

# ACTION RESEARCH BRIEF



## A Reflection of WTCS Student Success Center Progress and Data-informed Next Steps

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### Abstract

The Wisconsin Technical College System (WTCS) Student Success Center supports the 16 WTCS colleges as they develop student-centered pathways and advance educational equity at their institutions. The goal of the Center is to support institutional transformation that cultivates success for each WTCS student. Through the analysis of college interview data, survey data, written documents, and Scale of Adoption Assessment ratings, this brief reflects the progress of WTCS college pathway implementation and presents a series of data-informed opportunities to advance the Center's future work.

### Introduction

Two-year public college enrollments in the U.S. have grown to over eight million students served each year as brick-and-mortar two-year institutions have nearly doubled in count since the early 1960s (Cohen, Brawer, & Kisker, 2014). Government officials and community leaders look to these higher education institutions to provide a wide range of academic opportunities that are responsive to employer and community needs. The breadth of services, accessibility, and affordability of a two-year college education has contributed to these institutions serving proportionally more students of color, first-generation college students, low-income students, and part-time students with work/family obligations compared to four-year universities (Cohen et al., 2014). As the prevalence of a two-year college education expanded over the last century, an accountability movement in education also gained momentum presaged by the 1983 publication of *A Nation at Risk*, which called on education institutions to demonstrate their productivity through positive student outcomes (Cohen et al., 2014).

According to the Penn Graduate School of Education's Institute for Research on Higher Education (2018), Wisconsin ranks 49<sup>th</sup> in the nation for educational equity due to sizeable variance in student outcomes by race/ethnicity at the secondary and postsecondary level. Similar equity-related findings are echoed in the Wisconsin Technical College System's (WTCS) *System-wide Equity Report* which extends the narrative by highlighting racial disparities in WTCS staffing. Among many things, the *System-wide Equity Report* calls for institutional transformation where student and staff diversity, equity, and inclusion thrive. A catalyst to advancing Wisconsin's equity imperative resides in the WTCS Student Success Center.

Through support from Ascendium Education Group, the WTCS joined the Jobs for the Future (JFF) Student Success Center Network in 2017. Cooperatively led by the WTCS Office Associate Vice President of Student Success and Associate Vice President of Instructional Services, the WTCS Student Success Center strengthens the efforts of the 16 WTCS colleges and delivers a guiding framework within which colleges can align, integrate, and evaluate their student success and educational equity work. This approach, grounded in developing student-centered pathways, focuses on broad-scale change that affects the daily experience of each WTCS student.

The goal of the WTCS Student Success Center is to support *institutional transformation that cultivates success for each WTCS student*. To achieve this goal, Center activities are guided by four objectives that include:

- Refining the WTCS data infrastructure and its dissemination to best drive student-focused, data-informed decisions;
- Establishing a community of practice to broaden and accelerate the use of proven, high-impact student success strategies;
- Aligning state and national completion initiatives; and
- Leveraging the knowledge and experience available through the JFF Student Success Center Network.

This brief reflects the progress of WTCS college pathway implementation supported by each of the Center's four objectives and presents a series of data-informed opportunities to advance the Center's future work.

#### [Refining the WTCS data infrastructure and its dissemination to best drive student-focused, data-informed decisions](#)

The WTCS continues to elevate the effective use of data through aligned Center supports. With a comprehensive and sustainable data infrastructure, the Center advances the WTCS's practice of using System data for advocacy and continuous improvement.

One of the key activities supported by the WTCS Student Success Center is the development and dissemination of interactive student success dashboards. Shortly after the formation of the Center, the WTCS acquired Tableau data dashboard technology. A series of collaborative efforts supported, and continue to support, the successful scaling of Tableau dashboards and effective data use across the System that include:

- ✓ Forming WTCS Business Intelligence Cross-Functional Teams to inform the identification of consistent System-wide student success metrics and to inform the design of Tableau dashboards;
- ✓ Developing dashboards through the WTCS Office that allow action-oriented data disaggregation in support of advancing educational equity;
- ✓ Documenting student success metrics and dashboard capabilities;
- ✓ Acknowledging WTCS college cultures of data use by developing a system that allows colleges to request dashboard access for individual college staff;
- ✓ Providing guidance to WTCS colleges on dashboard roll-out strategies;
- ✓ Coordinating onsite and virtual training for WTCS staff to build a consistent understanding of dashboard data;
- ✓ Establishing a WTCS webpage for dashboard resources including dashboard user-guides and video recordings;

- ✓ Integrating dashboard data into WTCS Office functions including System Called Meetings, Center convenings, and WTCS grant funding opportunities and allocations; and
- ✓ Evaluating the effectiveness of developed dashboards in an iterative process that aligns with a philosophy of continuous improvement.

Thus far, two Tableau dashboards have been developed and are accessible to the WTCS. The *WTCS Program Performance Dashboard* is a resource for assessing the “health” of WTCS academic programs such as Welding, Nursing, and Business Management. A series of student success measures and equity analysis features are presented within the dashboard to support continuous improvement of the program student lifecycle. Some of the available dashboard success measures include course completion, job placement, and transfer.

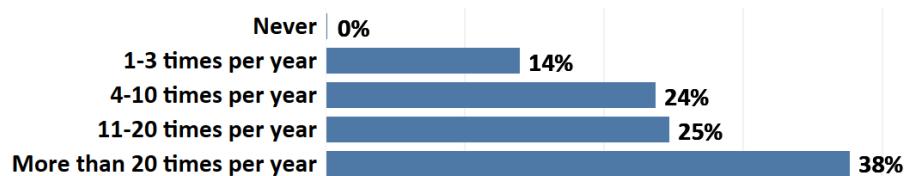
The *WTCS College-Wide Student Success Dashboard* offers a high-level summary of System and college-wide student success outcomes for first-year college students. Some of the presented outcomes include first-year fall-to-spring retention and first-year GPA of a 2.0 or greater. These metrics were informed by guidance from the Community College Research Center, a JFF Student Success Center Network partner, indicating the importance of assessing first-year student outcomes to monitor institutional transformation efforts.

- ✓ 16 WTCS colleges access the data-dashboards
- ✓ 800+ WTCS data-dashboards users
- ✓ 100% of WTCS colleges support continued data-dashboard efforts

Analysis of WTCS staff accessing the Tableau dashboards reveal the tool is used by a diverse audience including college leadership such as presidents, vice presidents and deans, college faculty, curriculum and program designers, student service staff, grant development staff, and institutional research staff. WTCS dashboard users access the tool at varying frequency. As illustrated in Figure 1, nearly two-thirds of dashboard users access the dashboards 11 or more times per year and 38 percent access the dashboards more than 20 times per year.

