Strategies for Empowering Board Members and Presidents to Contribute to a Culture of Equity
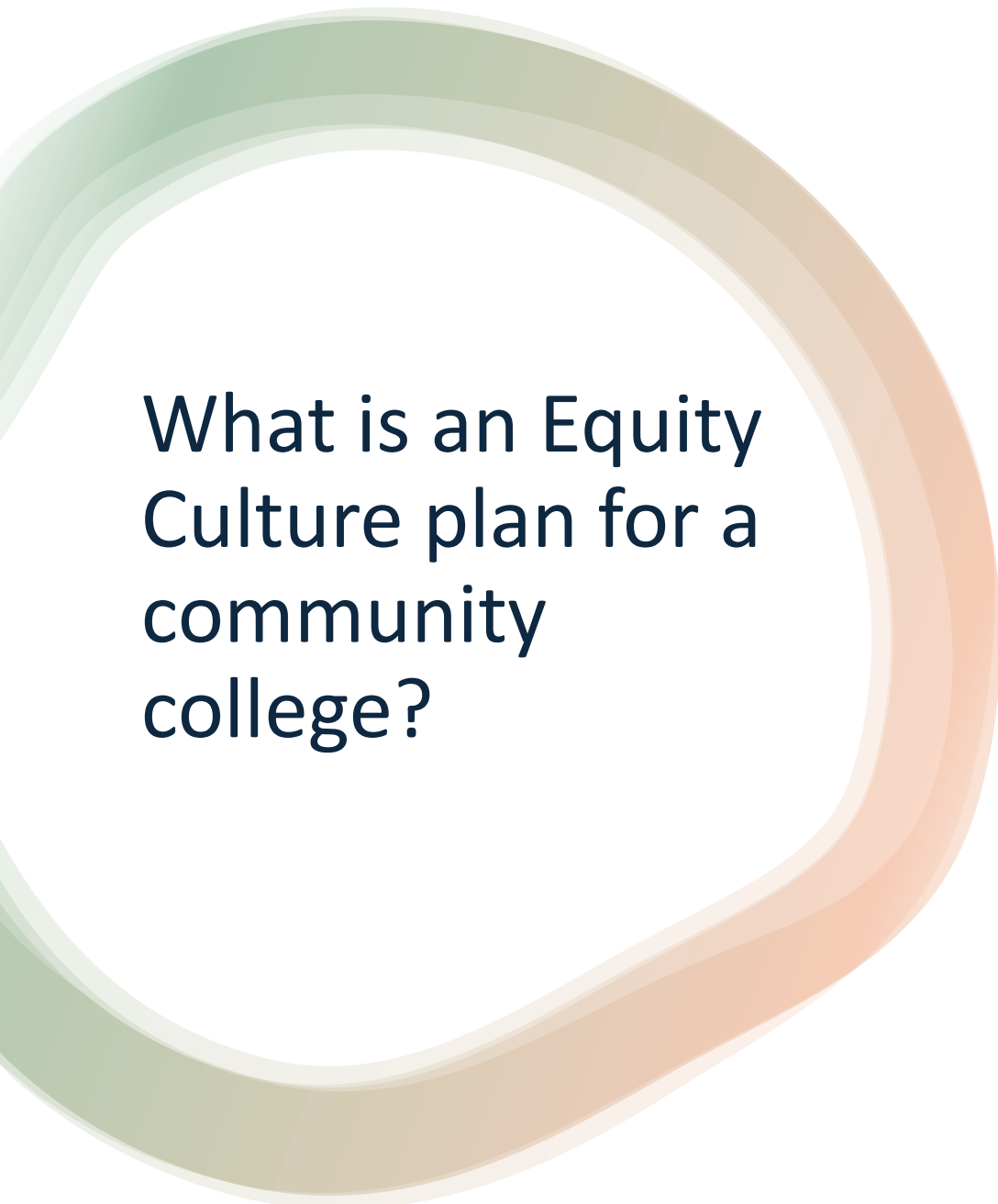
Equity Summit

