



Sacramento K-16 Collaborative Focus Group Findings Report

December 9, 2024

Introduction

The Sacramento K-16 Collaborative partnered with Career Ladders Project (CLP) to conduct five virtual focus groups, engaging a total of 40 students. The purpose of these focus groups was to gain insights into the specific challenges faced by adult learners, first-generation students, and students of color on their transfer journey. This report presents key themes that emerged from the focus groups, offering perspectives to inform and enhance the institutions' practices and processes. By centering student voices, these findings aim to help the Sacramento K-16 Collaborative in making meaningful improvements to support students navigating the transfer process.

Project Methodology

CLP provided the postsecondary institutions in the Sacramento K-16 Collaborative with an [overview of the process](#), [email templates](#) and the focus group protocol (see Appendix), to help initiate targeted inquiries. The institutions were asked to work with relevant departments (e.g., Institutional Research, Institutional Effectiveness) to identify students who had successfully transferred or declared transfer as an educational goal and also met specific criteria: adult learners (students aged 25 or higher), students of color, and/or first-generation students. Each institution then reached out to these students, inviting them to participate in the virtual focus groups via an opt-in form. To acknowledge their time and input, students who participated received a \$25 gift card.

Three institutions—Lake Tahoe Community College, Sierra College, and Sacramento State University—completed the recruitment process and had students participate in the focus groups. Sacramento State University focused on recruiting students who had already transferred from a college in the Sacramento K-16 Collaborative and met the demographic criteria of being adult learners, students of color, and/or first-generation college students.

CLP conducted a total of five virtual focus groups using the Zoom platform. The first focus group included Lake Tahoe Community College (LTCC) students who are adult learners or students of color.¹ The remaining four focus groups included a mix of students from the other two participating institutions, Sierra College and Sacramento State University. These four focus groups were divided into: adult learners; students of color; first-generation students; and a general/nonspecific group that the recruited students could opt into.

The questions posed to focus group participants sought to understand students' experience of the transfer process including where and how they obtained information about the process, support received from counselors, and challenges they experienced. Participants were also asked what support and resources the college could provide to make the transfer process easier.

Overview of Key Findings

One overarching theme that emerged from all the focus groups is the importance of human connection in helping students to feel a sense of belonging and feel supported and welcomed on campus. Students in all the focus groups expressed appreciation for the support of counselors and instructional faculty who had a common cultural background with students or who made an effort to connect with students and share stories about their own educational journeys. Compared with the students in the other focus groups, however, adult students were unique in expressing that they sometimes felt out of place on campus and wanted ways to connect with other adult students.

Different themes emerged from the focus groups around navigating the transfer process. Participants in the focus groups for students of color and first-generation students underscored the importance of counselors in connecting them to resources and helping navigate the transfer process. Adult students by contrast generally reported relying first on their own research about transfer. Similarly, the importance of receiving clear, understandable information about transfer early in the student educational journey was a common theme for all the focus groups, except the focus group comprising only adult learners.

Another common theme was a desire for ways to hear from other students and alumni who had gone through the transfer process or transitioned to careers. Focus group participants noted that these connections would help students feel prepared to navigate the transfer process and support career exploration.

¹ At the beginning of the project, LTCC successfully recruited a sufficient number of students to begin the process before the other institutions. CLP therefore conducted the initial focus group with adult learners and students of color who were on the path to transfer from LTCC.

Themes unique to specific populations also emerged from the focus groups. Participants in the students of color focus group noted the importance of overcoming stereotypes and the impacts of racial bias. The adult learners also generally highlighted different issues from the other focus groups. In addition to feeling out of place on campus and relying more on their own research about transfer, participants in the adult learner focus group expressed a need for greater flexibility in scheduling and online course options.

