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RESEARCH ARTICLE

Using policy to build equitable Latinx transfer pathways

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Abstract

This article describes the change process at East Los Angeles College (ELAC) to address the unique barriers that Latinx students face in transferring to 4-year institutions. Since 2014, California Community Colleges have had an unprecedented opportunity to target disparities in academic outcomes through the Student Equity Policy (SEP) and its requirement to examine inequity faced by minoritized groups, such as racial/ethnic students, in various academic areas like transfer and degree completion. Through the implementation of this policy, ELAC has made improvements to the conditions and experiences of Latinx students, resulting in improved Latinx transfer success. As scholar-practitioners, the purpose of our study is to share the process that unfolded at ELAC. In doing so, we focus on understanding how: (a) ELAC developed and implemented these Latinx specific transfer initiatives, (b) the impact and results from these new efforts for Latinx students, and then (c) highlight takeaways for community college practitioners.

USING POLICY TO BUILD EQUITABLE LATINX TRANSFER PATHWAYS

There is a long history documenting the complex and difficult pathways students must navigate to transfer out of community college into a 4-year university (Bensimon & Dowd, 2009; Gándara et al., 2012). Nationally, over 80% of community college students intend to transfer and earn a bachelor's degree, but only 25% eventually transfer and 17% achieve their goal of earning a degree from a 4-year university (Jenkins & Fink, 2015). Although students have high transfer aspirations, they encounter several structural barriers embedded within and across institutions of higher education, such as inequitable placement practices (Acevedo-Gil et al., 2015; Ngo & Melguizo, 2016), complicated and confusing articulation agreements (Kisker et al., 2012; Monaghan & Attewell, 2015), differentiated advising and support (Maldonado, 2019; Zerquera et al., 2018), and limited resources available for

transfer (Felix & Trinidad, 2017). As argued by Dowd (2007), community colleges have long been recognized as critical educational gateways for their open-access mission, but they also serve as gatekeepers that limit the educational opportunities for students.

These persistent transfer barriers experienced in community college become increasingly problematic as enrollment shifts to primarily first-generation, low-income, and racially minoritized students. Specifically, scholars (Bensimon & Dowd, 2009; Castro & Cortez, 2017) have noted the severe "racial transfer gap," drawing attention to disparities between espoused transfer aspirations and actualized transfer outcomes for Black, Latinx, Indigenous students. In California, Black and Latinx students continue to face the lowest rates of transfer among all racial/ethnic groups (Public Policy Institute of California [PPIC], 2020). To complicate matters, with nearly 1.1 million students in California's community colleges, Latinx students are the largest ethnic group in the system and experience the lowest transfer rates as well as the longest time to achieve their goal (Campaign for College Opportunity [CCO], 2017). Given the large Latinx enrollment in California's community colleges and the deep inequities faced in the transfer process, we dedicate this article to describing change efforts at East Los Angeles College (ELAC) that explicitly addressed barriers to Latinx transfer.

Purpose of the article

As authors of this article, we are scholar-practitioners committed to improving educational equity in community college and addressing barriers in the vertical transfer process. To this end, this article describes the change process at ELAC to address the unique barriers that Latinx students face in transferring to 4-year institutions. Since 2014, the California Community Colleges have had an unprecedented opportunity to explicitly target outcome disparities through the Student Equity Policy (SEP). This system-wide initiative prompts all 116 colleges in the California Community Colleges system to create a 3-year student equity plan with the goal of "demolishing once and for all the achievement gaps for students from traditionally underrepresented populations" (CCCCO, Student Equity, 2021, para 3). In these plans, campus leaders are asked to identify educational inequities for specific student groups, propose potential interventions to improve outcomes, and provide specific fiscal resources on an annual basis to achieve the vision of the plan (Felix & Ramirez, 2020). In short, the SEP can help to pinpoint outcome disparities faced by minoritized groups and then develop new interventions or scale-up existing efforts to address these equity gaps (Ching et al., 2020). At ELAC, the reform enabled leaders to transform how they serve Latinx students by improving the educational conditions and experiences for this demographic, resulting in their improved transfer success rates (Felix, 2020).

