FRONTIER SET

WORKING TOGETHER FOR EQUITABLE STUDENT OUTCOMES

STATE OF THE FRONTIER SET

2018

The Frontier Set is a select group of high-performing, high-potential colleges and universities, state systems, and supporting organizations, all committed to dramatically increasing student success and erasing attainment gaps by transforming how they operate.

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A TRANSFORMING INSTITUTION CONTINUALLY BUILDS ITS CAPACITY TO ACHIEVE EQUITABLE STUDENT OUTCOMES AT SCALE.

EQUITY IN EDUCATION

College is a bridge to opportunity. As the most reliable path to career fulfillment and financial empowerment, higher education has long driven social mobility and economic prosperity in our country.

But despite Americans' overwhelming belief in the value of education after high school, we know that for many students, navigating the path to graduation is too complex, challenging, and costly—especially for students of color, low-income students, and those who are the first in their family to attend college. This must change: Institutions must transform to better serve students and achieve more equitable outcomes.

42%

of postsecondary students are non-white

* Full sources can be found online at frontierset.org

While still strong overall, the United States has fallen behind other countries in terms of the portion of the population that holds a college degree, especially with young people ages 25–34. One critical reason is that our institutions are not doing enough to get students of color to graduation. As the total populations of black and Hispanic Americans rise, so do their numbers in higher education: 42 percent of students are non-white, according to the U.S. Department of Education*, but they are only about half as likely to get a postsecondary degree as their white peers, according to the U.S. Census Bureau. Similarly, Third Way found that Pell Grant-receiving students have graduation rates that are, on average, 18 percent lower than non-Pell students. Today's students look different than they have in the past: They are more likely to be working, raising children while in school, the first in their family to go to college, or from a historically underserved population. They need different support to succeed—and their success is critical.

Making education more accessible to more people creates preferable outcomes for all, in the form of a more vibrant and equitable society and economy. Diversity is good for everyone: A study in the journal *Growth & Change* found that students benefit from learning in a diverse environment, companies benefit from a diverse workforce, and more diverse regions may experience higher rates of economic growth.

Plus, our world is changing—the Georgetown Center on Education and the Workforce estimates that in two years, by 2020, about 65 percent of American jobs will require some college education. This is a significant jump; in 1973 only 28 percent of jobs had that requirement. A degree means more opportunities and better wages—it also means more tax revenue and better social outcomes, as increased levels of degree attainment have been associated with less crime, better health, and higher levels of political engagement.

Despite all the clear benefits of higher education, student readiness, cost, and graduation rates remain persistent barriers, and not just for a few students at a few institutions—these challenges are pervasive and systemic.

This has led to a public concern about postsecondary education in our country. For the past two years, New America has found that only one-quarter of Americans think higher education is fine the way it is. Another survey from Pew Research Center suggests that though most Americans see value in higher education, many are concerned about the future: Six in 10 believe higher education is generally going in the wrong direction—and lack of affordability is often at the heart of that belief.

It's clear that major change is needed to improve equity, access, and student success. This is critically important at both the level of the individual student and at a national socioeconomic level. Unless we dramatically improve access and student success in higher education, thousands of students, despite their best efforts, will be failed by the system, and our nation will suffer from a shortage of the skilled workers needed to ensure global competitiveness and national security.

Many scholars and practitioners have been working to uncover why and how students don't graduate—and how the system can be transformed to keep students on track. Researchers, policy groups, organizations, and postsecondary institutions themselves have all been instrumental in developing an in-depth understanding of what it takes for schools to be more student success-driven, effective, and equitable.

The Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation believes postsecondary education is an essential and promising area for making progress toward the goal of a more equitable world. The foundation's mission in postsecondary education is to close attainment gaps—the gap between white and non-white students' graduation rates—and improve student outcomes, meaning more students graduating across the board. This is why the foundation brought together the Frontier Set.

ONLY
1/4

of Americans think higher education is fine the way it is

The 29 institutions and two state systems that make up the Frontier Set are committed to tackling these same goals. They are pursuing promising approaches to transforming how they operate in order to create radically different outcomes for students, **and they will lead the way toward a better, more equitable future for our country.**

HIGH-PERFORMING, HIGH-POTENTIAL

CRITERIA

The Frontier Set sites were chosen because they were disproportionately narrowing the achievement gap in comparison to their peers

The Frontier Set is a select group of high-performing, high-potential colleges and universities, state systems, and supporting organizations that are all committed to dramatically increasing student success and erasing attainment gaps by transforming how they operate.

The 29 colleges and universities and two state systems (all referred to as "sites") that make up the Frontier Set stand as a diverse cross-section of higher education, encompassing research universities, state systems, regional comprehensive institutions, community colleges, urban-serving universities, and minority-serving institutions including Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs).

The member sites are succeeding in improving student outcomes by implementing innovative approaches, strengthening their capacity to adapt, and consistently focusing on how all these pieces come together to increase student success. They're experimenting with incorporating predictive analytics in their advising offices, increasing the use of digital learning approaches to meet student needs, taking creative approaches to financial aid, creating new methods for mentorship, and more. They are dedicated and innovative, and they have agreed to work together to go further and faster as a group, generating big ideas that will ripple outward and transform the postsecondary system as a whole.

Additionally, sites have committed to taking a hard look at their data and owning the story it tells—good or bad—and using that understanding to move forward in new ways that may serve as an example for other institutions grappling with similar challenges. They are committed to making college credentials truly attainable and affordable for all students, and to sticking to their values despite the financial, operational, and strategic challenges that entails.

The fundamental goals of the Frontier Set are equity-focused: Improve student outcomes and close attainment gaps within the network, and in that effort, find, implement, research, and document policies and practices focused on student success. The Frontier Set network—especially the intermediaries, which are organizations that serve as connectors and communicators—encourages sites as they pilot new strategies. The network provides a structure for sites to check in with others and ask about different approaches. This habit of sharing is essential to the Frontier Set, and will continue to build upon itself, spurring more demand for insight around student success. It's an innovative model based on learning and sharing in motion, and the power of a strong network—enhanced by the work of the support partners.