Harper College

October 10, 2024

"Diversity is a fact, but inclusion is a choice we make everyday. As leaders, we have to put out the message that we embrace, and not just tolerate, diversity."
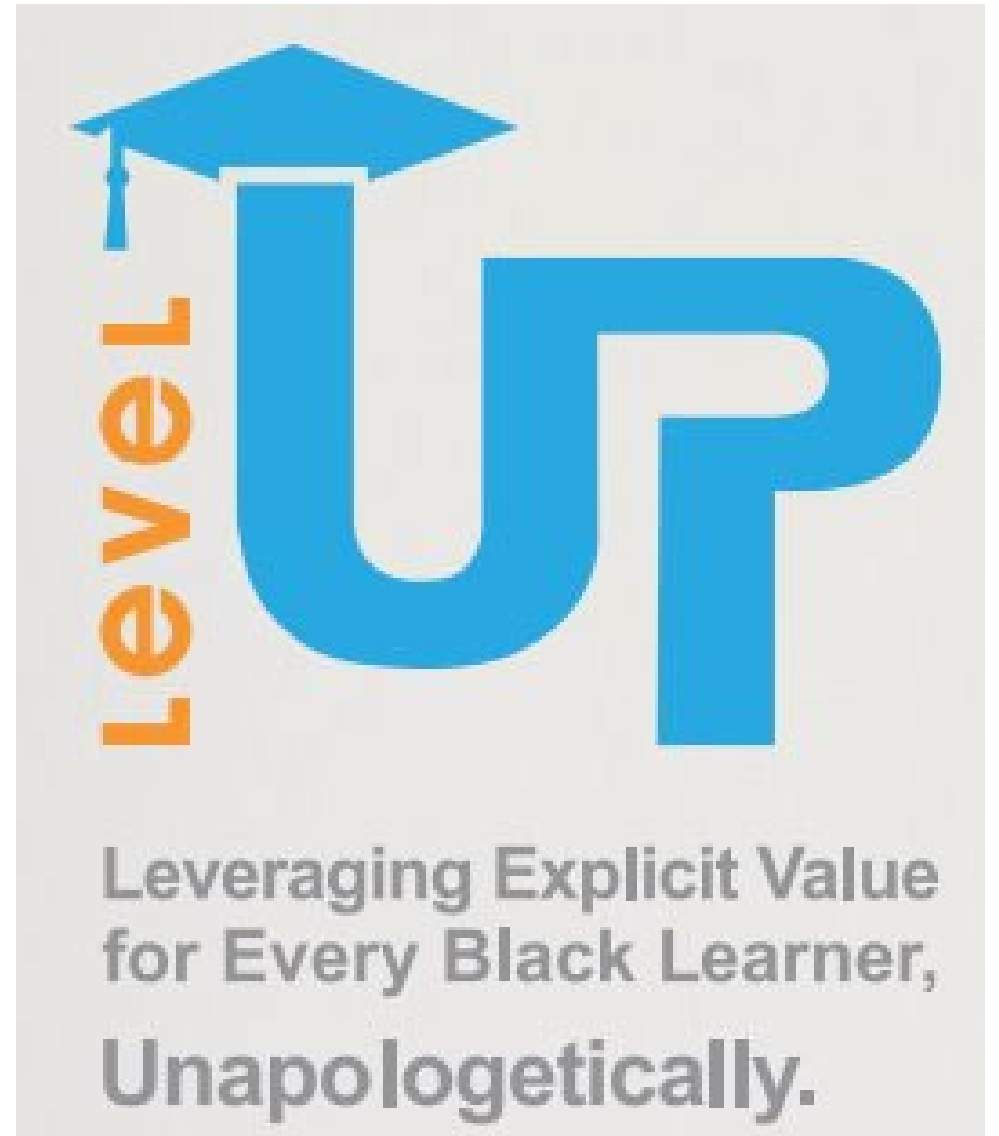
— NELLIE BORRERO

What is an Equity Culture plan for a community college?