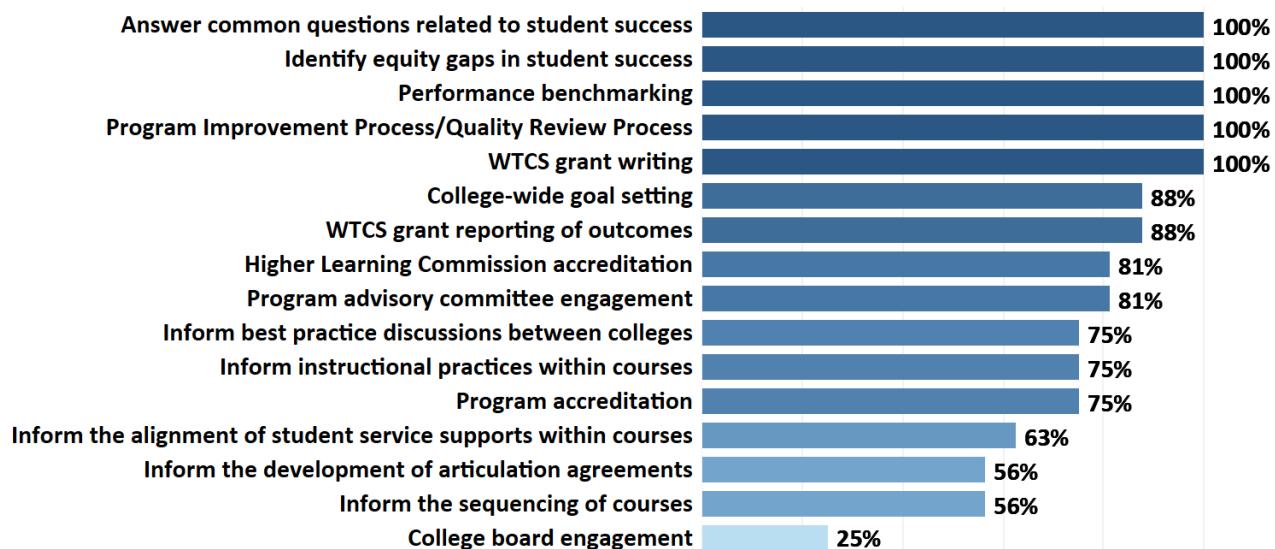
WTCS Tableau dashboard users were prompted through a survey to identify how the dashboards are currently used or are planned to be used to support college efforts. As demonstrated in Figure 2, the breadth of dashboard data use

Figure 1. Frequency of Accessing WTCS Tableau Dashboards



to support college student success is broad. Notably, all 16 WTCS colleges use or plan to use the dashboards to: answer common questions related to student success; identify equity gaps in student success; conduct performance benchmarking with other WTCS colleges; support college program improvement processes and quality review processes; and to support WTCS grant writing. This finding is significant because it demonstrates that the intent of the dashboards to support the advancement of student success is being operationalized across the System.

Figure 2. WTCS Tableau Dashboard Use to Support College Efforts



Results also demonstrate that the dashboards are being used to support external accountability requirements that are pivotal to college operations such as Higher Learning Commission accreditation (81 percent) and program accreditation (75 percent). Additionally, WTCS colleges are making use of the data to engage external audiences including program advisory committees (81 percent), articulation agreement stakeholders (56 percent), and college boards (25 percent).

The value associated with the dashboards has also been echoed by the WTCS Student Success Center third-party continuous improvement partner. Derived from semi-structured interviews with WTCS college staff, the external team recommends that Center efforts maintain focus on data use. With over 800 users of the WTCS Tableau dashboards, the Center should continue to support a System-wide culture of evidence where data is used to guide pathway refinement efforts.

*We use the Tableau dashboard data for our annual program reviews. It is THE most important data within the review. This data is central to identifying curricular improvements and identifying areas of needed academic or student support.*

*Because the data is presented in a manner that is easy to digest, I do not have to clean up the data before sharing. I am confident of the accuracy of data. I am also grateful for the thoughtful design. The dashboard data is the engine that powers our program review process. We are fortunate to have such outstanding data resources.*

- WTCS College Manager of Institutional Effectiveness, Accreditation, & Quality

*The WTCS dashboards provided the foundation for the development of the college's student success efforts. All program chairs, academic leaders, and senior leaders can access the data easily and when needed. This is a critical element of the college's work to remain accredited. The student success measures are now the key results in our college strategic plan. Several strategic goals depend on being able to measure student outcomes, much of what can be found in the dashboards, and having the data available in such an easy-to-use fashion has been beneficial.*

- WTCS College Executive Director of Planning and Organizational Excellence

In response to positive feedback from WTCS stakeholders, Center data-focused supports evolved to include the annual coordination of the WTCS Action Research process. WTCS Action Research leverages System data and investigates a specific question or set of questions to provide insight that is actionable for improving student success. Additionally, WTCS Action Research is coordinated with a focus on equity in student access and outcomes. The WTCS Action Research process includes:

- Gathering research project ideas from WTCS stakeholders;
- Setting the annual research agenda;
- Conducting the research; and
- Sharing the results with the WTCS community through coordinated learning sessions and written briefs.

Through the WTCS Action Research process, a series of equity-focused studies have been conducted that investigate the experiences of students as they advance along WTCS pathways. Some areas of research include equity in high school dual enrollment participation, factors supporting success in adult education and English language learning, inequities in low and high wage program enrollment, transfer student patterns, and stackable credentials as a mechanism to advance workforce and economic equity. The findings derived from action research projects have been shared across a diverse set of audiences including WTCS college staff, education partners, workforce partners, and policy advocates.

Together, the WTCS dashboards and action research complement each other and are situated in a framework of continuous improvement that effectively uses data. Within this framework, WTCS dashboards serve as a resource to identify areas of strength or improvement in student success and action research findings reveal educational concepts that can be implemented and scaled to advance student success.