LEVERAGING POLICY AND LEADERSHIP FOR TRANSFER EQUITY

Community colleges have become the *de-facto* Latinx-serving sector in California's system of higher education (Malcom, 2013). Latinx students are the largest racial/ethnic group enrolled in California's community college with over 45% of the total enrollment; nearly three-fourths of all first-time Latinx students attended community college (Contreras & Contreras, 2015). Although most students enrolled in California's community colleges have plans to transfer to a 4-year university, only a small share achieves the goal of transferring (PPIC, 2020). This low rate of transfer is especially true for Latinx students who continue to experience

educational inequities in their quest for a baccalaureate degree through the transfer process (Crisp et al., 2020).

Attempts to improve transfer pathways through policy reform

For decades, policymakers have relied on legislation as a tool to improve the transfer function in community college, especially the inequities faced by racially minoritized students along the various pathways to 4-year institutions (Amey, 2020; Crisp et al., 2020). However, without centering the needs of racially minoritized communities, much of this legislation has yielded little or no educational equity results for racially minoritized students attending community college (Ching et al., 2020; Felix, 2020). In recent years, fueled by a desire to advance and improve educational outcomes for community college students, policymakers and college campuses have attempted to work together to expand transfer opportunities by debunking barriers that have historically prevented students from transferring to 4-year institutions (Jain et al., 2020). In the state of California, these policy and campus initiatives include removing unnecessary remedial coursework that restricts access to transfer-level classes (AB-705), streamlining pathways through the use of associate degrees for transfer (SB-1440), and addressing equity gaps in academic outcomes (California Education Code 78220, n.d.). These efforts have been able to improve transfer opportunities, but there is still room for improvement. The potential of state policies, combined with institutional efforts, to bring exponential change to the educational opportunities of racially minoritized students can be magnified. For this to occur, educational policies and practices must include specific mandates that center the needs of this demographic in community colleges in the conceptualization, implementation, and evaluation process of policy implementation (Felix & Trinidad, 2020; PPIC, 2020).

Equity planning as an opportunity to improve transfer outcomes

Educational equity is an elusive target when state policy fails to center and address the educational barriers endured by racially minoritized students. Bragg (2020) reminds higher education practitioners and policy-makers that racially minoritized students such, as Latinx students, who endure the consequences of a bureaucratic transfer process need the transfer process to work for them. Yet, educational reform and well-intended policies continue to leave these students behind. Recent research conducted by the lead author (Felix, 2020) found that despite the large inequities faced by Latinx students in the transfer, campuses rarely used the equity policy to address issues in transfer or the barriers experienced by Latinx students. Still, we believe in the possibilities of the Student Equity Policy to improve educational equity when the needs of racially minoritized students are centered within its policy implementation and evaluation process (Ching et al., 2020).

Enacted in 2014, the Student Equity Policy attempts to remedy years of educational neglect experienced by historically under-served and minoritized students. The Student Equity Policy requires all community colleges to create a 3-year student equity plan that (a) examines disaggregated data to determine levels of inequity, (b) identifies specific student groups to target and mitigate equity gaps, and (c) develops new strategies to achieve equity goals. To support planning and implementation, the state legislature allocates $435 million annually for the entire community college system. Depending on the institution and students served, colleges receive between $250,000 and $3 million per year to carry out their student equity plan and mitigate educational inequities on their campus. A key

aspect of this reform is the ability to examine inequities by race/ethnicity and access to new resources to design new strategies and efforts to improve student success. In tackling educational inequity, the reform allows for discretion and autonomy at the institutional-level to address pressing issues each campus findings as critical, and we were interested in learning more about those that take a race-conscious approach given the few examples in the literature. As highlighted in our findings section, ELAC is an example where institutional leaders used the reform to create race-conscious and equity-minded strategies that explicitly addressed disparities in transfer pathways for Latinx students.