- The development of a set of values, policies, and practices that support the unique cultures of diverse communities and address systemic discrimination.

Dr. Keith Curry
President & CEO
Compton College
Los Angeles, California

Black Learner Excellence

- Black student enrollment has disproportionately declined in recent decades, and racial disparities in college outcomes persist. During the past 20 years, the American higher education system has lost an estimated 600,000 Black learners.

Impact of the Widening Gap

- As the college-going gap widens, we must act now on behalf of Black learners. Otherwise, thousands of Black learners will continue to be excluded from the benefits of earning a valuable credential beyond high school.

- As a result, our communities and economies will suffer the effects of fewer residents with greater education. Improving Black student enrollment requires that we reaffirm the value proposition of postsecondary education for Black learners.
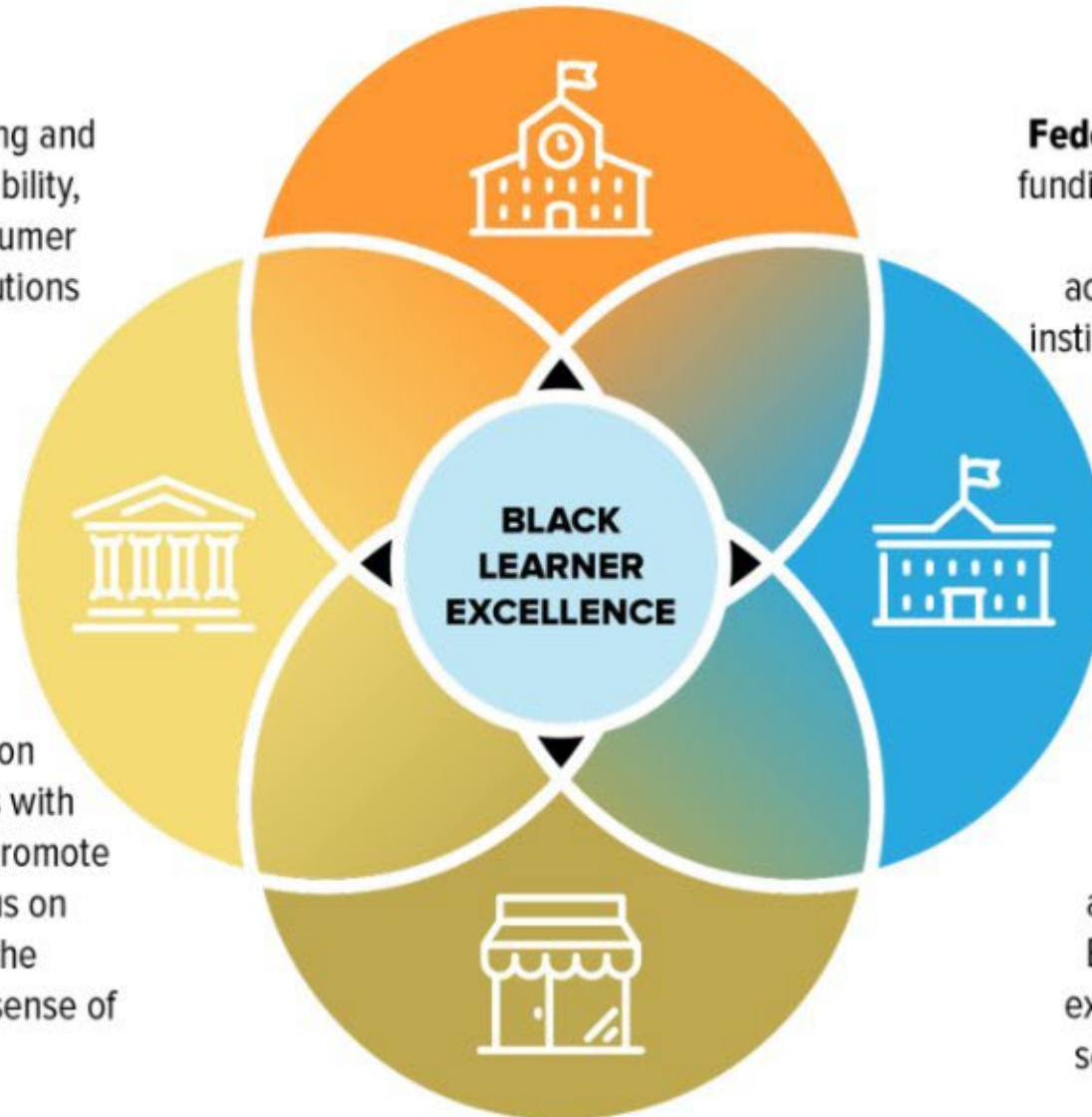
A Playbook to Demand Black Learner Excellence

