

 **Ohio** **STRONG START**
TO FINISH



Equity & Inclusion Implementation Forum Report



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Introduction

The objective of the Ohio Strong Start to Finish (SSTF) initiative is to increase the number of students who pass both gateway mathematics and English courses by the completion of their first year in college. Eighteen community colleges and 12 universities have joined with the Ohio Department of Higher Education (ODHE), the Inter-University Council, and the Ohio Association of Community Colleges to participate in the Ohio SSTF project.

Currently, 33% of the students in the participating institutions complete the gateway mathematics and English courses by the end of their first year. The goal of the Ohio SSTF is to increase the number of students passing these gateway courses as part of a guided pathway within (by the completion of) their first academic year. Additionally, the Ohio SSTF project focuses on reducing the equity gap for students of color, students from economically disadvantaged backgrounds, students from rural areas, and students over the age of 25.

Five implementation forums have been created to provide recommendations to the Ohio SSTF leadership: the Data Implementation Forum, Equity and Inclusion Implementation Forum, Placement Implementation Forum, Co-requisite Implementation Forum, and Advising Implementation Forum. The membership in these forums represents the complete spectrum of public institutions of higher education in Ohio.

While much of the Equity and Inclusion Implementation Forum's work occurred prior to the 2020 calendar year, the final report is being completed in June 2020 in the midst of the global pandemic of the novel coronavirus (COVID-19) and the national movement to challenge racism generally and anti-Black racism specifically. Even before these unique moments in history, it was important to note that equity and inclusion are institutional actions that cannot and should not be conceptualized or implemented piecemeal – this is even truer today. To ground the Equity and Inclusion Implementation Forum's work, the group established common definitions and developed guiding principles to help ensure that institutions leveraged data in an equity-centered manner. The definitions and principles are included below.

Definitions

- **Equity of Student Outcomes:** Elimination of demographic characteristics as predictive of course or program success and completion.
- **Equity in Institutional Support:** Strategic resource and support allocation that is intentionally based upon student populations served, institutional design, and needs for additional infrastructure.
- **Inclusion in Institutional Transformation:** An experience in which all campus constituents (e.g., faculty, staff, students, community members) feel included, heard, and valued in decision making and student learning, success, and equity is centered in the institutional redesign.

Leveraging Data – Guiding Principles

- Data disaggregation by demographic groups of interest
- Review current gaps in outcomes and opportunity
- Review data in ways that compare similarly situated groups and institutions
- Focus on how to present data so it is actionable for institutions
- Data are not collected to be punitive, but to facilitate change and improvement

In addition to the focus on the closing of equity gaps for the student populations listed above, the Equity and Inclusion Implementation Forum highlighted the needs to consider the experiences of and equity gaps associated with students formerly in foster care and those who are veterans or military-affiliated.

In this report, you will notice that the recommendations from the Equity and Inclusion Implementation Forum were not limited to impacts on the successful completion of gateway math and English courses, but instead take a broader approach given the belief that equity and inclusion require institutional focus to have meaningful impact for historically underrepresented and minoritized populations. Therefore, in this report we share examples of success and novel ideas being considered via a survey to participating institutions, provide an overview of climate assessment tools currently available, offer some guidance on identifying appropriate consultants and speakers, and provide general guidance to the Ohio Department of Higher Education and campuses around equity and inclusion.

Acknowledgements

This work was supported in part by Strong Start to Finish, Education Commission of the States. The views expressed in this publication are those of the author(s) and do not necessarily represent those of Strong Start to Finish, Education Commission of the States, its officers, or employees. Strong Start to Finish is an emerging network of committed postsecondary leaders and philanthropists, working together to change institutional practice and policy across the nation and bring equity to education. Our goal is to significantly increase the number and proportion of low-income students, students of color and returning adults who succeed in college math and English and enter a program of study in their first year of college. For more information, visit www.strongstart.org.