Findings by Focus Group

Lake Tahoe Community College | 5 participants

This focus group included adult learners and students of color from LTCC. The LTCC students had varying goals when choosing to attend college. One student stated they started college because “it was a last resort.” Another student said they were looking for “something different and better,” while others chose to attend community college because they wanted a better job or career. However, despite these diverse reasons for attending college, they shared similar experiences with understanding the transfer process, assessing where they found the most support, and knowing what kind of support they needed and appreciated. Four themes emerged from this group:

1. **A lack of early information about the transfer process contributed to a stressful experience.** Students generally felt like they should have been introduced to the transfer process much sooner than they were. One student suggested that the college could have alumni attend Welcome Week to share “their testimony as a testament to the transfer process,” as one way to introduce transfer early and get students thinking about their next steps. Other students discussed how helpful it was to tap into their network of family and friends who were familiar with college-going culture and the transfer process. One student noted that it was a “privilege [to] have a friend that graduated before me.” Another student said that they wished they would have “started learning about and talking about transfer earlier. It wasn’t even really brought to my attention until...my third year.”
2. **Instructional faculty who made an effort to connect or who shared a common cultural background helped students feel supported in their transfer exploration.** These faculty created faculty-student mentor relationships that were powerful for students. One student stated, “I did have two profound professors along my educational journey that really pushed for me....[One] was like the first Mexican that I met that actually went all the way above and beyond to get his doctor's degree.” This student went on to explain how important it was to “have professors that look like me and talk like me.”

Several students in the focus group talked about professors who had supported them in exploring classes, majors, and transfer institutions. One student shared, “My former

professor helped me look up on the campus's website for the campuses I wanted to transfer to, and how to find the professors that I'd be interested in taking classes with, and some of the resource programs that would be available." Another student said that his professor supported him in understanding the transfer process: "My teacher really explained it in a way that didn't make me feel overwhelmed." Another student described how hearing a professor talk about their own career journey helped him to envision his own.

- 3. Counseling faculty, especially those working with special programs, helped students to connect to resources and navigate the transfer process.** One student in the CalWORKS program and another in EOPS shared how helpful their counselors were, and how they connected them to essential resources. One student shared that, as a single parent, CalWORKS connected her to many helpful resources: "I joined the CalWORKS program at the county, and so I started getting food stamps. I started getting cash aid. They are actually the ones that connected me when I first wanted to go to school." Two students noted that EOPS and the financial and academic support it provides was very useful. One student said, "All that hands-on support definitely made me be more confident in myself And now, I am stable, and I'm able to hold my own. I have money saved up, and I feel like a lot of it is due to the support that I continuously got from the community college." These students' primary connections to resources were from counselors working with special programs like CalWORKS and EOPS.

One student described how support from her counselor pushed her to complete and want to transfer: "I feel like the support of my counselor ... pushed me to graduate...I didn't plan on continuing my education. I just kinda wanted to get through, and her constant support gave me the confidence to feel like I could do it." The encouragement and consistent point of contact helped this student and others to feel more confident and stay motivated to complete.

- 4. A need for financial and basic needs support is constant for many students.** Several students noted the need for financial support while they are attending college. Students appreciated the support they received in the form of transportation passes, gas cards, book vouchers, and food. One student said, "The gas cards, and just the extra incentives, and the programs and all [of] that, I feel is crucial for somebody to either continue on their educational journey and make it." A few students also noted that their reason for attending college in the first place was to try to obtain a job that provides more financial stability.

Adult Learners | 12 participants

This focus group included adult learners (students aged 25 years or older) from Sierra College and Sacramento State University. Participants included students who had successfully transferred to a university and others who had declared transfer as an educational goal. A number of students in the adult learner group expressed that they were early in their journey

toward transferring. The students in this group more than any other group noted how out of place and alone they felt in college. Students felt like there wasn't a place on campus where they could go to connect with other returning adult students, and felt more generally like the system isn't designed for them. Four themes emerged from this group:

1. **Adult learners were less likely to have received information from a counselor and more likely to have done their own research about transfer before enrolling in community college.** The adult learners shared that they learned about transfer through their own research. One student said, "I created my own education plans and looked at transfer requirements on my own. I had heard from other students that the counselors were not that helpful for my particular major, which was computer science. I went online to the websites of different universities and Assist.org." Other students shared similar experiences with finding their own information before meeting with a counselor: "I did a lot of research on my own prior to turning to my academic counselor, so that I had as thorough of an understanding of the process as possible so that I could also advocate for my own academic journey, which has not followed the 'linear' path of attending and finishing college directly after [high school]." The adult students are motivated, but also feel somewhat out of place in college, which may lead to them feeling less comfortable asking for help. One student shared, "I have never met with a counselor. Although recently I have been wanting to, but I feel nervous. I have just been taking classes based off of degree works, and hoping that it's correct with what I need to take."