State policymakers have law-making and budget authority to bolster accountability, affordability, transparency, and consumer protection, and they subsidize institutions where most Black learners enroll.

Federal policymakers have authority and funding to address affordability, strengthen data and delivery systems, oversee accreditation, and incentivize states and institutions to bolster foundational policies and target support to Black learners.

Higher Education Institutions are on the front lines serving Black learners with campus policies and practices that promote access and success, including a focus on increasing transparency, improving the value proposition, and cultivating a sense of belonging.

Community and business leaders are invaluable partners to advocate for Black learner excellence, provide work experiences, connect learners to human services, and foster community through mentorship.

BLACK LEARNER EXCELLENCE

REAL Transparency and True Affordability

We must focus not only on increasing need-based aid, but also on making more visible the bottom-line cost students will pay, based on a realistic assessment of what students can reasonably afford.

Ensured Success Through Shared Ownership

At each level—federal, state, system, and institutional—we must create mechanisms to support Black learners and ensure shared accountability for their success in and beyond their postsecondary experiences.

Academic and Social Supports that Create a Sense of Belonging

Institutions and systems must proactively consider the disproportionate challenges facing Black learners inside and outside the classroom by developing supports and connecting them to community resources. This will afford opportunities to provide robust advising, support to access pathways to high-wage and high-demand jobs, and assistance to address critical issues in an environment that fosters respect and a sense of belonging.

Learner-Centered Teaching Practices for Black Learners

Teaching practices should center students' lived experiences, perspectives, strengths, and needs as grounding for learning.

Black Learner Excellence End Goal

- When given equitable access to continued educational opportunities, Black students achieve upward economic mobility and academic and career success, and they contribute to meeting diverse workforce and economic needs.

What is Interculturality?

- The recognition and support of diverse and distinct cultures and the bridging and sharing of those cultures to build strong and interconnected communities, towns, and cities.

Why is creating an Equity Culture important?

- Increased student success for diverse populations

- Improved faculty and staff diversity

- A more inclusive campus environment

- Better preparation for a global workforce

- A deeper understanding of community needs by incorporating diverse perspectives

- All of the above ultimately lead to a more equitable and thriving learning environment for all students.

What should your plan strive to accomplish?

- Cultural equity explicitly addresses legacies of structural racial discrimination and remedying of institutionalized norms that have systemically disadvantaged categories of people based on race, ethnicity, customs, gender identity, sexual orientation, age, religion, disability, and socioeconomic or citizenship status.

- Cultural equity reverses economic disinvestment to ensure healthy and thriving communities where people feel a sense of belonging.

Professional Development and Capacity Building

- **Ongoing Training:** Provide continuous training for board members, presidents, and senior leadership on issues such as implicit bias, cultural competency, and structural racism.

- This could include workshops, conferences, and partnerships with organizations specializing in diversity and equity.