#### [Establishing a community of practice to broaden and accelerate the use of proven, high-impact student success strategies](#)

The WTCS thrives on collaboration across the 16 WTCS colleges and a united focus for student success. This focus is further unified by the *WTCS Commitment to Progress* which illuminates intentional changes needed in the WTCS to address the systemic racism and institutionalized inequity in our workplaces, educational systems, and society. The work of the Center supports these efforts by bringing together WTCS leaders who coordinate institutional transformation strategies that cultivate success for each WTCS student.

Each year a two-day Center convening brings together student success teams from each WTCS college. The annual WTCS Student Success Summit is an opportunity for college staff to learn from one another as they reflect on their institutional transformation efforts, receive professional development from student success advocates in the JFF Student Success Center Network, and receive updates on supports provided through the WTCS Student Success Center. Three Summits have been coordinated since 2017 with an average of 150 attendees at each.

Results from WTCS Student Success Summit evaluation surveys reveal that attendees have found value in the annual convenings. Highlights from the surveys include:

- In a 2017 Summit session led by the National Center for Inquiry & Improvement on guided pathways and the Scale of Adoption Assessment, 97% of attendees indicated they have a better understanding of guided pathways implementation.
- In a 2018 Summit session led by Center staff on measuring guided pathways early momentum indicators, 97% of respondents reported they will share at least one thing they learned from the session, and 99% of respondents reported they will “take action” by continuing the discussion at their college about measuring the implementation of guided pathways practices.
- In a 2018 Summit session led by Achieving the Dream on holistic student support redesign, four in five attendees indicated the session increased their knowledge of holistic student support redesign.
- In reflection of the 2019 Summit focused on educational equity, 98% of attendees reported they have a better understanding of implementing equity-minded approaches to support student success at their college.

The WTCS Student Success Center has also coordinated a series of additional professional learning opportunities outside of the annual Summits. Some examples include onsite Tableau dashboard training sessions at WTCS colleges and data-informed equity discussions at System Called Meetings like the 35<sup>th</sup> Annual Information Technology Conference. Collectively, the professional development through large-scale convenings or college-level engagements have brought WTCS staff together to build knowledge of student success strategies for institutional change.

The WTCS Student Success Center also aims to build System awareness of high-impact student success practices. These practices are identified through the WTCS Action Research process, collaboration amongst the WTCS colleges, and connections with national student success organizations through the JFF Student Success Center Network. One example of how the Center has curated promising practices from the WTCS colleges includes the administration of the WTCS Student Success Center Promising Practice Mini-Grant. Each WTCS college was awarded funds to document promising practices and share the information during the 2019 WTCS Student Success Summit. In time, these student success practices will culminate into a virtual repository for WTCS stakeholders to access as they consider college strategies that support equitable outcomes for students.

### [Aligning state and national completion initiatives](#)

In the first year of forming the WTCS Student Success Center, Center leadership became aware of the Community College Research Center’s Scale of Adoption Assessment (SOAA). Center staff found value in the SOAA as a tool to align the WTCS’s history of career pathways implementation with national initiatives centered on guided pathways. Further, the assessment provided a framework for talking about pathways and for assessing progress of institutional transformation towards successful pathways implementation. Clearly aligned with the Center’s goal, the Center incentivized the college completion of the SOAA and the use of the assessment results to support college pathway refinement.

Each of the WTCS colleges were invited to apply for the WTCS Student Success Center Leadership Grant. All colleges were awarded funding, and as such, completed the SOAA and used the assessment results to prioritize funded activities. Funded colleges were also required to complete the SOAA roughly two years later to understand progress of pathway implementation.

WTCS Student Success Center staff provided technical assistance to support the colleges' understanding of the SOAA. Technical assistance included coordinated webinars with the Community College Research Center in 2017 and an in-person presentation by the Community College Research Center during the 2019 Summit. Each session was coordinated to support WTCS college understanding of the SOAA and its successful completion. Additionally, Center staff provided onsite SOAA facilitation services to interested colleges.

Half of the WTCS colleges requested SOAA facilitation support from Center staff. In response, WTCS Student Success Center staff coordinated a half-day onsite facilitation session with each college's student success team of 12-15 staff. Each college student success team engaged in focused and open discussion around the SOAA essential practices and their institutions

- ✓ 8 WTCS colleges received SOAA facilitation support from the Center
- ✓ 100+ WTCS staff engaged in SOAA facilitation activities
- ✓ 98% of WTCS staff valued Center SOAA facilitation activities

implementation. At the end of a facilitation session, the college student success team had a foundational understanding of the SOAA and a broader understanding of their institutions progress towards pathways implementation.

Colleges receiving the WTCS Student Success Center Leadership Grant provided their college's completed SOAAs to the Center. Analysis of the first year SOAAs and each college's grant application revealed that the majority of WTCS colleges prioritized practices that supported helping students choose and enter a pathway and keeping students on a pathway. In response to these data, the Center coordinated supports including a two-day institute offered in collaboration with Achieving the Dream on holistic student support redesign followed by college-level coaching sessions on student support redesign. It is important to note that while these funded activities focused on helping students choose and enter a pathway and keeping students on a pathway, Center supports and WTCS activities also align with other areas of the pathway framework i.e., mapping pathways to student end goals and ensuring that students are learning.

A comparison of the SOAA results from the first year of the WTCS Student Success Center to the third-year reveal progress in pathways implementation as well as areas that colleges may benefit from additional Center support. Analysis of SOAA ratings from *Not Occurring* to *At Scale* were compared longitudinally across each WTCS college for each of the SOAA essential practices to understand incremental change in scaling since the formation of the WTCS Student Success Center. Figures 3, 4, 5, and 6 present the SOAA results in year three and the number of colleges that reported an increase in SOAA ratings. Colleges used the following scale to rate each of the practices presented in the SOAA.