Some students who had met with a counselor appreciated the information they received and the connection they made. One student noted, "I feel like I was connected with my counselor because he has the same background as I do, and you know, he understands how immigrants feel, especially when you come to this country and try to navigate the school system because it's totally different. The language and everything." The cultural connection with a counselor was important for this student and others who expressed that this added an element of comfort to the counseling experience. Another student talked about feeling seen and valued by her counselor: "My counselor is really passionate and gives me adequate time to talk with her. She makes eye contact and she shows me that it's important for her that I am worried about my future."

2. **Adult students want a place to connect with other adult students and sometimes felt like they didn't fit into the college culture.** Some adult learners described feeling out of place when they were placed in small groups in class. Others said that they felt like students in class didn't want to work with them because they were so much older. One student said, "I feel isolated... especially when the teacher puts us in groups to work, I feel like nobody wants to be part of my team, and that feels a little bit uncomfortable." The student also expressed that it would be useful if there was a place on campus dedicated to adult learners where they could go to connect with other adult students to share experiences and build relationships. One student talked about appreciating the diversity of Sacramento State, but also expressed the desire for a place to connect to other adult learners because "sometimes I am the oldest one." This student

went on to suggest “a space on campus specifically for adult learners where we can come and get resources...or study or meet up.” Another student suggested a workshop, program, or other space to connect and learn: “Having a dedicated program, whether it's a workshop, whether it's a kind of program throughout the school year, or whatever, that is focused specifically to us as adult learners.”

- 3. Adult students need more flexibility in general and specifically with class scheduling options.** Because the adult learners were working, they were constrained by the course schedules and modalities offered. Students reported that they needed more scheduling flexibility and online options to be able to enroll in the classes they need for their programs. One student who works during the day said, “It's easier and more convenient to go to school at night. And they don't have a lot of night classes or online classes.” Another student stated: “I wish there was more priority given as far as enrollment for these online or off-schedule classes for non-traditional students.”
- 4. Counselors and instructors who share a cultural connection and who made an effort to connect were an important part of developing a sense of belonging for adult learners.** The adult learners, like other focus group participants, noted that having a counselor or instructor who shared their cultural background made it easier for them to feel connected. One student who identified as an immigrant expressed a desire to connect with instructors “with my similar culture [who] understands my struggles and everything.” The comments about connecting to the immigrant experience were expressed in various ways in the adult learner focus group. The experience of immigrants poses unique challenges that intersect with cultural or racial barriers, so having counselors and instructors who can relate to their experiences was important.

Students of Color | 6 participants

This focus group included students of color from Sierra College and Sacramento State University. Participants were not asked to identify their racial/ethnic background. The students of color group, more than students in the other focus groups, emphasized the importance of their counselor in navigating college and the transfer process. These students also felt that there was a need to build in more structures for connecting students to financial resources, alumni who share their cultural backgrounds, and clear information about the transfer process. Four main themes emerged from this group:

- 1. Counselors are critical for supporting students through their completion and transfer processes.** Students in this group overwhelmingly emphasized the importance of having a counselor to guide them through their college-going and transfer-seeking processes. One student emphasized that connecting with a counselor who also spoke Spanish “really helped me feel very included, and the program I was part of was also for Hispanics or Latinas. I feel like she also made me feel very comfortable because she knew the information... She's also very easy to talk to, and never made me feel down for asking a question or multiple questions.” This comfortable connection with a counselor

where students felt secure in seeking out information was echoed by other students in the group. Another student shared that his counselor was “pretty sympathetic to difficulties that I had gone through, and he gave me a lot of resources to help me get better and be able to cope better with my classes and my course load.”

The students who had a specific counselor assigned to them or who worked with a counselor in a special program valued having easy access to the counselor. A student in a special program with a counseling class shared, “The counselor was actually my professor for a program I was in. She always told us that at any point that we needed to talk about classes or any question we had to go talk to her. So because I was just a past student of hers she already knew who I was, and it was a much better connection to talk to her. She was my counselor the entire time I was there at my community college.” Building this human connection with the counselor through the special program and through the connection of classroom instruction established an anchor for the student. Another student said that their high school had a program where a college counselor helped map out the pathway to and through community college, helping them establish a goal to attend community college and then transfer. The student had a counselor throughout their journey from high school to transfer who connected them to resources and people along the way: “It was a really good program to have. It was kind of unfortunate that it didn't exist at my first high school. From then on, I met with that counselor while I was in high school, setting up all my [dual enrollment] classes, and then she set me up with the counselors at my community college, so it made the transition really easy.”