Professional Development and Capacity Building

- **Cross-Cultural Competence:** Encourage leaders to build the skills necessary to engage effectively with diverse populations and to challenge institutional norms and policies that perpetuate inequities.

- **Learning Circles:** Facilitate peer-to-peer learning groups for presidents and board members to share challenges, successes, and best practices in advancing equity.

Data-Informed Decision-Making

- **Use Disaggregated Data:** Leaders should commit to using data disaggregated by race, ethnicity, income, and other demographic factors to identify and address equity gaps in student outcomes (enrollment, retention, graduation, etc.). Data should drive policy decisions and resource allocation.

- **Public Accountability**: Regularly report on progress toward equity goals to the public, including stakeholders like faculty, students, and community members. Transparency fosters trust and accountability.

Inclusive Leadership and Governance

- **Diversify Leadership**: Actively recruit and support diverse candidates for leadership roles within the board and administration to reflect the communities they serve. This diversity brings critical perspectives to equity discussions.

- **Shared Governance**: Involve faculty, staff, and students—especially those from marginalized groups—in governance processes and decision-making on issues that impact equity. This could include forming equity task forces or councils.

Resource Allocation for Equity

- **Equity-Focused Budgeting**: Allocate resources specifically for equity initiatives, such as funding for scholarships for underrepresented students, professional development, or support services like tutoring, advising, and mental health services.

- **Strategic Investments**: Invest in programs and partnerships that target historically underserved populations, such as early-college high schools, workforce training for minority communities, and recruitment initiatives that target underrepresented student groups.

Community and Stakeholder Engagement

- **Engage the Community**: Develop partnerships with local organizations, businesses, and advocacy groups that focus on equity and inclusion. These partnerships can provide additional support and resources for underserved students.

- **Listen and Respond**: Host town halls, listening sessions, and open forums to hear directly from students, faculty, staff, and community members about equity-related concerns and potential solutions. Being responsive to these concerns strengthens the institutional commitment to equity.

Community and Stakeholder Engagement

- **Listen and Respond**: Host town halls, listening sessions, and open forums to hear directly from students, faculty, staff, and community members about equity-related concerns and potential solutions. Being responsive to these concerns strengthens the institutional commitment to equity.

Establish Equity-Centered Policies

- **Review Existing Policies**: Conduct a thorough review of institutional policies and practices through an equity lens to identify and remove barriers to success for marginalized students and employees.

- **Adopt New Equity Policies**: Craft policies that specifically promote equity, such as inclusive hiring practices, mandatory cultural competence training for staff, or zero-cost textbook initiatives for low-income students.

Establish Equity-Centered Policies

- **Adopt New Equity Policies**: Craft policies that specifically promote equity, such as inclusive hiring practices, mandatory cultural competence training for staff, or zero-cost textbook initiatives for low-income students.

Create a Culture of Belonging

- **Celebrate Diversity**: Foster a campus culture that celebrates diversity through events, student groups, and curriculum offerings that reflect the experiences and contributions of marginalized communities.

Create a Culture of Belonging

- **Mentorship and Support Systems**: Create mentorship programs that connect students, faculty, and staff from underrepresented groups with established leaders in their field to foster career advancement and personal growth.

- **Mentorship and Support Systems**: Create mentorship programs that connect students, faculty, and staff from underrepresented groups with established leaders in their field to foster career advancement and personal growth.

Track and Celebrate Progress

- **Regular Audits**: Conduct periodic equity audits to measure progress toward equity goals and identify areas that need improvement. Use these audits as a basis for making necessary changes.

- **Celebrate Success**: Recognize and celebrate milestones in equity work, whether through awards, recognition ceremonies, or public statements, to reinforce the importance of this work.

Our Charge

- By embedding equity into leadership and governance, board members and presidents can create a lasting culture of inclusion and opportunity, positioning their institutions as leaders in closing equity gaps and advancing social justice in higher education.

Questions?