The importance of campus leaders in using policy for educational equity

Recent scholarship highlights the importance of institutional leaders in carrying out the responsibility of implementing federal and state policy at the local-level (Chase, 2016; Nienhusser, 2015, 2018). In doing so, institutional leaders can either hinder or advance the desired outcomes of an intended policy and ultimately influence the impact of the reform. Work by Garcia (2017, 2019) documents the importance of leaders in implementing roles related to Title V grants supporting Hispanic-Serving Institutions (HSIs). When institutional leaders use federal funding with the intention to serve Latinx students, such as creating culturally relevant mentoring programs, addressing the racialized campus climate of HSI's, or increasing Latinx faculty representation, Latinx student outcomes can drastically improve (Garcia & Okhidoi, 2015). Similarly, Nienhusser (2018) describes how institutional leaders can intentionally use the ambiguity of policy language to interpret the legal mandates as an opportunity to enhance equity for undocumented students and their "dreams of pursuing a college education" (p. 16). Whether administering a grant or overseeing policy reform, these examples highlight the need for institutional leaders who draw on their experiences, motivations, and positions to leverage federal and state policy as a catalyst for campus transformation (Felix, 2021). Both the research cited and our experiences shared in the next section illustrate the critical role of institutional leaders in shaping how reform efforts are used to improve equity for marginalized communities in education.

ADDRESSING LATINX TRANSFER PATHWAYS AT EAST LOS ANGELES COLLEGE

In the following section, we tell the story of how institutional leaders responded and used the Student Equity Policy, now formally referred to as the Student Equity and Achievement (SEA) program (AB-1809, 2018), to address the low rates of transfer success experienced by Latinx students at ELAC. We weave in personal accounts from two co-authors, Laura and Paulina, who served as Deans of Student Services at ELAC, and helped to develop and led equity efforts prompting change at ELAC. Our findings are shared in three sections that first describe the unique organizational conditions at ELAC, and then recount how campus leaders used the SEP to improve transfer equity, and lastly outline specific efforts created to improve transfer pathways for Latinx students.

The East Los Angeles community

ELAC is embedded in a culturally-rich area home to predominantly Latinx and Asian immigrant communities. Surrounding the campus are cultural markers affirming the history

and background of the Latinx community, from the smell of baked goods in neighboring *panaderias* to murals of Cesar Chavez, Dolores Huerta, and the United Farm Workers. These images of civil rights icons continuously remind us of the history of social activism in the area, especially the 1968 Chicano Blowouts, which protested unequal educational conditions and demanded better teachers and improved resources in neighborhood schools. This history of activism and advocacy is a source of pride and motivation for many of the Latinx educators at ELAC.

If you walk onto campus, you can easily recognize ELAC's status as a Hispanic-serving campus; over 80% of the 41,000 enrolled students identify as Latinx. In addition to a critical mass of Latinx students, for several years the campus has filled key leadership and faculty positions with Latinx educators, including co-authors Laura and Paulina. ELAC prides itself in serving the Latinx community, but for too many years has struggled to equitably support Latinx students' aspirations of transfer and completion. The UCLA Civil Rights Project described the campus as "intensely segregated" with "extremely low transfer rates" for Latinx students (Martinez-Wenzl & Marquez, 2012, p. 4). In 2014–2015, when the student equity work began, ELAC's overall 6-year transfer rate was 24.9%, but for Latinx students, it was 19.9%. Meanwhile, the transfer rate for the highest performing racial/ethnic group on campus was 45% (CCCCO Datamart, 2021). Laura reflects on the tension between being a Latinx-enrolling institution with strong cultural ties to the community, while still struggling to produce educational outcomes that serve Latinx students equitably:

> ELAC is a Hispanic-serving institution and one would assume that our largest numbers of students transferring were Latinx students, but unfortunately, it has not been the case. However, over the last decade, not only have we been intentional about expanding and improving transfer opportunities for all students, we have specifically focused on improving and expanding the number of Latinx students who transfer.