Equity & Inclusion Implementation Forum Charge

The goal of Ohio Strong Start to Finish is to increase student completion of their credit-bearing gateway mathematics and English courses in their first 12 months of matriculation, with a specific emphasis on closing the attainment gaps for students of color, adults over 25, rural students, and Pell-eligible students. The State of Ohio has an established goal that by 2025, 65% of Ohioans aged 25-64 will have a postsecondary credential of value. It is clear that Ohio cannot meet its attainment goal unless gaps in achievement are closed for underserved populations.

The Equity and Inclusion Implementation Forum is charged with developing collaborative solutions on the following items:

- Identify leaders in closing equity gaps that could be helpful in providing models for other campuses;
- Capture evidence-based practices for both institutional efforts and state policies, which result in closing attainment gaps among diverse populations;
- Recommend technical assistance that could be used for system and institutional improvements;
- Advise the Ohio SSTF leadership teams on ways to ensure equity and inclusion are at the forefront of the initiative.

The Equity and Inclusion Implementation Forum will serve as a sounding board and advisory group to the Ohio SSTF leadership teams on ways to close the achievement gap between diverse groups of students. The Equity and Inclusion Implementation Forum may also have recommendations for other equity and inclusion-related areas that emerge and are germane to the goal of the initiative.

Survey of Equity and Inclusion Initiatives at Participating Institutions

Over the last two decades, we have witnessed a growing urgency on the part of state governments and institutions of higher education to reform what has traditionally been called “remediation,” but what has increasingly come to be known as “developmental education.” This change in nomenclature has occurred due to a recognition that students who place in developmental education are understood as students in need of additional academic support, with which they—like students not deemed less-prepared—are capable of achieving academic success. “Remediation” today, then, should be viewed as further educating, providing these students with the knowledge they need to succeed.

While we are often encouraged to look outside of the state for models of successful equity and inclusion initiatives, the Equity and Inclusion Implementation Forum members asked that Ohio institutions be surveyed to provide more locally contextualized examples of success with equity and inclusion. Below are examples of equity and inclusion initiatives that have had many years of success as well as those that are relatively new. Rather than separate them into long-standing and recent initiatives, they are categorized by their focus and/or strategy.

Strategy: Success Coaches

As a new and unique system, higher education can often be confusing and overwhelming to new students, especially those from historically underrepresented and minoritized backgrounds. As a result, some institutions have invested institutional and philanthropic resources into a student success strategy that employs part- and full-time staff members to serve as student success coaches. Two Ohio examples are included next.

- **University of Cincinnati Blue Ash College's Success Coaching for Cincinnati Public Schools Graduates:** All first-year students who graduate from Cincinnati Public Schools are paired with a success coach to help guide them through the first-year at UC Blue Ash College. Success coaches provide outreach and wraparound support in areas of academic study, finances, emotional well-being, and social connectedness by offering just-in-time and personalized resources. Students are required to meet 1:1 on a monthly basis and attend workshops twice monthly with their coach throughout the first year.
 - » **Population(s) of Focus:** first-year students from Cincinnati Public Schools; includes students of color, Pell-eligible students, students from under-resourced communities/families, and veterans/military-affiliated students.

- » **Success:**
 - Students assigned success coaches persisted from fall to spring at a rate 10.4 percent higher than those without success coaches
 - 79% of students of color completed the intervention in fall 2019.
 - 84% of Pell-eligible students completed the intervention in fall 2019.
- **Cleveland State University's Graduation Success Coaches:** Full-time staff members were hired as Graduation Success Coaches to work with incoming underrepresented minority students to help them navigate the transition to college.
 - » **Population(s) of Focus:**
 - Students of Color
 - Pell-eligible students; students from under resourced communities/families
 - Adults over 25
 - Veterans/military-affiliated students
 - Students formerly in foster care
 - » **Success:** first-year retention increased from 50 percent to 81 percent.

Strategy: Comprehensive Approaches for Specific Populations

Other common approaches to equity and inclusion-focused student success efforts in Ohio were those that focused on the comprehensive support of a specific population. The most developed program came from Sinclair Community College and focused on adult students over the age of 25, including those who previously stopped out.