Support partners help capture the sites' progress indicators, which shed light on where sites excel and where opportunities for improvement lie. This critical understanding of sites' strengths and gaps informs ongoing efforts and helps sites formulate new approaches for the future. Along with this continual cycle of evaluation and growth, Frontier Set sites share their promising practices (and the indicators that support them) so others inside the network can learn from them, adapt them, and continue to improve and accelerate their own transformation. This progress is supported by building strengths and filling gaps with targeted technical assistance, facilitating efforts to ensure all students succeed.

As the University Innovation Alliance, a Frontier Set intermediary, put it:

"The Frontier Set provides permission and resources to be creative, try new approaches and succeed—or fail and learn—in new ways, and share those experiences and outcomes with peers. Our campuses are eager for deeper sharing, learning, and support around change management and institutional strategies."
— UNIVERSITY INNOVATION ALLIANCE, INTERMEDIARY

By capturing and sharing back how the Frontier Set is improving student outcomes and closing attainment gaps, the network begins to generate more big ideas that accelerate transformation. In this way, the Frontier Set is setting new standards and building a body of knowledge that will lead the way for others, transforming how institutions operate and positively impacting the lives of thousands of students nationally.

The Frontier Set serves as a testing ground for tools created to help institutions accelerate transformation, and is also the source of a collection of case studies, hypotheses, and common threads found in successful approaches to transformation. This resource will help other institutions find inspiration to inform their own next steps toward improving student outcomes. As time goes on, the Frontier Set's findings will continue to grow and evolve, becoming an essential resource for interested institutions and other stakeholders in higher education.

This is what is unique about the Frontier Set: learning and sharing in motion—plus doing it so openly in a field that is known to be competitive. Not only have sites committed to changing how they do things in order to make a difference in student outcomes, but they've also agreed to share the highs and lows, what they're trying, what approaches they're seeing promise in, and what they're hoping for the future.

The Frontier Set was created as a five-year initiative. Now, more than two years in, sites are growing and learning from each other, and finding success in innovative approaches and new ways of thinking.

There is plenty of hard work ahead, but also plenty to celebrate. This report is the State of the Frontier Set, a reflection of the early learnings and aspirations of the group, and a vision for what's next in increasing equity and accelerating student success.

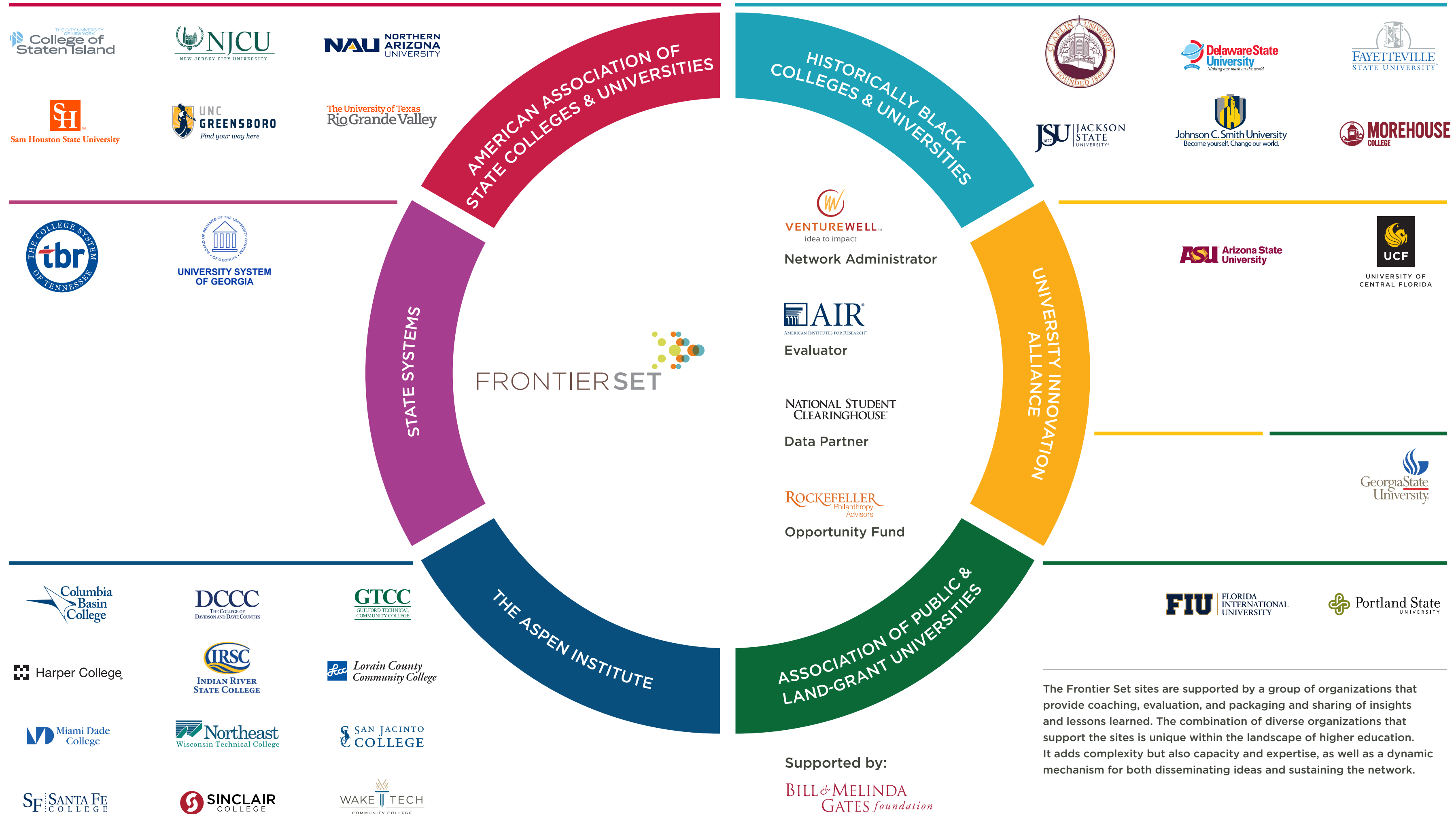# MAP OF THE FRONTIER SET

SITES AND SUPPORT PARTNERS

AMERICAN ASSOCIATION OF STATE COLLEGES & UNIVERSITIES

- College of Staten Island (The City University of New York)
- NJCU (New Jersey City University)
- NAU Northern Arizona University
- Sam Houston State University
- UNC Greensboro — Find your way here
- The University of Texas Rio Grande Valley