As long-time administrators at ELAC, Laura and Paulina attest that the college has struggled to fulfill its long-standing promise of providing transfer opportunities for Latinx students despite its best intention. What became clear for both was the need to change their existing transfer pathways. In doing so, they reflected on what was not working for ELAC Latinx students, built a coalition of equity advocates on campus, and envisioned new ways to support Latinx students and their educational success. Over the last decade, ELAC reports substantial improvements towards fulfilling its educational promise to the Latinx community. Laura and Paulina attribute these advances to the changes in three areas: Improved institutional leadership, including the arrival of a new college president, the intentionality of hiring staff committed to improving the transfer pathways for Latinx students, and new opportunities created by the SEA program.

For example, with the arrival of a new president in 2013, Paulina recalls being encouraged to hold campus conversations and initiate a process of self-evaluation: "We took time to discuss our organizational culture, our ecosystem that hindered or supported transfer access on our campus, and examined the effectiveness of current transfer practices, structures, and policies." These opportunities for reflection were turned into a formal campus-wide Transfer Taskforce in 2014 with over 40 students, staff, faculty, administrators, and community partners who provided recommendations for improving transfer at ELAC. Having these community conversations provided a space to acknowledge and recognize the need to do things differently.

Additionally, Laura and Paulina remember an active effort to build a transfer culture on campus through hiring personnel who grew up in the East Los Angeles area, attended

community college, and themselves were also transfer students. Paulina reflects, "Hiring a diverse professional staff from our community [was] one of the numerous factors that I attribute to the extraordinary commitment and personal mission held by employees to contribute beyond their institutional roles to the transfer success of our students." She continues, "We have been committed to hiring individuals who came from and reflect our local community, who reflect our student population, have cultural capital, [and] are committed to student success."

Despite glaring inequities, there was a critical mass of Latinx faculty, administrators, and staff who were committed to improving transfer for students and supporting the educational aspirations of the community. During this period, Latinx personnel made up most of senior leadership including President and VP of Student Services, 33% of tenure-track faculty, and 46% of staff (CCCCO Datamart, 2021). The emergence of the SEA program—its mandates and funding—became an opportunity for ELAC leaders to address Latinx transfer inequity. As Laura recalls, "The catalyst for change was the state-mandated equity programming, a convergence of funding, and committed faculty and staff who wanted to focus on expanding transfer opportunities for Latinx students, and were no longer being afraid to call it out." Our next section highlights the specific ways ELAC leaders leveraged the SEA program to tackle transfer barriers on campus.

Leveraging policy for organizational change

Laura and Paulina describe the student equity policy as "arriving at ELAC at the perfect time." As concerns grew related to the visible inequities experienced by Latinx students, campus leaders now need to fulfill the mandates of the policy. In 2015, this included conducting an equity audit that highlighted areas of inequity, proposed solutions to mitigate gaps, and provided new funding to carry out the vision in the plan. Joining the group overseeing the planning process, Paulina remembers thinking, "This is an unprecedented opportunity and resources to make transfer an institutional priority, to improve and expand transfer opportunities for Latinx students." Paulina adds, "The Student Equity initiative called for us to review and analyze campus data, disaggregate and identify disproportionately impacted students who aspired to transfer." She continues, "As we came together to develop the plan, a cross-section of campus stakeholders were brought together and met regularly to initially design program plans and services, based on specific disproportionately impacted student groups." Paulina recalls that "One of the glaring data revelations was the fact that it was taking Latinas an average of 10 years to complete their transfer preparation and AA/AS degree goals."

The results of the equity audit were written into their 2015–16 Student Equity Plan provided compelling evidence for the need to explicitly address the barriers faced in transfer by Latinx students (ELAC College Plans, 2021a). Paulina shares, "the state was telling us to examine our data, and our data said that Latinx students need more support, so we openly targeted them." Leaders at ELAC interpreted the mandates as being given the license to be race-conscious and use the equity funds to create new programs and services. As the Dean overseeing student equity, Laura recalls, "We looked at onboarding practices, academic programs, counseling services to understand why Latinx students were not transferring at similar rates as other populations." With a critical mass of Latinx leaders overseeing the implementation of the SEA program, they crafted an equity plan that directly addressed Latinx transfer inequity. Laura shares that in 2015, ELAC leaders decided to make several institutional commitments to improving transfer, which included:

> A large infusion of funding, close to 1 million dollars, targeted specifically to transfer-related activities and additional staffing to create programming such at the Latina Completion and Transfer Academy that served as a pilot to help us test out the ideas of targeted support, cohort classes, case management, embedded tutoring, tailored counseling, after reviewing data to reach out to Latinas who had not completed specific gateway courses and who had stopped out due to non-completion.

