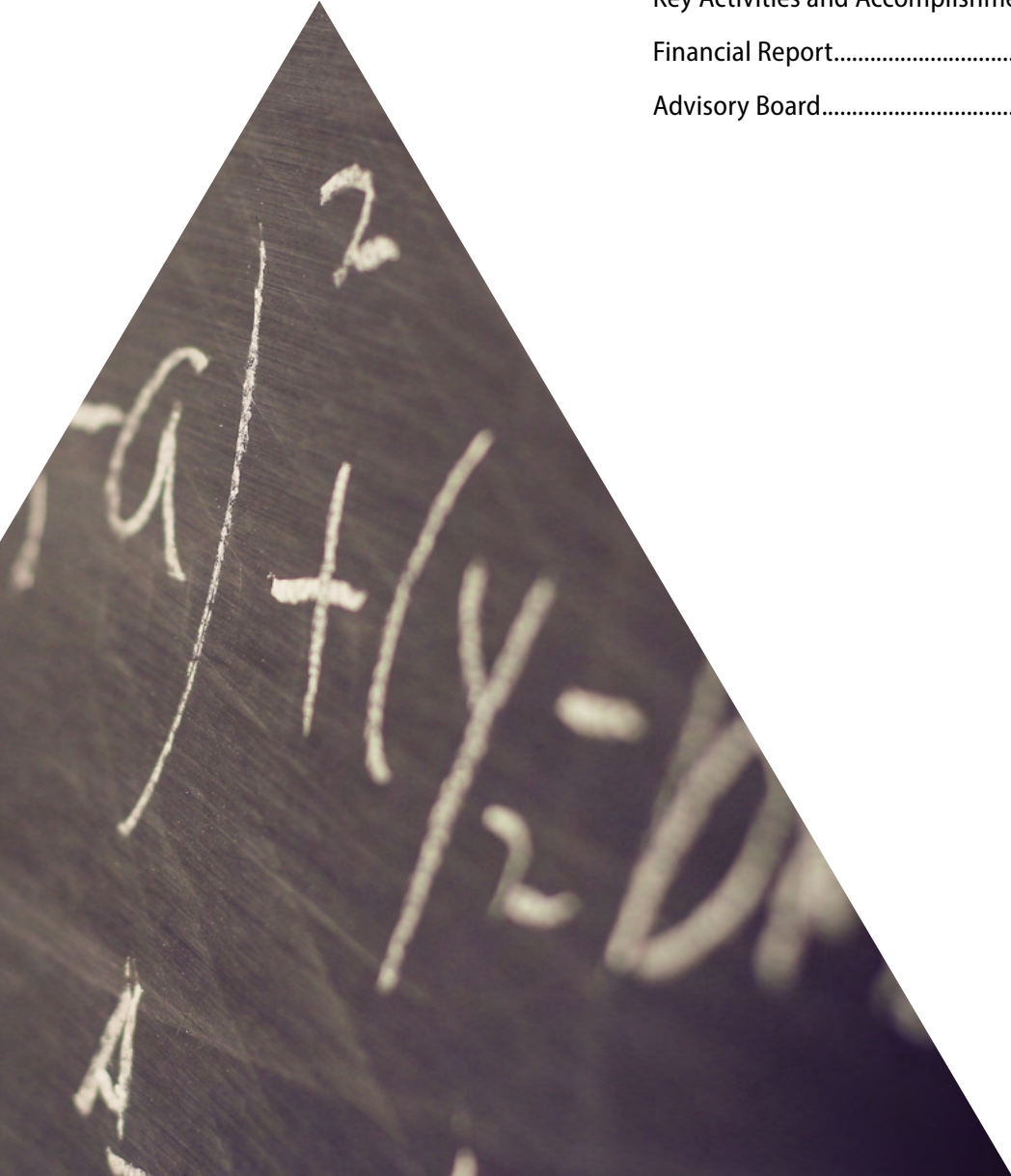


2019-20 Annual Report



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Report Highlights

The California State University (CSU) Student Success Network enhances student success efforts and creates spaces for innovation in the CSU by providing cross-campus, cross-role, professional learning opportunities for “middle leaders.” Middle leaders are faculty, staff, and administrators who work closely with students and have deep knowledge about how our campuses work.

The Network offers 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. This year, we started planning our first annual Student Success Conference, launching in a virtual format this fall, which will create a forum for exchanging actionable research and practices aimed at addressing inequities for students within our system.

In 2019-20, the Network facilitated the third Middle Leadership Academy; held a convening on educators’ growth mindsets about students and students’ sense of belonging on campus; piloted a virtual cross-campus consultancy; developed a multi-campus research project on bureaucratic barriers students experience in the CSU; and continued to cultivate key relationships across the CSU.

