

# Tips and Strategies from the Network

## Evidence Based Practices for Equity

by [Melinda Karp](#) and [Shonda Goward](#)



The California State University (CSU) system is working to meet ambitious graduation goals by 2025—but it is imperative that those goals are met for all students in the system. Bringing an equity focus to our work means thinking about strategies that elevate the success of Black, Latinx, Asian, and low-income students who have historically been excluded from our institutions and institutional change efforts. It means thinking about ways to close differences in outcomes across student groups, and rethinking our preconceived notions about student success. And it means taking accountability for changing our practices, habits, and mindsets.

Middle leaders are a critical part of our work to create more equitable institutions. They are often asked to implement equity strategies but are also often left out of discussions about the “why” and the “how” of those strategies. Thus, on October 11, 2022, over 100 individuals from all 23 CSU campuses and the system office came together virtually to learn how middle leaders can use data, evidence, and a reframing of what an equitable institution looks like to improve outcomes for disproportionately impacted groups as a part of the CSU Student Success Network’s fall Convening titled [Your Power in Middle Leadership: A Call for Evidence Based Practices for Equity](#). A key take-away across the day was that we tend to focus on enrollment—not whether we are serving students well, supporting them, and making sure our systems help them navigate higher education successfully. In short, we are focused on being enrollment-ready rather than student-ready.

The group first heard from [Dr. Tia Brown McNair](#), Vice President, Office of Diversity, Equity, and Student Success, at the American Association of Colleges and Universities (AAC&U), who is a leading scholar-practitioner of equity

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in higher education. She is most recently the lead author of *Becoming a Student-ready College: A new culture of leadership for student success*. Dr. McNair asked key questions that help one begin to think not only about becoming a student-ready campus, but an equity-minded, student-ready campus. She pushed the group to start by examining their institutions and determining what policies and practices are impeding student success. She also highlighted examining the campus culture and what the campus says about equity, belonging, and student success. Finally, she specifically challenged each participant to think about their role in

working toward being a student-ready campus and provided a [toolkit for middle-level managers](#) from Strong Start to Finish to support middle leaders in working through some of the challenges one encounters when attempting to make significant change.

Next, participants heard a discussion about the ways two CSU campuses are putting equity into action. Kim Altura, Associate Dean, Division of Undergraduate Education at San Francisco State, and Shonda Goward, Associate Vice Provost, Undergraduate Advising and Success, San José State, shared how they are approaching advising redesign using data, research, and a student-ready equity lens. Their experiences have implications and take-aways for other middle-leaders engaged in reform implementation.

Some of their insights included:

- Data helps you lay the groundwork. It may be disheartening to see metrics or outcomes differences, but these insights help you make an argument for why student-ready reforms are so important and why they deserve resources.
- Reform is an ongoing, iterative process. Make some changes, gather data, and then identify the next thing that needs to be improved.
- “Data” should include student voices, surveys, and qualitative information, as well as traditional quantitative metrics.
- When implementing reform, think about what you are taking away, not just what you are adding. This matters for staff and timeline—we cannot just keep doing more—but it also means that you can remove things that are impeding equitable student experiences.
- Change management is at the core of this work. Spend time consulting with, nurturing relationships with, and getting feedback from those who will be impacted by any reform. And make sure that you work with everyone who might be touched—not just those in your direct area.
- Think about where you need input from, and what kind. And also think about where you do not need input. Sometimes, a decision will be made, so consultation on whether or not it should happen is a moot point. But that does not mean that the details are set—and so consulting with others on “how” makes sense. Think about what type of feedback will be most necessary and useful.
- Middle leaders sit in a uniquely powerful “translational” role. You have contact with students and senior leaders so understand both the student experience and the overall goals of a reform.

At the end of the session, participants connected with their colleagues in breakout rooms to reflect on what they had heard, think about what “equity-minded student-readiness” might look like, and start to identify ways of assessing the student-readiness of their units and departments. Some ideas that emerged included the following:

- Student voice needs to be included in any assessment of student-readiness.
- It is a struggle to figure out the best ways to assess student-readiness and figure out which data are available and would be useful.
- Navigation is critical—think about whether students are being provided with the resources they need in ways that are accessible to them.
- It is important to remember that this process forces us to switch our thinking from, “are our students ready?” to “are we ready to meet our students?”
- Student-ready means switching values, language, actions, and responsibility.

We will be extending this conversation to discuss how we approach equity using not only data, but empirical evidence from the higher ed literature at our [next convening in March 2023](#).

The CSU Student Success Network is facilitated by the [Education Insights Center](#) (EdInsights) at [Sacramento State](#). EdInsights is 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.