The SEA program offered equity advocates like Paulina and Laura an opportunity to use the mandates and subsequent funding to address persistent barriers in transfer experienced by Latinx students. In previous years, campus leaders sought to address the barriers to transfer success, but did not have strong institutional commitment or resources to do so. Equipped with evidence proving their hunches right about the need to address Latinx inequities, institutional leaders, like Paulina and Laura, have spent the last several years developing and implementing various projects to make ELAC a more equitable environment. Through the SEA program, ELAC leaders created specific programs to support Latinx, first-generation, and undocumented students. Examples of these programs include: the Latina Completion and Transfer Academy, Men of Color Academy, University Transfer Program, and Dreamer Resource Center. Laura and Paulina assert that these programs were based on Latinx values—*historia, cultura, y familia*. Specifically, incorporating culturally-sustaining practices (Paris, 2012) that enhance transfer knowledge in ways that Latinx students could find meaningful and relatable. In the next section, we talk more about the Latina Completion Transfer Academy (LCTA) and its success in improving transfer for Latinas and providing a model to support all Latinx students on campus.

Building pathways for Latinx transfer equity

At ELAC, part of building equitable transfer pathways for Latinx students was addressing the specific needs of Latinas on campus. Through the SEA program, campus administrators reviewed institutional data disaggregated by ethnicity and gender that highlighted the inequitable rates experienced by Latina students in transfer and completion compared to their male counterparts and other racial/ethnic groups. With a large group of Latina leaders overseeing equity efforts, campus leaders like Paulina and Laura decided to conduct additional inquiry into the barriers faced by Latinas. Their findings revealed that, on average, Latina students at ELAC took between 8 and 10 years to transfer to a 4-year institution. More importantly, they found that the elongated time was due to multiple attempts to pass transfer-level courses in English, Math, and Science. Initially, both Paulina and Laura believed that these patterns were caused by "competing responsibilities such as caring for children, families, and working." However, neither were satisfied with such reasoning, and they sought to explore the inequities presented in the data. Laura and Paulina engaged a working group that reached out to over 1,200 Latina students through surveys and focus groups to learn more about their experiences, challenges, and opportunities at ELAC. After this inquiry process, ELAC leaders learned that they needed to shift advising practices to meet the experiences of Latinas, and that they should provide more tailored academic and social support. However, the biggest challenge along the pathway was a policy restricting multiple attempts at transfer-level courses after receiving a failing grade. Laura and Paulina realized that a "fourth attempt policy" was keeping a large number of Latinas from completing their transfer coursework.

The Latina Completion Transfer Academy (LCTA) was a response to the glaring transfer inequity identified by the SEA; it was "a program just for Latinas where we focused on improving transfer rates and providing wrap-around services that scaffold" as well as "getting them through developmental courses that were holding them back," Paulina reflected. Laura stated, "It was important for us to create a program for Latinas because we recognized that while Latinas made up the largest number of enrollments on our campus, they also had the lowest success rate on our campus." She continues, "It was also personal for many of us, as we experienced our own challenges in obtaining a college degree" and now as "faculty and staff we were committed to identifying and addressing reasons that Latina's were not completing and transferring at the same rate as other students on campus." LCTA was an ambitious program; it aimed to create an environment that was centered on Latinas and to develop services and resources that specifically addressed the barriers they faced. The LCTA called for the involvement of Latina faculty and tutors who were "culturally-sensitive instructors," and for the organization of "cultural, social justice, and leadership workshops that support growth and increase self-efficacy." Related to the fourth attempt policy hindering Latina transfer success, Paulina and Laura worked with the department chairs of the English and math, academic senate, and district-level personnel to change the policy process and allow LCTA students (and all students) to take necessary transfer-level courses to complete articulation agreements to 4-year institutions.