- **Sinclair Community College’s EAGLE Initiative:** EAGLE, or Engaging Adults to Graduate and Lead to Efficiencies, was designed to develop and promote new educational models to incentivize adults to complete an associate degree in 20 months or less (for full-time enrollment) or 36 months or less (if attending part time). The EAGLE Initiative provides an innovative “concierge” model with select degree programs to provide case management support from a student’s initial inquiry through degree completion. The case managers are known as Navigators. The ultimate goal of the effort is to increase degree completion through an accelerated time frame, which includes summer.
 - » **Additional Program Details:** Navigators act as holistic advisors, working with students from pre-enrollment to graduation and providing non-academic supports and wraparound services. Participation in the EAGLE Initiative provides adults with priority registration, mid-term check-ins with each student’s instructor, and personalized text nudges and phone calls.

- » **Population(s) of Focus:** Adults over 25, including returning adults.
- » **Success:** Since the program’s inception in fall 2017, 33 percent of students graduated within 20 months or less of enrollment, compared with the college’s three-year graduation rate of 26 percent.
- » **Other Institutional Changes:**
 - Sinclair redesigned the recruitment process to intentionally include orientation and outreach to adults 25 years old and older.
 - Faculty and staff are encouraged to participate in a three-hour training program (Adult Champion Training) designed to help faculty and staff better meet the needs of the adult population; training was developed through Sinclair’s Center for Teaching and Learning and covers content on evidence-based classroom strategies for adults, holistic supports, diversity, and equity topics.

Strategy: Attending to Critical Junctures and Transitions

- **Cuyahoga Community College’s [Women in Transition](#):** WIT serves women in various stages of transition who are exploring possibilities to advance their academic, career, or personal life. The program focuses on building self-esteem and confidence, establishing goals in a supportive environment, and introducing women to the resources and opportunities at Tri-C. The program is non-credit bearing; women who have not completed their high school diploma are allowed to participate and support is provided for completion of a GED.
 - » Population(s) focus: diverse women.
 - » Success:
 - In 2018-2019, 236 of 354 participants completed the program.
 - Completion rates by demographic group
 - » Students of color: 56%
 - » Adults over 25: 92%
 - » Pell-eligible students: 34%
 - » Veterans/military-affiliated students: 28%
 - » First-generation students: 19%
- **Stark State College’s [Jump Start Program](#):** A half-day program designed to build upon the concepts discussed at orientation and to provide students with information to aid in a successful transition to college. The program is composed of an opening plenary session along with a series of breakout sessions from which to choose and an opportunity to network with other students as well as faculty.
 - » **Population(s) of Focus:** All new first-time college students.
 - » **Success:** Students who attended Jump Start had a higher GPA, term-to-term persistence, retention, and first-day enrollment than non-attendees.
- **University of Cincinnati’s [CPS Strong](#):** Designed as a partnership across UC, Cincinnati Public Schools, and the broader community to support readiness, create access, and foster success for CPS students by aligning and co-designing programs and services in order to facilitate a more robust, system-wide ecosystem of support, with the student at the center. 2019-2020 was the first year of this initiative.

Strategy: Partnering with National Efforts

- **Lorain County Community College implements UNIDOS US's [Avanzando through College](#):** LCCC's Avanzando through Education Program is focused on increasing the success of first year Hispanic/Latino students. The program is built around a 12-seminar curriculum provided by UnidosUS that is intended to build leadership skills of individual students, while creating a learning community to help students connect with peers from similar backgrounds. The program is supplemented by cohort mentoring/ advising and each student is provided a cash stipend at the end of the program to incentivize completion.

Strategy: Partnering with State-Wide Efforts

In addition to Ohio Strong Start to Finish, the Ohio Department of Higher Education has several initiatives that include a focus on closing equity gaps for underrepresented populations of students, including economically disadvantaged students, adult students, and students of color.

- **[Bridges to Success](#):** With support from the Helmsley Charitable Trust, the Bridges to Success Mathematics Initiative has provided grants and technical assistance to public institutions in Ohio to improve student success by systematically linking three successful strategies: guided degree pathways, redesigned mathematics gateway courses, and corequisite remediation.