Re-imagining our work. The Network is facilitated by the Education Insights Center (EdInsights) at Sacramento State. As part of EdInsights’ commitment to racial justice, the Network is increasing our efforts to take purposeful action to address racial inequities within our system. With the onset of the pandemic, we pivoted our spring activities into the virtual space. In the coming year, we will continue to re-imagine our work, offering expanded virtual opportunities, anchored in racial justice, to identify and address the needs of students and educators as the pandemic continues.

About the CSU Student Success Network

The CSU Student Success Network is an independent effort, developed by CSU faculty, staff, and administrators, with financial support from the State of California, College Futures Foundation, The Kresge Foundation, and The James Irvine Foundation.

The issues the Network takes on are not simple, nor are the solutions clear cut. There are many historically rooted barriers to student success in the CSU, which are more pronounced for racially minoritized students, students experiencing poverty, and students who are the first in their families to attend college. The Network brings people together to build knowledge, develop relationships, and take actions to advance equitable opportunities and outcomes for students.

Foundational to the Network's Theory of Change is that leading equitable student success efforts—which we define as student learning, engagement, progression, and completion—does not need to start with people in formal leadership positions. People who work closely with students, regardless of job title, have the power to experiment with new policies, processes, and practices that create equity-driven change. Cultivating leadership “in the middle” is at the heart of the Network. Doing that will strengthen each campus' ability to develop and sustain student success efforts, which will then support the system overall.

The Network is facilitated by the Education Insights Center (EdInsights) at Sacramento State. EdInsights is an education 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.



Cultivating Leadership “In the Middle”

The Network seeks to engage “middle leaders” who are committed to making student-focused, equity-centered, and evidence-based change.

Since its launch in 2016, the Network has supported over 530 middle leaders from every campus in the CSU, and we track equity-focused actions and impact over time. For example, last year, a Chico State team that participated in the Academy introduced a successful resolution to that campus’ Academic Senate to help provide more clarity around equity-focused actions.

The resolution called for a campus-wide focus on equity, and the release of equity-gap data to support the equity work. The resolution was developed to include faculty and engage in culture change across the institution and within classrooms.

One participant of the team elaborated on how the Academy sharpened the team’s approach and deepened its impact on campus. “The thing that has been most beneficial has been the cross-divisional representation of our team and our ongoing engagement with this. We met regularly throughout the year and went to the Academy together. Because of that, we have been able to amplify our voices on campus.”

The team’s facilitator added, “That is what middle leadership is about. It’s not about edicts or directives. It’s about working effectively with people who are peers, to reach common aims in helping students.”

Key Activities and Accomplishments

The Network sparks and nurtures change by creating professional learning opportunities that center equity, evidence, and students' experiences. Our work supports middle leaders in developing strategies that help students reach their educational goals and creating meaningful connections across departments, divisions, and campuses that bridge professional roles and responsibilities.

The Network facilitates activities, conducts applied research, and offers resources that help middle leaders develop the knowledge, skills, and abilities to advance equitable opportunities and outcomes for students.

Convenings

We learn best when we learn from one another.

Convenings provide opportunities for middle leaders in the CSU to focus on issues of practice that affect students. During the convenings, participants explore key issues, discuss evidence-based strategies, and problem solve together about the opportunities and challenges we face.

Each convening is centered on a topic of importance to campuses across the system and is designed to cultivate conversations and encourage collaboration and action among participants.

2019-20 Accomplishments and Learnings

In October, Cal State Fullerton hosted a Network convening that focused on educators' growth mindsets and how we create (or inhibit) belongingness for students on our campuses. Approximately 100 people from 18 campuses and the Chancellor's Office attended. As of this year, every CSU campus has participated in a convening at least once.

Surveys administered at the convening showed that the vast majority of respondents found the opportunity useful in building relationships with colleagues to support equitable student success (94%) and considering ways (in)equity manifests on campus (89%). A large share of respondents reported the convening as being "quite useful" or "extremely useful" for examining the concepts of growth mindset and sense of belonging (85%) and how these concepts can help create a more equitable learning environment (83%).

A second convening was scheduled for April 2020—a workshop on equity-minded teaching and learning in partnership with the Center for Urban Education (CUE) at the University of Southern California (USC). Due to the pandemic, the convening was canceled.

Middle Leadership Academy

A space for evidence-based collaborative learning and leadership development.

The Middle Leadership Academy brings together campus-based teams of CSU faculty, student affairs staff, researchers, and students in a collaborative and supportive environment over the course of an academic year.

The Academy is grounded in a problem-based learning model that motivates participants to “lead from the middle” as they explore and apply strategies to strengthen student success on their campus, with a focus on closing opportunity and outcomes gaps. Each team is partnered with a peer facilitator who helps guide the team and provides targeted support.