LCTA's first cohort was provided access to free books, daycare, tutors, and case managers to provide continuous support and frequent check-ins. Additionally, Paulina and Laura worked hard to identify and collaborate with Latina faculty members to teach the previously-identified barrier courses. In its pilot year, 2015, LCTA served 40 Latinas and graduated 35 students. Beginning fall 2016, it formally accepted its first cohort, serving 121 Latinas that would take the LCTA-specific courses and supplementing support. Many more Latinas benefited from the additional components, like cultural and leadership programming. Since its inception, LCTA has held a 70% success rate for each cohort in achieving their transfer and completion goals. After a few cohorts, LCTA became a success story at ELAC. LCTA staff no longer needed to outreach to students as program alumni started to refer other students by word of mouth. During this time, the completion and graduation numbers for Latinas increased from 2,500 students in 2017 to 3,400 in 2019 and 3,800 in 2020. Similarly, the transfer success rates has increased year over year since 2015 (ELAC Institutional Effectiveness, 2021b). By fall 2020, LCTA served over 1479 students and became the model to enhance transfer and completion for all ELAC students. For example, the institution-wide effort known as Completion Case Management Teams seeks to support all students who have over 30 units and are not connected to support service programs such EOPs, MESA, DSPS, or other specialized programs on campus. Furthermore, as a policy, the fourth attempt is now a commonality as opposed to an exception. All these changes, rooted in the success of LCTA, have provided students with more transfer opportunities. LCTA illustrated the efficacy and intentionality of campus leaders, especially Latina leaders, in using state legislation to address equity gaps through new culturally-relevant transfer programming.

RECOMMENDATIONS: ENACTING RACE-CONSCIOUS CHANGE IN COMMUNITY COLLEGE TRANSFER

Building from the experiences at ELAC, we highlight two recommendations to create more equitable transfer pathways for students. As Laura and Paulina described in our article, the shift towards addressing and supporting Latinx students in transfer was a

comprehensive approach that sought to change culture, policy, and practice on campus (Bragg, 2020). Motivating this equity-minded and race-conscious change at ELAC were institutional leaders with a critical perspective seeking to improve racial equity by centering the voices and experiences of the students as they improved outcomes at ELAC.

Institutional leaders with a critical perspective

Bragg (2020) argues that transformative leadership is necessary for substantive change to occur in community colleges. A type of leadership that includes taking a critical perspective, acknowledging the need for new policies and practices, and modeling actions that can improve the conditions and outcomes for racially minoritized students. The focus on improving Latinx transfer equity and the creation of LCTA were a direct result of bold and transformative leadership. LCTA is an example of how institutional leaders can use policy opportunities, like equity planning, to create culturally-relevant and student-centered programs to improve transfer outcomes. In particular, we note how Laura and Paulina, as midlevel leaders, were actively engaged and empowered by their campus president to lead this work. These experiences align with McPhail and McPhail (2020) who find that midlevel leaders are critical to organizational change and key figures in successfully implementing senior leadership's vision of transformation. LCTA's origin story and impact at ELAC further affirms a theme in the community college literature: the pivotal role played by institutional leaders in leveraging policy opportunities to address educational inequities faced by racially minoritized students in community college such as Latinx students (Bensimon & Dowd, 2009; Castro & Cortez, 2017).