Other students were referred to counseling either in their orientation or through the matriculation process. In the initial educational planning counseling appointments, the counselor shared information about the transfer process. One student noted that they were provided with a checklist of things to do to transfer, which helped them feel confident in the process and expectations. Students did express a need for more intrusive counseling approaches. One student noted that it would have helped to have “more contact with the counselor during [my] final year and transferring. Maybe counselors [could] reach out, a follow up.” Students also felt like the information needed to be more accessible.

- 2. Overcoming stereotypes that students of color can't succeed in college is a significant issue.** Students worked to overcome negative perceptions about who can go to college. One student said that “misinformation that you have to be white, or you have to be rich” to attend college and earn a college degree was a major barrier, noting that “I found out that wasn't true, and made it a lot easier.” Another student shared that the idea that they wouldn't go to college or be successful in college started in high school: “There was this big notion that most Latin American students wouldn't be going to college out of high school.... And you know, that's not something that's good to repeat. That's not a good idea to hold. [It] has been nice coming to community college and seeing a lot of students who look like me and are of [a] descent similar to me [and] doing the same things, trying to transfer and be successful.”

The bias that students experienced starting in K-12 schooling left an imprint. And some students noted that it continued in community college. One student shared an experience in an engineering class taught by a white male professor where she felt dismissed while she watched her male peers get time and attention from the professor: “As a woman of color in the STEM field, specifically engineering, sometimes I feel looked down upon by white professors, white male professors. I remember an experience I had where I asked a simple question to one of my engineering professors, but I noticed that he kind of brushed it off a little bit. As to my other male classmates, he took the time to fully unpack their questions, but for mine, I just felt like he just wanted to get it over with.”

Students expressed that seeing students who look like them who had gone to college and transferred was motivating. Students also noted that meeting other community college students who share similar backgrounds and experiences supported them in developing their identity as a college student who can be successful. Students recommended that colleges support them by building in more opportunities to connect with alumni. One student said, “Alumni testimonials would be really good to [help] students feel supported and welcomed. Just having people to relate to. Having counselors to talk to is really good because they're very knowledgeable, but having someone who you can relate to closely as a student is really good.”

- 3. Students found that the clarity, timing, and online accessibility of information about the transfer process needs work.** Like other focus group participants, the students of color emphasized that information regarding transfer should come early and often. This group also emphasized the need for easily accessible online information. Some students recommended that websites be more interactive to help students find information more easily. One student said, “Websites are just big walls of text that you have to click through, so it's kind of hard to find resources. Maybe they could make their websites more interactive and more clear where to find certain resources for certain things.” Another student noted that the college needed “better coordination of information.” The lack of information or difficulty finding information made students feel like the process lacked transparency. They suggested that colleges could use student events as an opportunity to provide information on the transfer process so students are attending “not just for the ice cream, but for the information that they could probably use if they're thinking about transferring or know of someone that's transferring.”

Two students suggested that the college could develop an online portal that organized resources based on student goals and needs. One student suggested that colleges consider developing YouTube videos that walk students through key processes: “I think that would be more engaging.” Students noted that when they were completing the CSU and UC applications, they got confused and wanted a guide to help. One student suggested a “picture guide” to show what they need to do during the application process. Generally, the students wanted more interactive and visual resources that they could access on their own while working through the transfer steps.

4. **More information about financial aid and other financial resources helps students to envision their path to a transfer institution.** The majority of students in this group emphasized the need for more and better information about the financial resources available to them. One student said that they didn't know that financial resources were available: "Financial aid was the only thing keeping me back because I didn't think I could get help at that level. I thought you had to pay out of pocket." Another student shared that they didn't plan to go to college because they didn't think they could afford it, but learning about financial resources opened the door to the possibility of going to college. Other students who stated that they didn't qualify for financial aid, but still needed some financial support, wanted to know what additional resources were available.