In addition to leadership development and dedicated facilitation support, the Academy provides teams with access to external speakers, collaborative team time, cross-campus consultation opportunities, and time for strategic thinking and action planning.

2019-20 Accomplishments and Learnings

Last year, the Academy hosted 79 participants from 11 campus teams. The Academy has graduated three cohorts since 2017, with participation from 18 of the 23 campuses.

Similar to previous years, 2019-20 Academy respondents continued to express appreciation for ample time to share experiences, network, and brainstorm with colleagues from other campuses (particularly through cross-campus consultancies) and designated time to work with their campus teams.

Virtual Consultancies

This past fall, the Network tested out our first “virtual consultancy”—a structured process for giving and receiving peer feedback that we frequently utilize in our in-person events. We offered the consultancy as a follow-up to the Spring 2019 convening on supporting student success after the first year. Each of the four participating teams had an opportunity to present a challenge of practice and receive real-time thought partnership and feedback from other campuses. Participants noted the consultancies were useful in expanding their thinking and considering alternative solutions to their issues of practice. Given the ongoing pandemic and necessity to operate online, we are continuing to explore the use of the virtual consultancy protocol in 2020-21.

Annual Student Success Conference

Make connections and share knowledge about what works, what doesn't, and for whom.

The first annual CSU Student Success Network Conference (modeled on the California Community Colleges' Research and Planning Group's **Strengthening Student Success Conference**) will advance equitable student success by providing faculty, staff, administrators, and students with an annual statewide opportunity to share actionable research and practices. The conference launches virtually this fall, with the objectives of building relationships and knowledge exchange across the CSU, and providing a sustained forum for learning about actionable, equity-driven, evidence-based examples of student success efforts in our system.

2019-20 Accomplishments and Learnings

Our planning team spent the past academic year designing and developing the conference, including selecting a theme (Building a Student-Ready Campus: Shared Opportunities for Equity and Transformation), identifying goals and learning outcomes, and releasing the call for proposals. We received 19 submissions from eight campuses and the Chancellor's Office. The conference will launch as a virtual two-part series with multiple sessions this fall, featuring plenary speakers, student voices, topical sessions, and networking time for participants.

Applied Research

Make sense of the different aspects of the student experience in the CSU.

Network research helps to bring evidence about students' experiences into the system and to develop shared language and knowledge on key topics.

2019-20 Accomplishments and Learnings

Over the course of 2019-20, the Network designed and gained IRB approval for a multi-campus research study exploring the bureaucratic barriers (called "administrative barriers" in Graduation Initiative 2025) that students experience in the CSU. The purpose of the project is to help improve campus climate and student engagement by providing clear examples of barriers student face—particularly first-generation students of color—and how those processes can contribute to inequitable opportunities and oppressive structures.

The pilot study was scheduled to launch this spring. Due to the challenges of conducting qualitative research with students during the pandemic using a methodology involving discussions to develop individual and group process maps, and the fact that administrative barriers are quite different while campuses are virtual, the research study is delayed.

The Network is launching a new resource in the coming year, the Knowledge Center—a virtual repository of memos that contain synthesized information about timely issues. We are also exploring ways to pivot our research during the pandemic, and will restart the bureaucratic barriers project in 2021-22.

Financial Report

CSU Student Success Network Financial Report ¹

FY 2019-20 Expenditures

Activity	Total Spending
Academy	\$195,786
Communications	\$80,807
Conference	\$23,232
Convenings	\$50,292
Evaluation	\$47,280
Infrastructure	\$321,437
Research	\$58,055
Total Expenditures	\$776,889

All Network activities are free of charge to participants, and we reimburse reasonable and allowable travel, food, and lodging costs.

Infrastructure costs support all core Network functions, and include salaries and benefits, general meeting expenses, supplies, and services.

¹ Due to the pandemic, the Network shifted our work online and delayed our planned research project, resulting in cost savings. The Network is using carryover funds for a range of activities, including increasing online engagement in FY 2020-21; establishing grants to support equitable student success at the campuses; and supporting a planned in-person conference for Fall 2021.



Advisory Board

The Network's community of collaborators share a commitment to student success. The Network is guided by an Advisory Board composed of representatives from CSU campuses who serve in a variety of roles. The Board meets throughout the year to provide direction for all Network activities and to help identify focus areas for our work. Advisory Board members act as Network liaisons on their campuses, sharing information about Network activities and ways to get involved.

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Contact Us

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The background features a large, dark blue triangle on the left containing a network diagram with white nodes and connecting lines. A solid dark blue triangle is on the top right, and a solid orange triangle is on the bottom left. The main text area is white.

Student Success Network

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