In the case of Laura and Paulina's leadership experience with LCTA, their visionary perspective was instrumental in serving as a bridge between identifying an institutional problem to then using state policy to address the root of the problem afflicting educational outcomes for Latina students. From the start of this work, they knew they had buy-in from senior leaders, resources from the Student Equity and Achievement Program, and an active commitment from campus colleagues. As Deans, they illustrated how midlevel leaders can successfully manage change efforts across organizational actors and served as an important link between institutional leaders and colleagues that would help put into practice a vision for improved transfer success (Garcia, 2020; McPhail & McPhail, 2020). They used data inquiry to uncover racial inequities, held community conversations on ways to address these barriers, and were advocates for using the equity policy's mandates to create more race-conscious transfer strategies. Laura and Paulina's work at ELAC highlight the need for educational leaders to not only have the critical perspective for policy implementation but also to have the ability to see themselves as institutional agents (Stanton-Salazar, 2011) in driving institutional change and leveraging opportunities for racially minoritized students. Aligned with Felix and Ramirez's (2020) work on addressing Latinx student equity, we believe that critically-minded leaders must (a) use data to make racial disparities visible, (b) can talk clearly about race with campus colleagues, and (c) be empowered to take explicit action to address racial inequity. With these skills, institutional leaders may be able to see policy implementation (i.e., expanding guided pathways, creating transfer degrees, eliminating developmental education) as opportunities for transformation and to recognize the role and power they possess in influencing the type of change that can be created. This type of bold and direct leadership is needed to transform student outcomes; when seeking to create change, institutional leaders must see the possibilities embedded in policy reform.

Centering student voices to create equity pathways

Achieving student equity without explicitly centering students who have the most to gain is an unreachable task. To tackle the persistent racial gap in transfer success, institutional leaders must "adopt a nuanced" perspective that seeks to understand the unique needs and barriers faced by specific racial groups on campus (Crisp et al., 2020, p. 63). As documented in our article, much of the change to improve transfer at ELAC was generated through data inquiry and student outreach to learn more about the experiences and challenges faced by Latinx students. From that deep inquiry, Laura and Paulina were able to create transfer efforts that tackled root-causes of inequity on campus while drawing on the experiences of Latina students and the strengths their family and community possess. As Castro and Cortez (2017) and Jain et al. (2020) argue in their research, community college practitioners must be bold and critical in their approaches to improving transfer pathways and recognizing that systems must change not the students. In this way, community colleges build a "transfer receptive culture" that builds on racially minoritized students' aspirations, values, and experiences (Jain et al., 2020, p. 16). LCTA's impact speaks to the possibilities for institutional reform when educational leaders address educational inequities through an asset-based approach. This approach allowed Laura and Paulina to analyze their institutional data, exercise patience, center students' concerns, and not rush to solutions when developing a culturally relevant program to address Latina students' educational barriers at ELAC. To this end, as a first step to develop culturally and race-conscious student programming, we recommend leaders challenge their biases and assumptions regarding Latinx student success by centering students' needs and voices in their program assessment and program development.

To achieve this recommendation, educational practitioners must first identify the root of the problem afflicting student outcomes without adopting a deficit-minded student framework. Examining and disaggregating institutional student data is a valuable first step towards this goal. Once educational challenges have been identified and potential solutions are brainstormed or implemented through student programming, educational practitioners must be vigilant to ensure that their intended intervention reaches their desired outcomes. Our recommendation aligns with Castro and Cortez (2017), who urge higher education institutions to reflect on how racially minoritized students interact with and experience their institution. Learning from students, and a willingness to modify programming as new information is acquired from student experiences, can ensure that the desired outcomes are met. In other words, student voice must be constantly present in program implementation and evaluation to advance equity.

CONCLUSION

Without the work of committed and critical educational leaders, no one policy can truly address the educational disparities in the transfer process endured by racially minoritized communities such as Latinx students. Similarly, without the support and investment of resources allocated through the state and federal agencies, efforts to promote educational equity become limited. Our findings at ELAC speak to the possibilities of using a state policy in race-conscious ways to address inequities in the transfer process for Latinx students. These possibilities require centering the needs of the most vulnerable student populations in both policy development and policy implementation. We believe that, through intentionality and a commitment to serving the most vulnerable students, policymakers and educational leaders can create significant improvements in their quest for educational

equity. In this article, we highlight Laura's and Paulina's experiences as possibilities for leveraging policy and using it to explicitly address known and persistent inequities on campus. They provide one of many examples in this special issue for educational leaders to interpret and respond to policies in ways that can transform organizational structures and practices in the name of equity.

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