

# How to Achieve More Equitable Community College Student Outcomes Lessons From Six Years of CCRC Research on Guided Pathways

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## Summary

CCRC’s 2015 book *Redesigning America’s Community Colleges: A Clearer Path to Student Success* (Bailey et al., 2015) catalyzed a national community college reform movement. Since its publication, hundreds of community colleges have sought to implement whole-college reforms using the guided pathways model outlined in the book, either on their own or as part of a national or state initiative. CCRC has studied the adoption, implementation, costs, and effects of these reforms at over 100 colleges and interacted with thousands of practitioners implementing guided pathways through institutes, webinars, and workshops. In the process, we have deepened our understanding of how community colleges can improve students’ experiences and outcomes and advance educational equity through guided pathways reforms.

In this report, we describe how CCRC’s thinking about guided pathways has evolved in five areas: program organization and design, new student onboarding, remediation and academic support, ongoing student advising, and teaching and learning. For each area, we discuss what we have learned from studying the implementation of guided pathways at colleges across the country, parts of the model that were underemphasized or mainly theoretical in 2015, and practices that research suggests are critical to achieving more equitable student outcomes and ensuring community colleges’ survival in a post-COVID environment. A summary of these advances in our thinking is shown in Table 1.

**Table 1.**  
How CCRC’s Thinking About Guided Pathways Has Evolved

AREA OF PRACTICE	REDESIGNING AMERICA’S CCs	CURRENT THINKING
Program organization and design	Organize programs into meta-majors and create default program maps for students	Build academic and career communities and make sure every student has an individualized educational plan
New student onboarding	Ensure new students receive career and transfer information and advising	Ensure new students participate in guided exploration to choose a pathway of interest, and help them make connections with other students and faculty in academic and career communities
Remediation and academic support	Use multiple measures to place students into appropriate developmental or college-level courses and provide corequisite remediation when possible	Teach students to be effective college learners in college-level program foundation courses (not just math and English)
Ongoing student advising	Provide holistic wraparound advising and other supports	Provide case-management advising by meta-major and use students’ educational plans to schedule classes and monitor progress
Teaching and learning	Establish program learning outcomes and promote faculty development through collaborative inquiry	Embed active and experiential learning in all programs