STATE SYSTEMS

- tbr — The College System of Tennessee
- University System of Georgia

THE ASPEN INSTITUTE

- Columbia Basin College
- DCCC — The College of Davidson and Davie Counties
- GTCC — Guilford Technical Community College
- Harper College
- IRSC — Indian River State College
- Lorain County Community College
- Miami Dade College
- Northeast Wisconsin Technical College
- San Jacinto College
- Santa Fe College
- Sinclair College
- Wake Tech Community College

HISTORICALLY BLACK COLLEGES & UNIVERSITIES

- Claflin University
- Delaware State University — Making our mark on the world
- Fayetteville State University
- JSU Jackson State University
- Johnson C. Smith University — Become yourself. Change our world.
- Morehouse College

UNIVERSITY INNOVATION ALLIANCE

- ASU Arizona State University
- UCF University of Central Florida
- Georgia State University

ASSOCIATION OF PUBLIC & LAND-GRANT UNIVERSITIES

- FIU Florida International University
- Portland State University

FRONTIER SET

- VENTUREWELL — idea to impact
  Network Administrator
- AIR — American Institutes for Research
  Evaluator
- National Student Clearinghouse
  Data Partner
- Rockefeller Philanthropy Advisors
  Opportunity Fund

Supported by:

BILL & MELINDA GATES foundation

The Frontier Set sites are supported by a group of organizations that provide coaching, evaluation, and packaging and sharing of insights and lessons learned. The combination of diverse organizations that support the sites is unique within the landscape of higher education. It adds complexity but also capacity and expertise, as well as a dynamic mechanism for both disseminating ideas and sustaining the network.

COMMON THEMES IN ANNUAL REFLECTIONS

In addition to defining what it means to be a transforming institution, all of the Frontier Set sites reflected on their efforts this year by writing letters to their peers outlining what they've learned, what they've struggled with, and what they hope to share with each other and the field. Among the multitude of topics covered, five key themes emerged. These themes were touched upon by multiple sites, tackled from different angles, and addressed from unique perspectives, resulting in a rich, multifaceted view of what is top of mind for sites:

STUDENT-CENTERED MISSION
Focusing on a central thread and purpose: student success

DATA-INFORMED DECISION MAKING
Continual use of data to explore challenges and outcomes

COLLABORATIVE, EMPOWERED ENVIRONMENT
Engagement across levels and divisions of the institution or system, plus the resources to act

COMMITMENT TO CONTINUAL IMPROVEMENT
Unwavering dedication to exploring the most challenging aspects of the work

GOALS & ACCOUNTABILITY
Establishing and communicating milestones along the journey

STUDENT-CENTERED MISSION

While the work of the Frontier Set is all about student success, it's easy to lose sight of the actual student in the midst of planning, strategizing, managing staff, and interacting with policy and larger issues. **Part of what makes the Frontier Set sites so distinct is that they are steadfast in their focus on the students, striving to see them as individuals and basing every decision on their needs.** They frame their efforts around equitable student success rather than institutional success, and continually underscore this driver of their efforts. This shared goal contributes to better student outcomes as well as a more deeply engaged campus overall.

Fayetteville State University, for example, has found that a student-centered mission, shared wholeheartedly by both leadership and faculty, is critical:

"A transforming institution has leaders, faculty, and staff who affirm timely degree completion by its students and lifelong personal and professional success by its graduates as the ultimate goals of all they do. This shared vision of institutional purpose is articulated clearly by leaders; embraced by faculty and staff; and infused in policies, procedures, personnel decisions, and assessment methods."
— FAYETTEVILLE STATE UNIVERSITY

At Arizona State University, they've found it useful to continually underscore their charter. ASU focuses on the fact that as a comprehensive public research university, they aren't measured by whom they exclude, but rather by whom they include, and how they enable success. This perspective includes a fundamental responsibility to the health of the community the university serves, with students at the heart of that community.

Lorain County Community College pointed out that the foundation of their vision is the belief that all students can and will achieve success. Confidence in students lays the groundwork for interventions and lasting change. In the past, many institutions have assumed the stance of requiring students to be college-ready, but sites like Florida International University have found that position no longer acceptable.

"We must constantly strive to be student-ready," wrote FIU, noting that along with that shift, it needs to be made clear that doing so is not equivalent to coddling students or watering down degrees. The ability to be student-ready comes from sitewide focus and effort to meet students where they are. As such, FIU provides a number of services and electronic tools—such as My_eAdvisor Student Dashboard, College Life Coaches, and learning assistants—to respond to student needs in real time, help students enhance their academic experience, and proactively track their progress.

The Tennessee Board of Regents has achieved this shift to student-centeredness through an ambitious combination of "goal-setting, use of research, data analytics, planning, collaboration, execution, evaluation and continuous quality improvement, all centered on student success."

Likewise, the College of Staten Island is committed to fostering success for all students at all levels. They are working collectively to create a positive college experience by prioritizing strong student engagement, both inside and outside the classroom, and assisting students with developing a "growth mindset."

But it's not just observing students from afar. Sites also find it essential to continually source student insights and opinions—beyond the data, one-on-one conversations, surveys, and stories help shed light on students' needs and help sites better support them. As Indian River State College put it:

"Momentum builds when at every level we listen to our students. Engaging them in focus groups, surveys, call projects, and spontaneous conversation reveals so much about their reality and enables all involved in this work to better understand the why. We must see their faces in the data, hear their voices in the surveys, know our students, and change their lives."
— INDIAN RIVER STATE COLLEGE

This close understanding of the student helps Frontier Set sites both foster a real culture of caring *and* ignite action. Portland State University noted that at the heart of their work are both the students and a material commitment from leadership to support open innovation. This approach originated with the 2013 Provost's Challenge, in which the university leveraged $3 million in one-time funding to support 24 faculty- and staff-initiated projects that use technology in innovative ways to deliver high-quality, affordable education. More than 160 proposals were submitted by 1,000 faculty, staff, and students, ranging from online academic advising to degree-completion coaching, online general education pathways, and reduction of textbook costs. All projects were supported through a detailed project management approach, and deployed crowdsourcing and design-thinking approaches to co-identify problems and solutions—all with student voices, feedback, and perspectives at the center of the work.