First-Generation College Students | 10 participants

This focus group included first-generation students from Sierra College and Sacramento State University. The first-generation college students shared that transferring to a four-year college was either a goal before they started community college or was established after meeting with a counselor. This group expressed that support from counselors was pivotal to their college-going and transfer-seeking experience. The students also appreciated the information sessions, career fairs, and transfer workshops held at the college. Several expressed the importance of guidance on how to pay for college, and identified longer-term financial planning as an important motivator. Three main themes emerged from the first-generation college student focus group:

1. **Counselor guidance was crucial for their motivation and persistence throughout their time at community college through transferring.** Several students noted how influential and critical the support they received from their counselor was. Students shared that counselors helped them when they first got to college to set up their class schedule and pathway plan, and they also helped them to learn about transfer and stay motivated. One student said that, on starting at the community college, "I went to my counselor to request help with setting up a plan for my degree. And then that's when I learned about transferring." The information about the transfer process that students received at their first counseling appointment was very helpful in developing an early awareness of how to navigate the decisions they will make as they progress through their program of study.

Students appreciated when counselors provided information that helped them to make decisions about their major and transfer options. Providing specific information about what those college and career journeys might look like was key to helping students make decisions about which majors and transfer institutions they wanted to pursue. One student shared, "I didn't know what major I wanted, and [the counselor] was really kind in explaining to me that we can find something that interests me. She connected me to a couple of people who were in different jobs that I was interested in. And then, after that, I found something that I was interested in, and I did a lot of research."

Another student described a similar experience with a counselor who was able to support her in understanding her options and opportunities. She also expressed gratitude for having a counselor she could identify with and connect with on a personal basis: “I’m thankful to have had a counselor who was very experienced with first-generation students. I think she was a first-generation student herself....She made it feel comfortable to build a personal connection and when I was on campus I’d see her regularly. And so I think that during the meetings that we had, she already had a feel for what I prioritize and what’s important to me, and what my budget is.” The connection that this student and others made with the counselors provided them a trusted point of contact at the college, someone they knew they could go to with questions.

Students noted that it would be helpful to have a counselor assigned to them. One student suggested it would help to have “some type of point a person [who] would get assigned to you and make sure, before these deadlines come, that you were on track.” That sentiment was echoed by other students. One student said, “I think it’d be great if that same counselor would send you emails or more information about what specifically you can do [and know] what’s available to you.” Students wanted to have the opportunity to develop a connection with a counselor who was familiar with their situation and educational goals.

2. **Timely information is a key way that colleges can support students.** Students described the information that was shared with them at various points of their educational career and recommended that colleges work to provide timely information for students throughout their college-going journey. One student talked about how a presentation they had heard while in high school created an awareness of opportunities and enabled them to develop a vision of their college future: “In high school, we had a couple of speakers from Sac State come in and tell us that there was always an option for community college for a couple of years and then you can transfer. And then I just knew I wanted to have a bachelor’s. I didn’t know [in] what at the time because I was so young, but after that, I knew that I wanted to get everything done in community college and then transfer.”

Students also shared the impact of not having essential information when they needed it. One student learned, after they were approaching 90 units at community college, that financial aid would only support them for a limited number of units. This information came too late and was related by another student, not the college. And it had additional impacts, causing the student to face more barriers.

One of the hardest things was, I went over my 90 credits that you're allowed to take... and I didn't know about that until my third year.... Someone told me, if you take any more [units] you will not be supported financially, which is a struggle because I'm not, my family is not financially well-off because I have two more siblings who are still in school. And so it was hard to learn that, and I thought I

wasn't going to be able to transfer. I had to make an appeal, and I was able to only get support on the classes I need for my transfer. So far, all I know about transfer is that I have to do a tag agreement for UC Davis, but until that time comes, I haven't really researched more beyond that. I didn't have a lot of knowledge going in because, well, my parents didn't do this. They're not from this country. So it was really hard to understand where to go about that.

For the first-generation college student group in particular, having someone to guide them through the college-going and transfer process from the beginning of their journey through transfer was really important. Compared with other groups, they did not speak as much about tapping into networks of friends and family who had gone to college or successfully navigated the transfer process. One student described the lack of support making them feel “a little scrambled” even after they successfully transferred. This student went on to say, “Even though I'm transferred, I'm still a little scrambled, and I don't have that support that I need. It's a little more intimidating.”