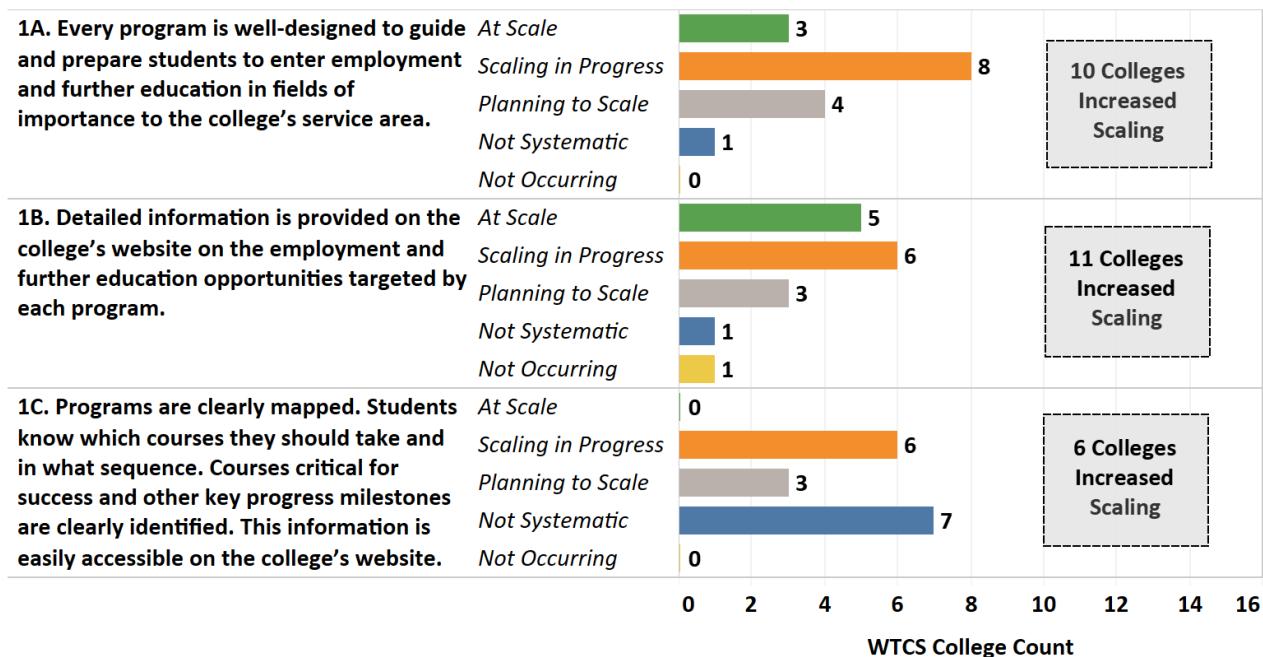
Scale of Adoption	Definition
<i>Not occurring</i>	College is currently not following, or planning to follow, this practice
<i>Not systematic</i>	Practice is incomplete, inconsistent, informal, and/or optional
<i>Planning to scale</i>	College is/has made plans to implement the practice at scale and has started to put these plans into place
<i>Scaling in progress</i>	Implementation of the practice is in progress for all students
<i>At scale</i>	Practice is implemented at scale—that is, for all students in all programs of study

#### ***Mapping Pathways to Student End Goals***

As demonstrated in Figure 3, the majority of WTCS colleges are implementing efforts to scale the practices associated with mapping pathways to student end goals. A System strength within this domain is the WTCS's engagement in career pathways implementation prior to the formation of the WTCS Student Success Center. As such, WTCS colleges have institutionalized the alignment of academic programs to employment through program development, maintenance, and modification processes that engage local employers and workforce partners.

Activity in this domain has led to significant progress from year one to year three. Based on SOAA

Figure 3. Mapping Pathways to Student End Goals Domain - SOAA Year 3 Results and Year 1 to Year 3 Comparisons



ratings, ten colleges have increased the scaling of program design practices related to employment and transfer (practice 1A). Derived from narrative in completed SOAAs, many colleges are actively clarifying pathway opportunities for program-to-program transfer and continuing the existing processes of aligning programs to employment. Recent collaborative efforts between the Wisconsin higher education partners resulting in the Wisconsin Transferology website and new transfer agreements with the Wisconsin Association of Independent Colleges and Universities should support the further scaling of transfer pathway efforts in Wisconsin. An opportunity for the WTCS Student Success Center may include coordinating training on the effective use of the Transferology tool and building awareness among WTCS students and college staff, or providing a platform where colleges can discuss strategies in developing program-to-program transfer agreements.

One-third of WTCS colleges reported an increase in scaling program maps for students (practice 1C). While an increase has occurred, seven WTCS colleges are *Not Systematic* in this practice. Many of these colleges reported they have a listing of each program's required curriculum on their websites, but they are structured for full-time program students who take 12 or more credits per semester. Additionally, colleges rated as *Not Systematic* indicated the program pages on their college websites

are missing other key components identified within this practice such as milestones to program completion. One of these colleges noted:

*Some areas for improvement include creating part-time program maps, identifying milestone courses in each program, and ensuring the website is up-to-date with all of the relevant information for each program.*

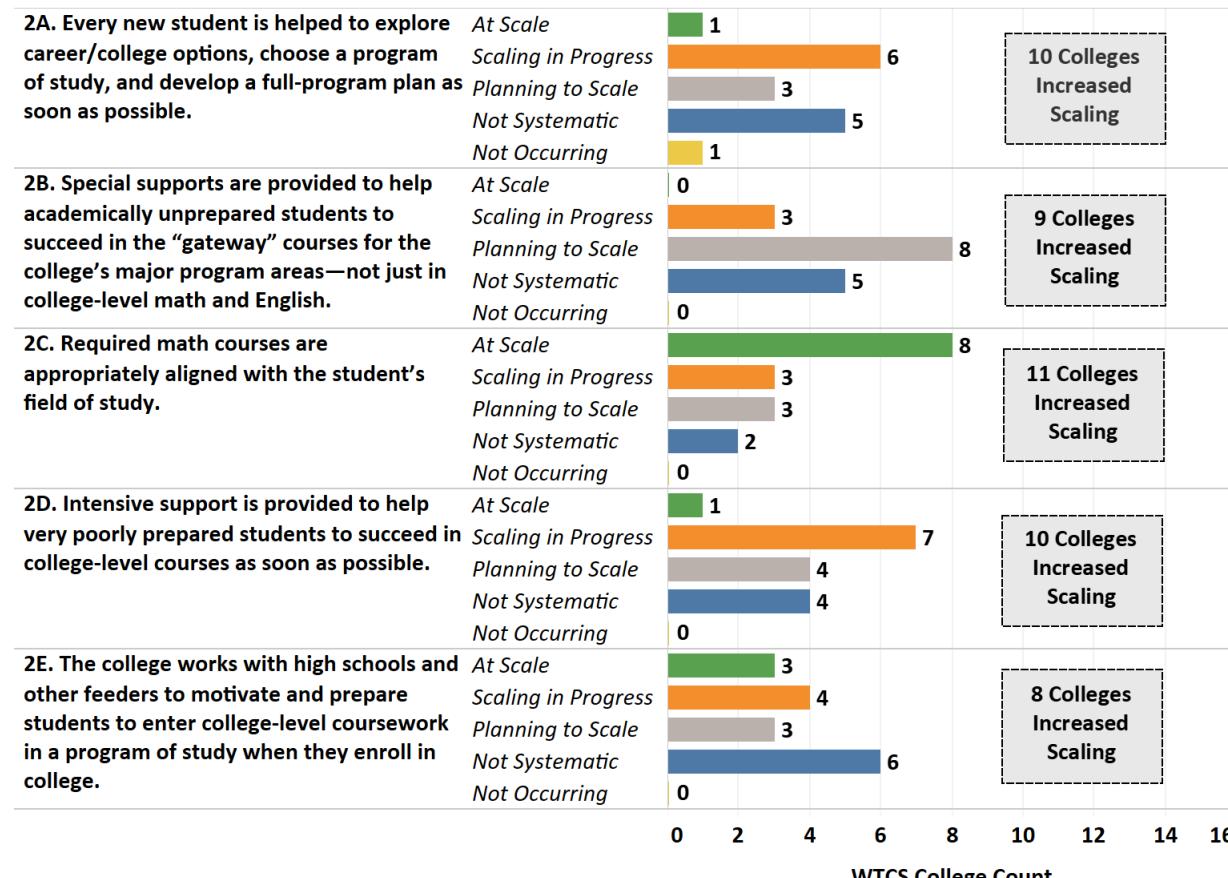
There may be an opportunity for the WTCS Student Success Center to leverage the existing collaborative relationships across the colleges by convening and identifying critical courses and program milestones in programs that are offered across all or a majority of the 16 WTCS colleges.