The Tennessee Board of Regents has also seen this equity-focused work spur innovation: "A transformational perspective on student success and an ethical obligation to that success has spawned a culture of innovation, exploration, and investment in encouraging enterprises."

This focus can also help sites coalesce their efforts. New Jersey City University coordinated and prioritized several fragmented initiatives under the general umbrella of "Student Success," including adapting their centralized advisement model and increasing the number of professional advisors from six to 20, while supporting faculty members' focus on mentoring and career-readiness.

Similarly, Sam Houston State University has focused its student success efforts around advising, dramatically revamping their advising system. Their Student Advising and Mentoring Center (SAM Center) was designed 15 years ago to be a centralized, one-stop advising service for a campus of 12,000 undergraduates. Initially, its innovative design and high level of service won the SAM Center several national awards from NACADA and NAAA. But because of high enrollment growth since its founding (enrollment is now over 21,000), the SAM Center gradually modified its design to a more decentralized model, scattering advisors among departments and colleges. Communication became difficult, mistakes were regularly made, and the quality of service provided by the SAM Center no longer warranted national recognition.

However, with the support of the Frontier Set, including a visit to Northern Arizona University to learn about their model, Sam Houston was able to begin a redesign of the Center to better accommodate the growing enrollment while at the same time providing a comprehensive academic and advising experience to students far beyond simply choosing courses each semester. Once the redesign is complete next year, the new SAM Center will exclusively use professional advisors (as opposed to part-time or volunteer faculty advisors) to present a comprehensive advising curriculum to students, giving students the means to make informed decisions regarding their education.

Big changes like that require broad buy-in. A decade ago at Sinclair Community College, President Steven Johnson established that buy-in, stating that student success and completion are everyone's job. Since then, over 1,400 faculty and staff members have participated in professional development activities, work teams, or focus groups, all seeking to improve student outcomes. Similar all-hands, boots-on-the-ground approaches have helped many Frontier Set sites drive transformation.

University of Texas Rio Grande Valley commented that transformation necessarily involves the entire campus, requiring everyone to refocus on students and their success. Northern Arizona University defines that success as the "interdependent and intertwined combination of academic achievement, engagement, persistence, and personal growth that results in degree attainment."

Keeping this focus on student success central is important across the Frontier Set. Indian River State College approaches all decisions with a "student-first lens," which not only improves outcomes but also provides stability and consistency in focus for faculty, staff, and administration. It's all about both daily operations and campus culture, noted Delaware State University: "Student success continues to be our top priority, and is consistently communicated to all segments of the university community."

Claflin University defined student success as "persistence toward graduation, receipt of prestigious fellowships and scholarships, admission into competitive graduate and professional schools, and recruitment by major companies and agencies." They also include reduced student debt as a critical component.

All of the Frontier Set sites feel the urgency of improving student outcomes and, most importantly, doing it in a way that promotes equity across student demographic groups. Santa Fe College asks the difficult question, "How many are we leaving behind?" Though Santa Fe is a high-performing college, with retention and success rates among the best of any two-year school in the United States, their success rate of 70 percent still doesn't feel good enough. Like Santa Fe, other Frontier Set sites are asking those difficult questions and committing campuswide to making a difference.

This work requires an unrelenting focus on students and their needs—plus, and perhaps more critically, genuine concern for student outcomes and the courage to try new approaches. **That central thread and purpose has helped Frontier Set sites take significant strides toward meaningful transformation.**
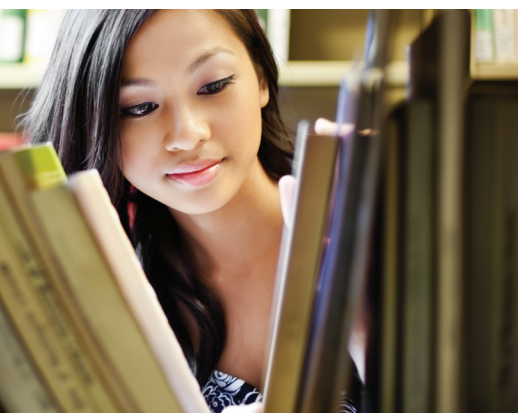
DATA-INFORMED DECISION MAKING

Data is a critical component of Frontier Set sites' efforts. As part of the Frontier Set initiative, all sites commit to tracking a set of key performance indicators (KPIs) from a common metrics framework that includes:

Credit accumulation threshold
Credit completion ratio
Gateway course completion ratio
Retention rate
Graduation rate
Number of completions

A close look at data can indicate where energy and resources should be focused, sometimes with surprising results. **Data provide a clear way to benchmark and set goals, track the success of changes implemented across an institution, and learn what does and does not work to make future efforts more fruitful. It can also generate urgency, and then validate the following change efforts.**

Infrastructure is a prerequisite to the effective use of data. Fayetteville State University found that data-driven continuous improvement requires both personnel and physical resources to collect, disseminate, and analyze data—as well as guidelines for how to actually use that data to make improvements.

Florida International University noted the same need for infrastructure. They shared that after establishing the necessary data infrastructure, they've been empowered to make more data-driven decisions than ever before. They use data as a way to chart their course—when data showed they had room to improve their student-advisor ratios and course failure rates, they paired these findings with perspectives of faculty, staff, and leadership to determine where to begin. With initiatives like this, they have come to realize they can and should offer more support to more stakeholders regarding how to access and use data for decision making across the institution.