- **[Finish for Your Future](#):** With support from Lumina Foundation and ODHE, Finish for Your Future builds upon established initiatives and creates a strategic framework to advance improvement of adult learner outcomes. The project will produce recommendations for institutions, ODHE, and Ohio public policy to support adult learners entering or returning to higher education.
- **[GEAR UP Ohio](#):** The GEAR UP project is focused on embedding a college-going culture in targeted schools and communities to increase the number of low-income students prepared to enter and succeed in postsecondary education. The project's goals are to increase academic performance, preparation for postsecondary education, high school graduation rates, and knowledge of postsecondary options, preparation and financing.
- **[Ohio Mathematics Initiative](#):** The goal of the Ohio Mathematics Initiative is to support the development of pathways in mathematics that yield: (a) increased success for students in the study of mathematics, (b) a higher percentage of students completing degree programs, and (c) effective transferability of credits for students moving from one Ohio public institution to another.

Strategy: Promising Practices Covered by Other Implementation Forums

These include:

- Co-Requisite support for Math and English
 - » [Long-term benefits of co-requisite mathematics](#)
 - » [Tools for improving co-requisite models](#)
 - » For an example of success in Ohio (based on the survey noted above), check out the work happening at Columbus State Community College.
- Math Pathways
- Multiple measures for placement
 - » [Moving beyond placement exams](#)
 - » [Advancing opportunity](#)
- Predictive analytics-informed proactive advising

Climate Assessment Tools

During the Equity and Inclusion Implementation Forum's June 2019 retreat, there were a number of climate assessment tools shared that might be of interest to those interested in leveraging equity and inclusion to transform their institution for minoritized populations. They include:

- SOVA SSTF Assessment
- [National Assessment of Collegiate Campus Climates](#) – USC Race and Equity Center
- The [Culturally Engaging Campus Environments \(CECE\) Surveys](#) – National Institute for Transformation & Equity
- [Equity Scorecard](#) – USC Center for Urban Education

Some Guidance on Identifying Consultants and Speakers

Often when there is consideration given to tackling challenging, long-standing, persistent problems, colleges and universities turn to consultants and speakers. However, we know that not all consultants and speakers are the same – and not all consultants and speakers will be useful for all considerations. Below, guidance is provided to help Ohio colleges and universities determine if they should seek to engage speakers (one or multiple events) or longer-term consultants.

Determine institutional need: consultant versus speakers.

To ensure that colleges and universities are getting the right support from external consultants and speakers, they have to be willing to be clear in stating their need. Traditionally, speakers are for one or multiple, short-term engagement opportunities that seek to educate around a specific topic and inspire participants to act, learn, or change, among other things. However, it is rarely the case that speakers are intended to help institutions identify and work through substantive institutional transformation. Instead, colleges and universities would consider short- or long-term consultants. Short-term consultants are perhaps best employed to help an institution address a specific, well-defined concern, while longer-term consultants likely can be employed to help institutions investigate broader, less-defined challenges and subsequently work to develop a more substantial plan to address the challenge as its root cause becomes better understood.

Consider the alignment between the inviting institution and the invited speaker/consultant. Once an institution is clear if it desires a speaker or consultant, there are questions that should be considered to determine if the possible speakers/consultants are appropriately aligned with the needs of the college or university.

Questions for evaluating speakers might include the following:

- What are the goals (e.g., inspiration, critical reflection) for bringing in this speaker at this time?
- What are the focal areas of the speaker's prior engagements?
- Is the content of the speaker appropriate for the level of knowledge of the campus community?
- Which level of faculty, staff, students is the person/company best equipped to meet and work with?
- If the focus of the talk centers on the issues of a minoritized population, is the speaker from that background? If not, are there other qualified speakers who are?

Questions for considering consultants might include the following:

- What level of familiarity does the person/company have with your state/institution's social, historical, and political context?
- Which level of faculty, staff, students is the person/company best equipped to meet and work with?
- What are their previous engagements? How long did they last?
- What are the outcomes for institutions that worked with the consultants previously? Is that true for institutions like mine?
- If the focus of the topic of the consultation centers on the issues of a minoritized population, is the speaker from that background? If not, are there other qualified speakers who are?