3. **Connection with other students and hearing from alumni who have completed the journey is very helpful.** The students in the first-generation group agreed that hearing from other students about their college journey was really important for them and might ease some of their anxiety about the process and where the journey leads. Students shared that “student panels [with] peers that have transferred already would also be of great help because they've been in your shoes more recently than counselors.” Students felt like hearing from students who had transferred and then transitioned into a career would be helpful. One student noted: “I say this because, being a first-generation student, it is hard to hear stories about jobs that require higher education.” The first-generation college student group does not necessarily have a network of peers or family who share stories about their experiences. They also suggested that student groups focused around similar career pathways would be helpful.

General/Nonspecific | 7 participants

This focus group included students from Sierra College and Sacramento State University. Participants were identified for recruitment based on the initial criteria (as adult learners, students of color, and/or first-generation students) and subsequently opted into this general/nonspecific group. The general student group shared experiences similar to those expressed by students in other focus groups around understanding the transfer process, what supported their decision-making, and what recommendations they had for colleges. In this group, students' experiences clustered around three main areas: counselor support, communication and information around transfer, and student networks and stories.

1. **Students felt connected to their counselors especially when the counselors also shared aspects of their cultural identity.** The students reported feelings of appreciation for the support their counselors provided. One student noted that talking to their counselor felt safer than talking with a professor because “the counselor doesn't

judge if I get a bad grade.” This sense of safety created a space where students felt welcomed and were comfortable asking questions and seeking out information. One of the students described their counselor as a “maternal presence” for them at the college. Another student reported that it was particularly comforting to know that the counselor “wanted to know my goals and also had access to my transcripts, so knows my background and showed me how I could get into the school I wanted to.”

One student reported connecting with a counselor who shared the same nationality: “We had a lot of similarities in our culture, and I just felt like she would always have my goals in mind and she would just help me follow them.” Students generally established connections through their counselors, which contributed to a sense of belonging.

- 2. Students felt that the transfer process was introduced too late, recommending an early and continual communication about the transfer process.** Students reported that the transfer process was confusing and the paperwork was stressful. One student said that “the transfer process was introduced suddenly instead of early on in school.” This sentiment was shared by other students who were frustrated that they didn’t learn about what was required to transfer earlier in their college career. The students who felt supported in the transfer process attributed that to the support they received from their counselor and to transfer-focused workshops and events. One student said that the transfer fair “got me excited to transfer and it motivated me.”

Despite the support students received from their counselors and the positive experiences in other campus transfer events, they also felt that the transfer process should be talked about more and this information should start to be conveyed earlier. One student noted: “I feel like the whole transfer thing should be talked about more, like at the end of middle school, or the beginning of high school.” Another student described getting a “checklist of the things I need to do to transfer, but I received it really late when I was already far off in the process, so it would be way more helpful to get in at the very start of the journey.” Overall, students agreed that learning about the transfer process earlier would have helped them have a smoother transfer experience.

- 3. Connections to other students and alumni would help current community college students to navigate the college transfer process and career exploration.** Students expressed that it would have been very helpful to hear the stories of other students who have completed the transfer process. One student noted, “Providing more stories of people who have transferred and what it’s like for them now after they transferred” would help students feel more prepared for the experience. Students agreed that resources were helpful, but it would be more impactful “to be connected to people who have gone through the same journey as us and therefore can relate to what we are experiencing.”

One student who identifies as a woman of color stated that she plans to go into welding, a career field she said “is dominated by white men.” She said that it helped to find a “woman of color going into the field [who was] able to help me out in some of the

processes.” For this student, connecting with a woman in the industry established an anchor to that career field, a sentiment shared by students of other identities. One Black student noted that it would be helpful to see more Black people or people of color represented among college personnel: “I think just providing resources of Black [people] or people of color, like counselors or tutors... so we have someone we can connect with on a cultural level when talking about academics or just personal things.” The student further expressed that this connection of people with a shared identity would help “when we move from place to place, wherever our journey takes us through the transfer process. We'll have a connection with people.”