Georgia State University places data squarely at the center of their transformation journey: "Institutional transformation is using data-driven interventions at scale to combat known hurdles faced by first-generation and low-income students, including understanding how to navigate complex university systems like degree-mapping and registration." For instance, GSU launched a chatbot in an effort to reduce "summer melt," which refers to students who accept admission to the institution but don't show up for fall enrollment. The chatbot's development took into account data on common obstacles at-risk students face between high school graduation and college enrollment, such as submitting financial aid applications and documents, including immunization records, and completing placement exams. The chatbot, "Pounce," serves as a 24/7 texting service that leverages this data and provides answers to questions from incoming students on their smart devices. In its first summer of implementation, the service reduced summer melt by 22 percent.

Delaware State University also focuses on individual student retention. They create individual development plans (IDPs) for each new freshman student, and they redesigned their advising model to monitor and deliver those plans. Prior to the IDPs, delivering consistent advising was a challenge, but now IDPs have been used for three cohorts, ensuring that students receive advising from a common framework. The IDP model also provides leadership with data that proactively measures the system's success; the data are key in executing the student success strategy and informing the institution of timely course corrections for students.

In the years since implementing the IDPs in 2015, there have been key organizational and leadership changes at Delaware State University, and the results are unmistakable: historic enrollment, retention, and graduation rates.

"What we have learned is that while we have many stakeholders—faculty, staff, funders, alumni, elected officials, and just plain fans—we have only one customer: the students."
— DELAWARE STATE UNIVERSITY

Data can also help sites understand their unique context. Davidson County Community College sees transformation as "large-scale adaptation to student and community needs and economic conditions, based on evidence." They also point to another key use of data: as a benchmark to measure progress along the journey to fulfilling an ambitious vision.

Jackson State University noted that its "key performance indicator targets are a constant reminder of how we want to improve student success at our institution. Knowing there is always room to grow and having a supportive administration are what makes this work possible."

The Aspen Institute, the intermediary for community colleges, noted that a common theme in sites' journeys has been putting data at the forefront of difficult conversations, and using it to demonstrate an urgent need for change. **Transparency around data creates a new level of clarity and accountability, and helps sites make decisions about what to pursue as well as how to continue to measure the success of their efforts.**

Northeast Wisconsin Technical College wrote: "Evidence-based decision making is a standard practice for initiating change and creating a culture of continuous improvement."

Many Frontier Set sites have found that data play a role as a validator of student success efforts. Georgia State University found that when they experienced resistance to new initiatives from faculty or leadership, data provided evidence and helped them build consensus and move ideas forward to implement new approaches. That consensus-building work is critical, as the work prompted by data can be difficult. As Miami Dade College noted, it often requires substantial collaboration between academic and student services, as well as professional development for faculty and staff.

After the protocols and systems for gathering and analyzing data are in place, areas of focus have been established, and support has been gathered from around the institution, sites put specific approaches into place to improve student outcomes.

One approach many Frontier Set campuses are taking is engaging faculty in predictive analytics, both within their own courses and by leveraging faculty research skills to support student success institutionwide.

Arizona State's eAdvisor tool uses data from various academic and co-curricular information systems across campus to generate student and advisor alerts when students may be off track. ASU has also developed an Online Student Success Coaching Center for personalized multi-modality support via 59 coaches dedicated specifically to supporting online students. In addition to the existing academic advisor support for online students, Success Coaches are available as both advisors and coaches to offer success strategies and connect students to the various resources at ASU.

The University of Central Florida launched a pilot cohort of Predictive Analytics Faculty Innovation Fellows, a learning community of six faculty members who worked with institutional data to conduct research on course-taking patterns as well as barriers to and predictors of persistence and completion. Their recommendations are informing program design across campus.

The Tennessee Board of Regents, comprising 13 community colleges, looked at student performance data and found that undecided students were significantly less likely to persist than those with a degree objective. They also looked at student performance by major at each institution, uncovering the critical courses that predict student success in each degree pathway. Collectively this led them to study choice theory and paralysis, and ultimately create a set of eight Academic Foci: meta-majors that guide students toward an area of interest and eventually a major.

San Jacinto Community College found that continuously and intentionally confronting the data at key moments is critical to build and maintain a sense of real urgency on campus. When they realized that students took, on average, 94 semester credit hours to obtain a 60-semester-credit-hour associate's degree, they dug into why that was. They found that students tended to wander from course to course, and often that wandering was encouraged—without a broader understanding of the excess student-loan debt and the delay in program completion this could cause. Motivated by their realization, San Jacinto implemented a pathways philosophy, and oriented their staff to that new mindset. *The pathways model is an integrated, institutionwide approach to student success based on intentionally designed, clear, coherent, and structured educational experiences, informed by available evidence, that guide each student effectively and efficiently from their point of entry to attainment of high-quality postsecondary credentials and careers with value in the labor market. It is often a focus area for Frontier Set sites.*

Data can show gaps, but also prove and celebrate successes—San Jacinto saw a 48.1 percent increase in the number of degrees and certificates awarded between 2011–2012 and 2015–2016.

Integrating data into the planning cycle of an institution can continually drive innovation and improvements: The discovery of opportunities for improvement spurs initial changes, then data show the success of those changes, which fosters further data analysis and transformation work. The Association of Public and Land-grant Universities (APLU), the intermediary for urban-serving public and land-grant universities, noted that when data are used as a driver of transformation, the strategy should include both the relevant inputs (like staffing ratios) and outcomes (like retention) to get a clear picture of progress. APLU also noted that data are most useful when contextualized in order to understand when to change—and how to sustain change for real impact.

48.1%

Increase in the number of degrees and certificates awarded between 2011-2012 and 2015-2016 at San Jacinto

Data can serve as proof of that sustainment. At Sam Houston State University, data have helped increase the visibility of their student success and Frontier Set initiatives, and they believe it will also play a role in recruiting faculty and staff to work on student success initiatives.

The Frontier Set sites also use data as a way to quantify their efforts as they share their stories with others. The University System of Georgia, for example, found tremendous value in the data collected by the Tennessee Board of Regents. Analyzing the Tennessee data helped USG review their own data more quickly, which in turned helped them get statewide buy-in to new initiatives. Increasingly specific analyses are helping shape the USG's plans for the future, and evaluation and reporting on the ongoing efforts is pushing changes in policies, practices, and data communication structures. Additionally, each of the USG institutions submits an annual Campus Plan detailing high-impact, high-priority activities and progress toward student success. Data from those plans is summarized and used for systemwide decision making.