### **Helping Students Choose and Enter a Pathway**

WTCS colleges continue to scale student-centered approaches within the domain of helping students choose and enter a pathway (see Figure 4). The collective activity across the WTCS within this domain has contributed to notable institutional change. SOAA comparisons from year one to year three demonstrate that half of the WTCS colleges have increased the scaling of *each* practice within the helping student choose and enter a pathway domain.

The most growth has been reported in the math course alignment practice (2C). Additionally, half of WTCS colleges report that the practice is at scale across all programs of study. One college indicated they reduced the number of math course offerings and worked with programs to contextualize

**Figure 4. Helping Students Choose and Enter a Pathway - SOAA Year 3 Results and Year 1 to Year 3 Comparisons**



math course activities relevant to the program. Another college rated *At Scale* indicated their college General Education Math team reviews their course offerings with each division through an annual process to ensure proper alignment. These efforts have led to the adoption of contextualized offerings including quantitative reasoning courses in the college's Criminal Justice and Health Information Technology programs. Some colleges rated *At Scale* also noted the implementation of math pathways and the use of co-requisite models to transition adult education students to academic programs. The noted strategies coupled with several colleges at different stages of implementation highlight an opportunity for the WTCS Student Success Center; specifically, in coordinating practice sharing among WTCS colleges to support successful implementation across the System.

The continued WTCS scaling of high school dual credit, resulting in over 200,000 WTCS credits being awarded to high school students in 2019 alone, has provided opportunities for pathway exploration and building academic momentum in high school to WTCS college transitions (practice 2E). While WTCS colleges have made significant progress in scaling high school dual credit pathways, one-third of colleges rate practice 2E as *Not Systematic*. One college's SOAA comments suggest a need for dual credit expansion in rural regions of the state. The college indicated: *With 47 school districts across 11 counties, it is difficult to be involved in each one at the same level to create dual credit opportunities*. Additionally, colleges rated as *Not Systematic* cited a need to critically assess dual credit eligibility requirements and how these may limit access among students from diverse backgrounds. One college cited:

*Each high school is different and has guidelines on who qualifies to enroll in a dual credit academy. This may be leaving out underrepresented individuals. Are schools with higher numbers of minority/non-white students offered equitable opportunities to gain dual credit prior to high school graduation?*

The majority of colleges indicated a strong focus on high school dual credit within this practice (2E), suggesting room to understand the scaling of other college feeders. Specifically, there may be opportunity for the Center to facilitate strategies that build pathway feeders to college programs through re-entry services for incarcerated populations and adult education or English language learning programming.

### ***Keeping Students on a Pathway***

Colleges have made progress in scaling the five practices that support students in staying on their path, yet many rate themselves as *Not Systematic* (see Figure 5). One half of WTCS colleges have increased the scaling of monitoring student progress toward program completion (practice 3A). This finding is encouraging given the Center's intentional collaboration with Achieving the Dream on student support redesign. One college that advanced their scaling indicated they developed new college processes and the use of data to support the monitoring of students.