The questions listed above are meant to provide a starting point for college and university leaders to more clearly identify the goal of engaging a speaker or consultant, as well as how to ensure that the individuals contracted represent the diversity, equity, and inclusion the institution is seeking to facilitate or reinforce.

Determine the outcomes against which to measure.

Perhaps the most important component of considering speakers and consultants is clearly defining the purpose of engagement and the desired or anticipated outcomes. While these can be developed in partnership with the speaker/consultant, the college/university leaders must be clear in their objectives. Subsequently, they should structure their contract with the speaker/consultant in a manner that lays out the outcomes and discusses the best way to measure them. While helpful and appropriate for limited engagement speakers, this is critical for consultants.

Equity and Inclusion Guidance to ODHE

1. **Establish a Standing Committee on Equity and Inclusion in Ohio Higher Education.** As established early on in the work of the Ohio Strong Start to Finish Equity and Inclusion Implementation Forum, equity and inclusion are efforts that cannot — and should not — be limited to individual initiatives. As a result, there is support for a standing committee on equity and inclusion in Ohio Higher Education. This standing committee would be responsible for providing guidance to the leadership of ODHE and Ohio college and university leaders on important equity and inclusion considerations, as well as the identification, contextualization, and review of implemented promising practices.
2. **Prioritize disaggregated completion and progression metrics.** ODHE has an abundance of institutional data available that can help contextualize the current challenges of the diverse students enrolled at Ohio's colleges and universities. ODHE should prioritize the review and use of disaggregated completion and progression metrics to help campuses identify potential gaps in their support of their varied student populations. For example, ODHE might help institutions look at the difference between first-year retention rates and 30-credit-hour progression by (and at the intersections of) race, gender, Pell-eligibility, and first-generation status, among other demographics.

3. Evaluate the racialized difference impact in key programs. The Equity and Inclusion Implementation Forum encourages ODHE to investigate the ways in which their signature programs challenge or reinforce differential outcomes by race, gender, Pell-eligibility, and first-generation status, among other demographic groups. Some programs for consideration include College Credit Plus and Ohio College Opportunity Grant (OCOG).

4. Develop a catalog of prospective speakers, consultants, and local/national leaders. This implementation forum developed a list of speakers, consultants, and local/national leaders (Appendix) based on who had been previously engaged/invited to Ohio colleges and universities. We believe that ODHE could bring particular value and support to Ohio colleges and universities by continuing to build out a list of speakers, consultants, and local/national leaders that might be useful to campuses, noting the typical kinds of engagements offered, where they have seen success, and what campuses need to know about connecting and contracting with such individuals and organizations (e.g., cost, websites).

Equity and Inclusion Guidance to Campuses

1. **Define key terms for the college/university community.** To ensure that all members of the college or university community are on the same page regarding the objectives of the change initiative, such as Ohio Strong Start to Finish, it is important that institutional leadership work with varied stakeholder groups to define key terms, including diversity, inclusion, and equity for the institution broadly and within the initiative specifically. As noted for the Equity & Inclusion Implementation Forum, keywords can require more specificity (e.g., equity in student outcomes, equity in institutional support, inclusion in institutional transformation).
2. **Understand perspectives and perceptions of key stakeholders.** Undoubtedly, members of any institutional community will have varied perspectives and perceptions of the need for and the extent to which diversity, equity, and inclusion efforts should be implemented. To increase one's likelihood of successful diagnosis, solution development, and implementation, it is imperative that colleges and universities make efforts to understand the varied perspectives and perceptions of key stakeholders. While it is certainly necessary at the onset of any such efforts, colleges and universities must be sure to check in periodically to determine how such perspectives and perceptions are changing (or evolving) in response to the institution's efforts.