Frontier Set sites are committed to learning more about their own data and exploring how best to use it—and sharing their findings with others so the group can continue exploring new challenges and approaches.

Data paired with a student-centered mission is a powerful thing. Santa Fe College noted that it requires "an understanding that data represents the lives of real students, many of whom are struggling amidst tremendous adversity to gain access to educational and economic opportunity."

COLLABORATIVE, EMPOWERED ENVIRONMENT

In their definitions of transformation, letters to peers, and hopes for the coming year, all of the Frontier Set sites noted how fundamental a truly collaborative environment and campuswide culture of care are to this work. They've seen how critical it is for leadership to clearly and consistently build a culture of empowerment as they move equity and student success efforts forward. This entails building a culture that fosters collaboration, encourages experimentation, and celebrates success—all through strategic communications and developing a rigorous planning process that aligns the institution around a core set of principles and goals. Faculty and staff must be made active partners in the journey, both by granting ownership and by creating working groups or task forces with specific aims. Key messages, from sweeping goals to tactical changes, must be delivered campuswide, and communicated clearly and frequently.

This work to create a truly collaborative environment pays off when initiatives succeed, faculty and staff are engaged and active, and students graduate.

Here are some thoughts and examples from the Frontier Set sites and intermediaries:

THE ASPEN INSTITUTE, INTERMEDIARY
"Transformation includes meaningfully engaging all campus constituencies, even those who serve students indirectly or have historically not been a part of student success work."

AMERICAN ASSOCIATION OF STATE COLLEGES AND UNIVERSITIES, INTERMEDIARY
"Institutional transformation begins with an articulation of core values, particularly a commitment to student success for all students. Transformation also requires that the entire campus is committed to the core values, enacted in each office and program. Institutions that are in the process of transforming possess an experimental and innovative mindset, willing to try new approaches as well as jettison outdated practices."

COLUMBIA BASIN COLLEGE
"Institutional transformation is a necessary and complicated process. Status quo is not good enough these days, and transformation forces institutional growth and collaborations between colleagues, all in an effort to ensure student success."

CUNY COLLEGE OF STATEN ISLAND
"The ability to change involves a complex multitude of elements, all of which rely on acceptance and buy-in at every level."

DAVIDSON COUNTY COMMUNITY COLLEGE
"Rather than talk about the names of the various initiatives, we intentionally avoid such divisional, segmented language and instead talk more holistically about student success."

How ▸ By engaging the whole campus in annual book reads that are centered on difficult topics—and creating an equity champions program that helps a key group of staff and faculty teach others about equitable outcomes and supporting the needs of each student.

INDIAN RIVER STATE COLLEGE
"A transforming institution is one which operates within a culture that is intentionally structured to enable employees to expect and welcome intrinsic and extrinsic change. This approach significantly reduces resistance to new initiatives by employees, allowing us to shorten the time necessary to scale new student success models."

How ▸ By creating temporary workgroups that meet on a very specific topic for a limited amount of time. Anyone at any level of the organization can join these, and they very rarely become permanent committees—instead, they just meet until a sustainable solution is identified and recommended for implementation. The workgroup model is collaborative, made up of administrators, faculty, and staff.

JOHNSON C. SMITH UNIVERSITY
"Radical transformation is the process of profound and swift change that orients an organization in a new direction and takes it to an entirely different level of effectiveness. Unlike 'turnaround,' which implies incremental progress on the same plane, 'radical transformation' points to a significant change of character, with little or no resemblance to the past configuration or structure."

PORTLAND STATE UNIVERSITY
"We employ the five stages of design thinking: empathy, problem definition, ideation, prototyping, and testing. Students, faculty, and staff are involved at each stage."

How ▸ By taking an active problem-solving approach that squarely places students at the center of development activities in which the university leverages cross-functional teams to iterate, prototype, and implement solutions through a collaborative design process. This approach engages leadership at all levels and also, importantly, utilizes active listening and customization, which effectively draw on institutional resources and capacity. A few results to date include developing flexible degrees, blended academic and career advising aligned with the PSU student journey, and interactive degree maps.

MIAMI DADE COLLEGE
"New teams have been formed as the institution tackles new challenges, but throughout this process, a core of team members remained in place, seeding new teams with a common language, methodology, and culture of transformation. This structure not only enables broad participation from faculty, staff, and administrators, and leverages resources and learning, but it also helps minimize initiative fatigue. New members bring fresh ideas, experience, and perspective, but the teams remain rooted in a shared vision and goals for student success."

MOREHOUSE COLLEGE

"Morehouse is a transforming institution; the college not only sets its goals to transform and influence the lives of the students, but also to transform itself to meet the changing needs of those students."

NEW JERSEY CITY UNIVERSITY

"Institutional transformation is a complex process that requires, among other things, patience, enforcement, and, most importantly, strategic human, financial, and technological investments, and involves self-awareness, empathy, and competency."

NORTHEAST WISCONSIN TECHNICAL COLLEGE

"A culture of student success is maintained across the institution. All staff, executive leadership, and board members have a clear vision of how initiatives and their individual roles promote student success."

`How` **By giving major initiatives to a coordinator who works collaboratively across divisions to manage the logistics of a specific project. This helps free capacity among faculty, staff, and administrators, who can serve more as content experts and thought leaders.**

SANTA FE COLLEGE

"Part of what catalyzes transformation is a decentralized culture of empowerment and accountability that begins with the orientation of new faculty and staff, and is supported by ongoing professional development and collegewide communications."

STATE SYSTEMS INTERMEDIARY

The two state systems, comprising 39 institutions, create environments that drive and support institutional transformation. Each system has a vision with clear goals, and each seeks to create enabling policy environments, provide technical assistance, and build statewide infrastructure that coordinates resources to support transformation.

UNIVERSITY OF TEXAS RIO GRANDE VALLEY

"Institutional transformation is a fundamental change in the orientation, policies, and practices of an institution, from entry-level staff through the president's office, to refocus directly on the student experience and the primacy of that, including particularly the perspective of groups of students that may have been previously overlooked or not heard."