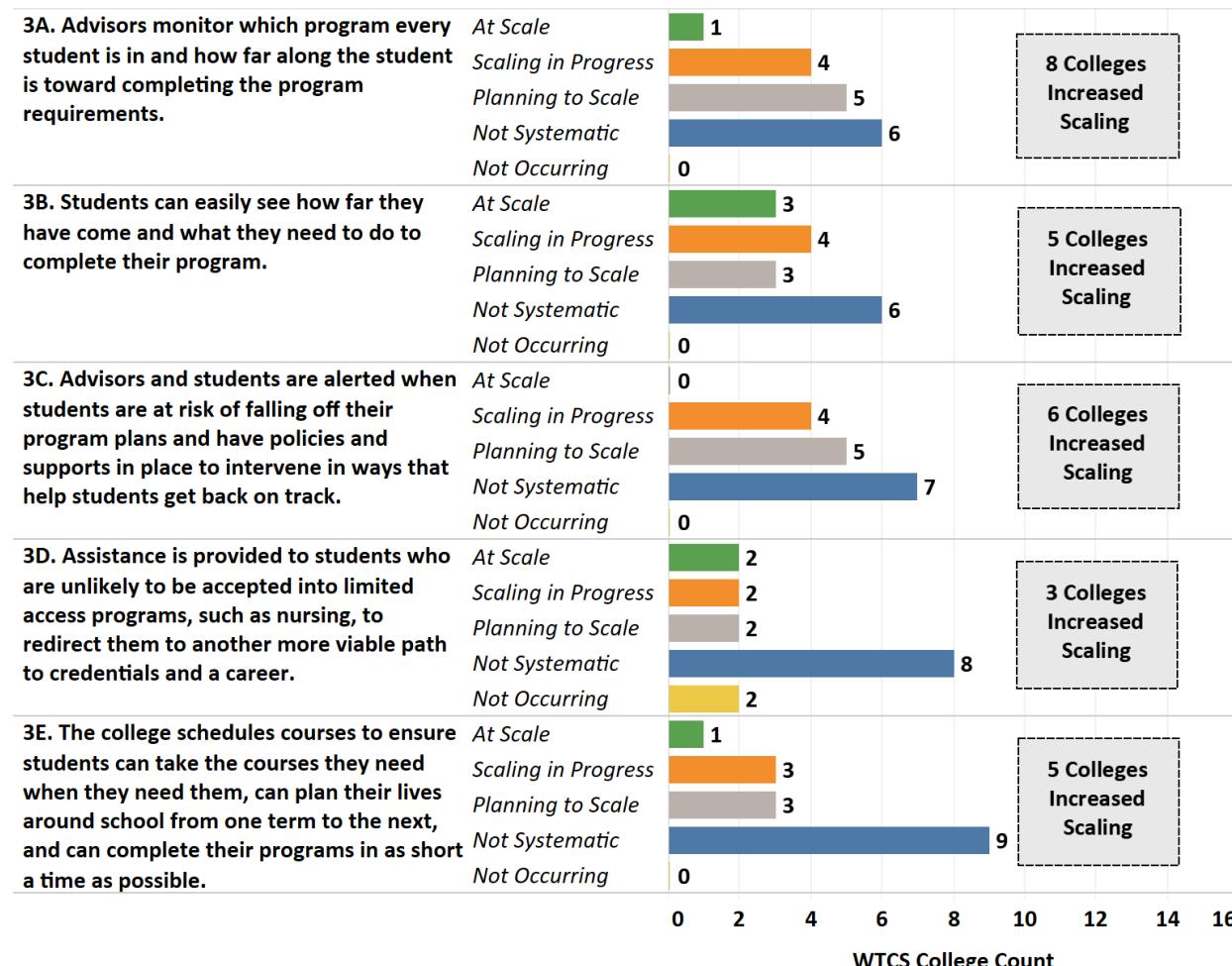
*An assigned advisor process was implemented in 2018. Assigned staff and faculty advisors have defined caseloads allowing them to focus their efforts on supporting specific student populations. Additionally, the college is beginning its efforts in implementing predictive analytics. This functionality will assign a Predicted Risk Level for each student, allowing staff and faculty to focus retention efforts on students who may need additional support on their path to completion.*

The described use of data to prioritize staff/student connections may be a lever to success. This is notable as many colleges indicated that large advisor caseloads limit the ability to provide “just in-time” support to students. Some colleges also reported other methods to monitoring student progress such as faculty advising models or the use of technology tools to support advising efforts.

Assistance for students unlikely to be accepted into limited access programs (practice 3D) had the least number of colleges that increased scaling and is also a practice with one half of colleges rated as *Not Systematic*. Additionally, two colleges rated the scaling of this practice as *Not Occurring*. The majority of colleges indicated they do not have a defined college process to support practice 3D. Sample comments supporting this notion include:

- *Unless a student requests assistance, they are not directed into different paths. Students who do not meet program requirements are put in pre-program status but are not required to meet with someone.*
- *Assistance is regularly provided to students after they have not been admitted into a program. Although some individual staff members may have these types of conversations ahead of time, there is not a systematic approach to guiding advisors and faculty in providing this assistance to students.*

Figure 5. Keeping Students on a Pathway - SOAA Year 3 Results and Year 1 to Year 3 Comparisons



Narrative related to timing of outreach or lack-there-of is consistent across colleges who indicated they are *Not Systematic*. One college reporting more progress in this practice indicated:

*For programs that have an extended wait for program classes, students are advised at application and throughout their wait of other possible options if getting into the workforce sooner is needed. For example, many Dental Hygiene program students become Dental Assistants while completing their additional general education courses and waiting for their chance to enroll in core, program courses.*

Collectively, this practice may be an area for the WTCS Student Success Center to provide focused support in a community of practice approach dedicated to successful scaling across the System.

### ***Ensuring that Students are Learning***

A goal of the pathways model is to ensure that students are building essential skills and knowledge across programs, not just in individual courses. Faculty are encouraged to assess whether students are mastering learning outcomes as they complete a program and use the results of assessments to improve the effectiveness of instruction within their programs. The ‘ensuring that students are learning’ domain also emphasizes that program learning outcomes are aligned with the requirements for success in further education and employment in a related field, and that instruction imbeds collaborative and active learning that engages students within their field of study both within and outside of the classroom.