The students shared ideas for how the college could help build these connections. One student suggested organizing “a group or club of students who want to transfer to the same college” where students could share “challenges they are currently facing and how they tackle them.” Another student added: “It would be super helpful if students or graduates who already did the transfer process would have assemblies or meetings with people who are thinking of transferring or are in the process to help guide us.... We can connect more and ask them questions about their experience.” Generally, students felt that having mentors who had recently completed the transfer process or were early on in their careers would help them gain an understanding of what the journey looks like and what they might encounter.

Recommendations

CLP summarized the suggestions directly expressed by participants and has identified some preliminary considerations for the Sacramento K-16 Collaborative.

- Develop adult learner programming that is cohorted with dedicated counselors, flexible scheduling options, and intentional opportunities to build relationships with other adult learner students.
- Develop an online information hub with interactive components, videos, and visual representations of the transfer steps, processes, and application requirements.
- Implement a case management model for counselors at community colleges with a warm handoff to transfer institutions.
- Build networks of students who went to community college, transferred, and entered a career. Hold networking events with these former students and professionals to help build social networks for first-generation college students.
- Consider professional development, hiring and assignments such that students have opportunities to engage with counselors and faculty who believe in and support their educational success, and/or share similar cultural backgrounds and experiences.
- Communicate key information about college, transfer, and career to students in engaging and interactive ways. The information should first be communicated early in the student journey and repeated often throughout, from high school through transfer. Activities supporting this communication could include presentations, student panels, workshops, career fairs, counselor meetings, alumni panels, and a warm handoff to transfer institutions.

Conclusion

The focus groups provide an important window into the challenges faced by adult learners, first-generation students, and students of color in navigating the transfer process. These insights into students' experiences, along with their suggestions for how colleges can improve practices and processes, can inform the work of the Sacramento K-16 Collaborative to smooth and streamline the educational journey for students across the region.

Appendix: Focus Group Protocol

Facilitator Introduction

Thank you for agreeing to talk with us today. We have been asked to include student voices and experiences in discussions with your college's leaders and faculty about how the college can better serve students in their journey to transfer.

Would it be OK to record the conversation, so that we can capture your ideas as you present them?

Confirm consent via chat or verbal consent, in addition to completing the consent form.

As we write this up, we will not be using your names. We want you to know that we think everything you have to say is important, and we are here to learn from you and your experiences here at {name of institution}.

Please change your name to anything you like, a color, a super hero, etc.

We would like to hear from everyone, whether your experiences are similar to or different from others. Are there any questions?

General Group Questions

1. Let's go around, introduce yourself, and how you identify (student of color, adult learner, first generation, male of color).
2. When you first started at [name of institution], was your goal to transfer?
 - If yes, why was transferring your goal?
 - If not, when and how did you first learn about the transfer option?
3. When you developed interest in transfer, where did you go to seek help for your transfer options?
 - Probe: Maybe a probe to #4? - Were you referred to see a counselor? How did you find out to see a counselor?
 - I heard you name [insert services named] what about (*Moderator: List general types of services students may not have named*)
4. Was there anything that a counselor did that made you feel more comfortable?
 - Cultural connection, language connection
5. What did you find enjoyable about the transfer journey?
6. *As a student of (color, adult student, first generation, men of color), what challenges did you have on your transfer journey?*
 - Probe: What other resources did you seek for help?

7. *As a student of (color, adult student, first generation, men of color), in what ways can your institution be more helpful when introducing the transfer journey?*
 - Probe: Counselor visits in classrooms, outreach strategies, in-person vs. virtually, flyers, etc.
8. What resources do you wish the college would provide for students to make transfer easier?
9. Aside from meeting with counselors, what other ways would it be helpful to hear about the transfer journey?
 - Where else on your educational journey are you hearing about the transfer process?
 - When could it be helpful to hear more about the transfer process?
10. What other things can the college do to help students overcome their biggest challenges and stay in school?
 - Probe: What do you want faculty/staff to know and better support your success?
11. [Name of institution] wants to welcome and support a diverse student population. What can your college do to make students feel more welcomed and supported in their transfer journey?
12. Reflecting on the transfer process, rate your confidence level before and after meeting with a counselor?

Closing

Now, we are close to the end. We have talked about a lot of things. Let's take a moment to think through what might be most important when it comes to helping more students hang in there and finish their programs of study or degrees and/or transfer process. Let's go around and share any final thoughts you may have on this—maybe something we talked about, or something that just occurred to you.