`How` **By creating college-level Student Success Teams in academic colleges. The purpose of these teams is to develop college-level ownership and investment in student success and to gather insights and develop locally led programs to improve students' success. Each team is led by a college Associate Dean and is composed of college faculty, academic advisors, a Career Center representative, and a Student Life representative. These teams are then also represented on the Student Success Steering Team, which meets once a month to elevate college-level ideas and concerns, and collaborate on student success strategies.**

UNIVERSITY SYSTEM OF GEORGIA

This state system recently announced the creation of the Chancellor's Learning Scholars, a program designed to provide scaling capacity to reach 10,000+ full-time faculty in the system and to create a truly collaborative student success environment within institutions and across the system. The system will engage communities of practice on each of the 26 campuses, supported by USG expertise via the overall systemwide Faculty Learning Communities, to be led by the Chancellor's Learning Scholars.

WILLIAM RAINEY HARPER COLLEGE

Harper College's strategic plan, which frames the transformational change initiatives for the college, was developed by engaging 100 key internal and external stakeholders in a community-based strategic planning process to ensure buy-in. Once the plan was finalized, five goal teams were developed, each led by a Harper faculty member and an administrator. These teams are empowered to develop strategies that address their particular goal.

For such a huge transformation to be possible, it's necessary that faculty and administration work together on a common goal. Not everyone always agrees, but having faculty and administration play an equal role in leading these teams allows for each side to help see the other side's perspective.

These goal teams meet on a regular basis, and the leaders of all those teams—along with the president, provost, grant directors, and stakeholders from institutional research, finance, outcomes assessment, and beyond—also meet several times each semester. This approach builds momentum and allows teams to see where another team's work may support their own.
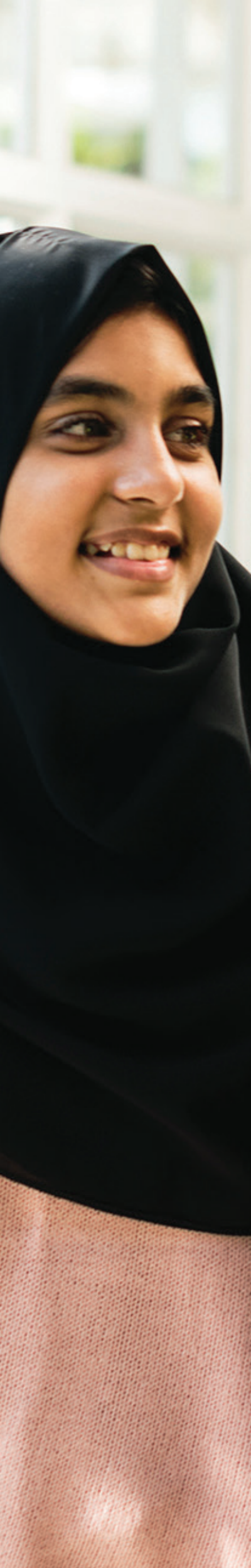
COMMITMENT TO CONTINUAL IMPROVEMENT

The process of transformation is necessarily iterative, and the Frontier Set sites are continually exploring opportunities and implementing new approaches, learning and tweaking along the way. To undertake this work, institutions must be self-aware and have processes in place to assess progress and tackle problems—data play a critical role in this. They must also be agile, with empowered faculty and staff who are excited about and deeply engaged with the work—as well as ready to question assumptions and innovate. Speed is important, too: Even though transforming an institution can seem like steering an ocean liner, implementing new ideas on a smaller scale can effect change rapidly and build toward a greater shift. **Dedication to continual improvement can drive a cycle of learning, building, and testing, which results in better approaches to serving students.**

The network supports this cycle of iteration for the sites, as noted by Claflin University:

"The Frontier Set has allowed us to make assumptions, test them, and improve them to create a more developed plan that will improve student success, specifically for low-income, first-generation students."
— CLAFLIN UNIVERSITY

New Jersey City University also noted that the Frontier Set has enabled them to move quickly and systematically, particularly in developmental math education. They've found this work requires deep discussion about pedagogical challenges and changes, but even with those constraints, they're able to progress toward increased student success.

Florida International University sees transforming institutions as those that truly understand why they need to change, and are hungry to do so. Those institutions learn more from their failures than their successes, and are always ready to adapt. The College of Staten Island described it this way: **"A transforming institution is a continuously evolving and highly integrated entity with the ability to self-assess and respond in a timely way to changing needs."**

This agile self-assessment requires buy-in from across campus to continually explore the challenging aspects of their work, looking for places to improve. That might entail turning to other institutions for ideas—a method encouraged and enabled by the Frontier Set— or developing unique fixes for their particular students or context.

Fayetteville State noted that "A transforming institution establishes a culture of continuous improvement that is evident in the willingness of leaders, faculty, and staff to look critically at all aspects of the university, learn from other institutions with similar goals, experiment with new techniques and tools, assess progress, and adjust strategies based on outcomes."

Northern Arizona University also sees a transforming institution as "one that has a vision of a future state that is different from the current state, and is progressing from the current to future condition. This requires intentionality and coordination efforts across the university toward student success goals. A transforming institution continually grapples with important questions to continue informing, guiding, and refining its transformation."

Momentum for this work is maintained in part by leadership. The University of Central Florida wrote that efforts are sustained at their campus because leadership continues to promote a culture of innovation, organizational learning, and student success.

In addition to culture, key performance indicators are critical to continual improvement. It's important to track the success of efforts to see what works and what doesn't, in order to better understand what to do next. This cycle of examination is shared across sites in the Frontier Set, helping all members go further, faster. **By looking at others' attempts, sites can glean what might work for them, then more effectively implement new approaches. Northeast Wisconsin Technical College noted that "the opportunity to see and hear about innovative projects inspires us to continuously rethink our current state and strive for a higher level of student success support."**

As well as connecting with the education community, it's important for sites to remain aware of the ever-changing student community—both the students themselves and their unique contexts.

Jackson State University's leadership is intentional in developing and implementing a holistic process for providing support to students from a wide range of backgrounds, from recruitment through graduation. They maintain the success of their first-generation, economically challenged students through intensive advising and mentoring at all levels.