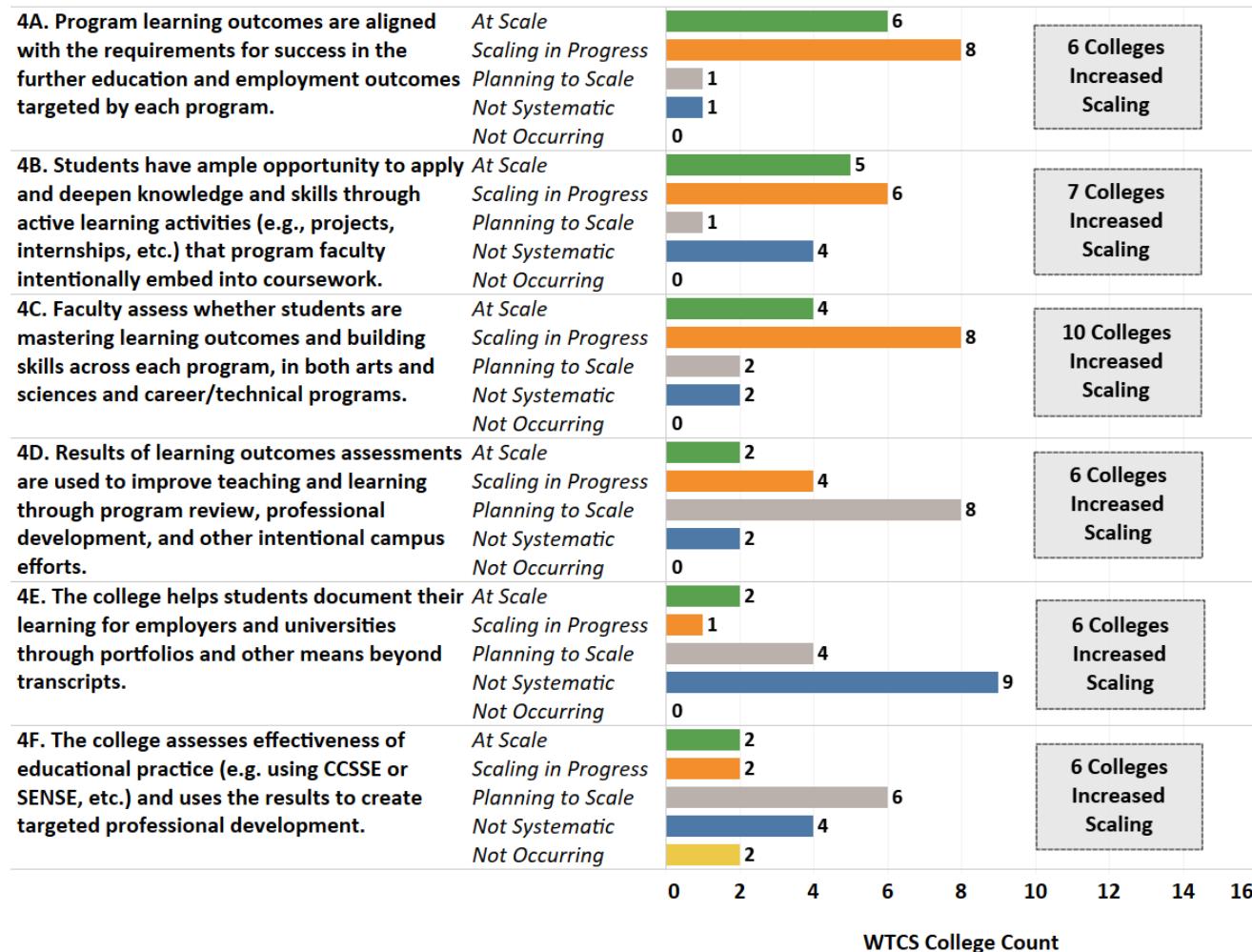
System-wide, the ensuring that students are learning domain has a high level of variance by practice, implying that WTCS colleges are at varying stages of implementation (see Figure 6). Ten colleges reported increases in assessing learning outcome mastery and skill building across their programs of study (practice 4C). Narrative provided in college SOAAs suggests faculty are assessing whether students achieve their program learning outcomes through the WTCS Technical Skill Attainment (TSA) assessment process. TSA assessments are formal, direct measurements that provide evidence that students have achieved intended program outcomes or skills. TSAs may include third-party exams, performance-based assessments, portfolios, capstone projects, clinical evaluations or other measures. First introduced to the WTCS in 2011-12, TSAs have been implemented in every college. System-wide, over 50% of WTCS approved programs currently have a TSA implemented and many colleges are actively working to establish TSA in other programs of study.

Each college within the WTCS regularly administers at least one student survey to assess the effectiveness of educational practices (practice 4F). Regularly administered surveys include the Community College Survey of Student Engagement (CCSSE), the Survey of Entering Student Engagement (SENSE), the Noel Levitz Student Satisfaction Inventory (SSI), and home-grown end-of-course surveys. Commonalities exist among the colleges rated as *Not Systematic* or *Not Occurring*; specifically, related to connecting student survey results to targeted professional development. One college rated as *Not Systematic* noted:

*Although the college has gathered student input on the CCSSE and SSI surveys in the past, there is not a regular practice of using these data to inform professional development activities at the institution. That being said, advising staff are examining recent SSI data to determine how best to incorporate those results into professional development and operations to better serve students.*

Colleges further along in scaling this practice noted the use of survey results to inform college strategic planning. Further, some colleges indicated survey results are reviewed during their college program review process. The variance within this practice highlights an opportunity for the WTCS Student Success Center to maintain focus on effective data use. Specifically, by supporting colleges in how they might use survey data to inform professional development and college improvement strategy.

Figure 6. Ensuring Students are Learning - SOAA Year 3 Results and Year 1 to Year 3 Comparisons



### ***Pathways Scaling with an Increased Focus on Equity***

Analysis of the SOAA results also reveal that college implementation ratings have retracted in some areas. There are many reasons that might contribute to these changes. At the college level, the student success team engaging in the SOAA completion may have changed, providing new insights into existing college practices. Additionally, as the college becomes more familiar with the SOAA they may realize that they are not as far along as they originally thought. There was also an update to the SOAA reflected in the second administration that prompted student success teams to critically assess their college practices via equity considerations identified by the Community College Research Center.

The majority of reductions in college ratings emerged in the ensuring students are learning domain. For example, one-fourth of WTCS colleges indicated a rating decrease in the essential practice of providing students opportunities for active learning opportunities (practice 4B). The colleges that reported a decline provided narrative in their SOAA that related to equity in active learning opportunity participation. One college indicated uncertainty in monitoring active learning opportunity participation across student populations.

*Students have access to opportunities to deepen knowledge and skills. Some embedded and required for graduation; some not. Not sure how many underrepresented groups participate in outside of class projects.*

Additionally, comments were provided highlighting a need to consider different student backgrounds and the feasibility of participating in external to the classroom active learning opportunities.

*Unsure what effort is given to ensuring diverse populations have the same opportunities within these active learning methods which align with their needs. Ex: Study Abroad is offered now but is that a realistic opportunity for adult learners or low-income populations? Is there something else comparable for them to engage in?*

These findings suggest that the WTCS Student Success Center may have an opportunity to provide professional learning on methods to critically assessing institutional policy and practices with an equity lens. Through these efforts, the Center and colleges could explore the extent to which well-intended concepts like active learning are producing unintended disparities in participation.