3. **Communicate institutional expectations and goals frequently.** While it may seem sufficient to host a large launch event and then allow the work toward a specific goal to continue, it is necessary to regularly communicate institutional expectations and goals. This allows new faculty and staff to be brought into the conversation and reminds the broader campus community that you are still working toward these goals.
 4. **Develop transparent, data-informed accountability metrics and publish progress.** Any effort for improvement must be data-informed and equity-centered. To continue intentional accountability, it can be helpful to publish progress in a manner that keeps the campus community accountable, informed, and motivated to continue making progress. Leaders should consider the extent to which information on progress is made available, being transparent about the frequency with which websites and dashboards will be updated and to whom it will be available. Is it just faculty, staff, and students, or will it be accessible by those outside the institution as well?
 5. **Include opportunities for self-examination and reflection.** Work to enhance an institution's diversity, equity, and inclusion goals can be challenging, especially when focused on underserved specific student populations. It can be helpful and necessary to incorporate opportunities for self-examination and reflection, especially in corporate experiences.
6. **Leverage qualitative and quantitative data.** It is impossible for only quantitative data to tell an institution's success or struggles. To give a fuller picture of what is going on, it is important that college and university administrators deploy qualitative and quantitative data to tell themselves and the broader institutional community the progress made and challenges still ahead.
 7. **Use national experts purposefully.** National (and even state) experts can be important motivators, who help campus constituents understand what might be necessary to make the desired strides. However, national experts can also project potential or promising solutions in isolation of local context, creating increased opportunities for constituents to call out why they think a particular approach cannot or will not work. If invited to campus, the role of the national expert must be clearly outlined and that person should be informed how they should connect to local context, challenges, and concerns.

8. **Distinguish between invited speakers and consultants.**

All too often, colleges and universities bring external experts to campus with false hopes of their impact. It is important to distinguish between the goals and expectations of invited speakers. One cannot hope for long-term engagement and impact from an individual who is brought in for one day with a motivational speech. Similarly, one has to be intentional about the role of consultants, their responsibilities, and how an institution intends to make use of the consultants' expertise. Institutional leaders have to be clear on the cadence of engagement and how progress will be measured along the way as well as at the end of the contract.

9. **Celebrate successes and invite collective attention and engagement for persistent problems.** This work can be difficult. It's important that senior leaders find opportunities to celebrate successes. Additionally, rather than hiding persistent problems or leaving them unattended, senior leaders can reinforce the collaborative nature of this work by inviting groups to turn attention and collective engagement toward identification of new approaches to further engage persistent problems.

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Appendix: Consultants, Speakers, and State/National Leaders

Members of the Ohio Strong Start to Finish Equity and Inclusion Implementation Forum highlighted a number of consultants, speakers, and state/national leaders with whom institutions have found success in progressing their equity and inclusion work. This abbreviated list is included below.

- Complete College America Fellows (<https://completecollege.org/cca-fellows/>)
- USC Race and Equity Center (<https://race.usc.edu/>)
 - » Equity Institutes (<https://race.usc.edu/equity-institutes/>)
- National Institute for Transformation & Equity (<https://www.indiana.edu/~cece/wordpress/>)
- OACC's [Student Success Leadership Institute](#)
- Speaker bureaus such as [CAMPUSPEAK](#)
- Specific Speakers/Consultants
 - » Dr. Damon Williams (<https://drdamonawilliams.com/about/>)
 - » Dr. [Shaun Harper](#), Professor and Executive Director, [USC Race and Equity Center](#)
 - » Dr. [Rebecca Covarrubias](#), Associate Professor & Faculty Director, [Student Success Equity Research Center](#), UC Santa Cruz
 - » Dr. [Sonja Ardoin](#), Assistant Professor, Appalachian State University
 - » Dr. [Sara Goldrick-Rab](#), Founding Director of the [Hope Center for College, Community, and Justice](#) & Professor, Temple University
 - » [Andre Perry](#), Brookings Institute
 - » Dr. [Tia Brown McNair](#), Vice President for Diversity, Equity, and Student Success & Executive Director for the Truth, Racial Healing, and Transformation Campus Centers, Association of American College & Universities
 - » [Petey Peterson](#), Director, [Office of Gender and Sexual Diversity](#), Tulane University
 - » Dr. Ben Williams, [National Alliance for Partnerships in Equity](#) (NAPE)