Many of the practices within the ensuring students are learning domain incorporate the use of equity-minded professional development for faculty as a way to facilitate successful pathways implementation. Professional development that seeks to advance educational equity is especially relevant to faculty and staff who engage with students on an ongoing basis, as well as to college administrators who define institutional policy. A review of SOAA narratives within this domain suggest that WTCS colleges are at different places in providing professional development to faculty and staff that incorporate equity-conscious teaching and advising or pedagogical approaches towards culturally responsive teaching. One college indicating progress reported:

*All student services and learning staff receive recurring training in unconscious bias, diversity, and cultures relevant to our student population. We are increasing the understanding of unconscious bias among administrators to make resolution of issues involving students more equity minded.*

Colleges also reported the use of data to support intentional professional development. One college indicated an approach with a consistent focus on equity that flowed through college strategic goals, program review processes, and professional development offerings. Specifically, the college indicated:

*One of our strategic goals is Equity, Inclusion, and Support which requires a high level of teaching and learning professional development and massive program reviews. We are continuing to leverage our IR department to generate the needed data to make informed decisions about what type of professional development we need to meet the needs of our Guided Pathways philosophy. Data informed decisions will be a key part of our Guided Pathways work.*

Conversely, the majority of colleges reported that faculty professional learning is provided through regularly scheduled college in-service days in areas such as active learning strategies or generally stated “skill building.” These college-specific SOAA narratives do not mention the extent to which equity-conscious professional development is offered, resulting in a descaling of the related SOAA practices.

Equity-minded instructional practices may be an opportunity for the WTCS Student Success Center to provide targeted supports. In the Center’s efforts of acting as a clearinghouse of promising practices, the Center and colleges may find value in generating a speaker’s list that documents well-received professional development by topic area, such as culturally responsive teaching.

Additionally, the Center may want to continue its efforts in coordinating professional development centered on equity-focused instruction reform; an effort highlighted during the December 2019 Equity in the Classroom convening in support of the states 60 Forward credential attainment goal. The Center has an opportunity to strengthen this work by providing targeted support that enables faculty to learn together and implement equity-minded instructional practices designed around the specific needs of their respective program areas.

#### [Leveraging the knowledge and experience available through the JFF Student Success Center Network](#)

As a member of the JFF Student Success Center Network, the WTCS benefits from connections with other state Centers and student success organizations within the JFF Network. Through these connections, the Center can continue to align and accelerate its work. To date, the WTCS has fostered collaborations with the Community College Research Center, Achieving the Dream, the National Center for Inquiry & Improvement, the Aspen Institute, Phase II Advisory, JFF, state Centers in the JFF Network, and other education and workforces partners. These collaborations, and the ongoing work of the Center and WTCS Office, have helped to inform a series of aligned WTCS Office processes, policies, and supports.

For example, the WTCS General Purpose Revenue Grant Application integrates common language from the SOAA, which was first introduced to the WTCS colleges during the Center coordinated 2017 Student Success Summit. Additionally, Center coordinated Tableau dashboard data is used to guide WTCS Office System Called Meeting conversations and professional development. Further, WTCS Office fiscal grant allocations, including the Perkins Reserve Capacity Building for Equity and Inclusion grant, are derived from equity gaps using Center supported Tableau dashboard data. The WTCS Office is also allowing the use of grant funds to attend conferences coordinated by Center partners such as the Achieving the Dream DREAM conference. By leveraging the knowledge and experience of the JFF Student Success Center Network partners, the Center and WTCS Office provide aligned supports for institutional transformation that cultivate success for each WTCS student.

#### [Discussion & Recommendations](#)

This review of the WTCS Student Success Center’s activities and college progress in pathways implementation reveal a series of data-informed opportunities that the Center may consider as it navigates next steps.

#### ***Provide Focused Support on Pathways Implementation***

The WTCS Student Success Center should continue to provide support to the WTCS colleges as they build and refine equitable student-centered pathways. This suggestion is supported by positive feedback from Center coordinated convenings and by recommendations from the WTCS Student Success Center third-party continuous improvement partner. Also, the results of the SOAA reveal that WTCS colleges are at different stages of pathways implementation. The Center could use the SOAA results to inform broad topical support accessible to all colleges or to generate cohorts of colleges as they engage in their pathway efforts. As the WTCS Student Success Center engages in this work going forward, it may prove valuable to communicate these efforts through a common language that is consistent with the SOAA and educational equity efforts such as the *WTCS Commitment to Progress*.

For example, the WTCS Student Success Center could leverage the existing structure of System Called Meetings with college Career Preparation Coordinators to discuss strategies in scaling high school dual credit in rural regions of the state. The Center could communicate alignment of this work to practice 2E of the SOAA (see Figure 4) and continue to emphasize the equity implications of dual credit access. Similar messaging could be used for re-entry pathways among incarcerated populations or adult education and English language learning pathways to postsecondary programming.

### ***Continue the Momentum of WTCS Data Use***

WTCS college narratives and survey results reveal that the Center's efforts in refining the WTCS data infrastructure to support effective data use have been positively received. These findings are echoed in college interviews conducted by the Center's third-party continuous improvement partner. As such, the WTCS Student Success Center has an opportunity to continue the positive momentum in supporting the colleges in their local data efforts.

One college supportive strategy might include creating a System-wide community of practice that aims to effectively use CCSSE data; a practice that colleges are grappling with as described in the System's SOAA findings (see practice 4F in Figure 6). Another example might include creating learning communities centered on how colleges use data to discuss educational equity during college program review; a concept included in SOAA practice 4D for which half of the colleges rated themselves as *Planning to Scale*. As the WTCS colleges continue to implement student-centered pathways, the continued use of data will be critical to understand what is working and what needs refinement.

### ***Serve as a College Connector and Clearinghouse of Promising Practices***

There is an opportunity for the Center to act as a connector among colleges that are undertaking similar pathway implementation efforts. This concept is supported by the variance and similarities identified in the System's SOAA ratings and narratives. Coordinating college connections may prove valuable as WTCS institutions navigate implementation obstacles or seek strategies for success.

Similarly, there is an opportunity for the WTCS Student Success Center to act as a clearinghouse of promising practices for the System. Some of these promising practices could be generated through the WTCS Action Research process, connections with national student success organizations through the JFF Student Success Center Network, or through WTCS Office coordinated grant activities such as the WTCS Student Success Center Promising Practice Mini-Grant. The System curation of promising practices pairs with the Center's existing efforts of creating a virtual repository of educational strategies. The Center may find value in coordinating discussions on what

information will populate in the virtual repository, how this information will be curated, and how the repository will be communicated and used to support institutional transformation and educational equity.

### Additional Resources

- ❖ [WTCS System-wide Equity Report](#)
- ❖ [WTCS Commitment to Progress](#)
- ❖ [WTCS Action Research Briefs](#)
- ❖ [WTCS Tableau Dashboard Resources](#)
- ❖ [Community College Research Center – Scale of Adoption Assessment](#)

### Acknowledgments

The WTCS Student Success Center would like to thank Ascendium Education Group for generous support to help make this WTCS Action Research project possible.

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