Johnson C. Smith University, in its strategic plan, resolved to change its business model in order to survive in a quickly changing and highly competitive market in which students have a multitude of options for earning degrees. This required a shift of focus, broadening from recent high school graduates to students who might be excluded from the typical college pipeline, such as nontraditional adult students, Dreamers, foster youth, and academic underperformers. This broad strategic plan aims to modify the student experience to improve retention and graduation rates for all kinds of students, as well as enhance civic engagement.

Jackson State and Johnson C. Smith are HBCUs. Together, the HBCU Frontier Set cohort has defined institutional transformation as "a process that focuses on developing culturally relevant, student-centered, and collegial environments that evolve through data-informed decision making to meet the needs of students." The HBCU intermediary echoes this sentiment by stating that HBCUs continue to meet the needs of low-income, first-generation students by creating a campus climate that fosters success within diverse learning environments to ensure every student has a chance to succeed.

The University of North Carolina at Greensboro also takes a close look at their students to ensure the institution is creating the best environment for them to succeed. They update their predicative analytics model annually, based on characteristics of the incoming first-year class and new data elements collected through faculty advice. As a result of their focus on a holistic approach, the institution was identified by the Education Trust as a national leader in closing the black and Hispanic achievement gaps in 2010, 2012 and 2013—and, more recently, the U.S. Department of Education highlighted UNCG as an institution making "significant strides in increasing graduation rates among Pell Grant-eligible students."

Wake Technical Community College similarly wrote about how important it is to continually adapt to the changing environment in which their students live, taking into consideration their backgrounds, their current circumstances, and their post-graduation outcomes. Students' needs are always shifting; institutions need to match that. One way Wake Tech has done this is with EPIC (e-Learning Preparedness Initiative across the College), a quality enhancement plan that aims to prepare students for taking online courses and prepare faculty for teaching them. They also opened a campus in a research park in order to be more connected and responsive to local businesses' needs. Both these efforts demonstrate the wide-ranging ways institutions can evolve to better fit and serve their students—an ongoing process described succinctly by Guilford Technical College: **"A transforming institution is one that understands that the reform work is not something it is doing, but rather something it is becoming."**

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CHANGE IS ALWAYS CHALLENGING, BUT IT HAS BECOME OUR NORM. WE ARE CONDITIONED TO TRANSFORMATION FOR THE SAKE OF OUR STUDENTS' FUTURE.

WAKE TECHNICAL COMMUNITY COLLEGE

GOALS & ACCOUNTABILITY

Once a campus is committed to the process of continually working to improve equitable student outcomes, it's crucial to set clear goals and establish a culture of accountability. Goals are often founded on data, and the work toward them is likewise fueled by continual check-ins on progress. At the start of the Frontier Set initiative, each site set targets and publicly committed to student success by sharing long-term credential production goals. Frontier Set sites make goals public in order to create transparency and accountability, and to generate a sense of urgency and involvement across campus. **Students themselves are arriving to sites with their own ambitious goals. Frontier Set sites recognize that and push themselves to both match and support those goals. Sites dream big, with hopes for dramatically different student outcomes across the country, setting goals big and small along the way to help them get there.**

"To keep momentum, it is important to set measurable goals, collect data on a regular basis to measure those goals, and then report on that data. People need to know that the hard work they are putting in is making a difference."
— WILLIAM RAINEY HARPER COLLEGE

Those goals should be clear to all: the American Association of State Colleges and Universities, the intermediary for regional comprehensive universities, noted that "Transformed institutions are publicly committed to and accountable for increasing access and creating opportunities for the success of underserved students, both during and after their time as students."

Institutions in the Tennessee Board of Regents and University System of Georgia have aligned their student success goals with state goals, as well as a range of public accountability measures. In turn, system boards and legislatures hold their respective systems accountable. This alignment and mutual accountability support goal-setting and, additionally, both systems regularly engage the public in conversations about the "why" of transforming for student success. The Tennessee Board of Regents also creates annual publicly reported College Profiles, which include both student characteristics and key performance indicators.

Harper College has found it's important to check in frequently on goals and progress, reiterating the importance of the work every semester. These frequent check-ins ensure all are reminded of why they're engaged in this work, and reinforce a common message around a common goal. To aid in this effort, they created a website with dashboard indicators that show if they are on target with key components of their strategic plan. Sinclair Community College also created a website to house all of their policies in once place, so that everyone on campus has access to current rules and procedures.

Data also help track changes in a transparent way. Santa Fe College noted that when they disaggregated data down to the department, discipline, and course levels, it helped show faculty how their individual efforts add up to a better student experience, as well as how they contribute to institutional performance. That continues to fuel the cycle of engagement with faculty and staff: As they see their work make a difference, they continue to drive innovation and build on the culture of engagement and collaboration.

Frontier Set sites set ambitious goals—as a group, they aim to totally erase attainment gaps and radically increase completion rates. Many sites feel that ambition keenly, like Morehouse College, which wrote:

"Transforming the college is not an easy task, but it is a necessary one. A task taken to live up to the call to be as great (or greater) an institution for social justice in the 21st century as it was in the 20th century."
— MOREHOUSE COLLEGE

This "dream big" mentality is central to transformation. Though there are many steps and checkpoints along the way, it's important to keep the end goal of improved student success and increased equity in outcomes as the north star. Florida International University sees goals and accountability—ownership of the process—as the heart of transformation:

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Institutional transformation is: a willingness to be vulnerable, and to know that our goals are so important and consequential that they warrant the challenges and discomfort that accompany change; commitment, at all levels, to examine our practices and revise them as needed, setting our egos aside; willingness to accept both failures and successes as opportunities to pause, reflect, and learn; and **dedication to leaving one's institution better than one found it.**"

FLORIDA INTERNATIONAL UNIVERSITY

LEADING
THE WAY

The Frontier Set is leading the way toward a better postsecondary system, a system that will be more equitable, graduating students from all populations at higher rates with meaningful degrees that will drive them toward sustainable jobs and successful lives. **This work is of critical importance. As a nation, we need to graduate more students to remain globally competitive, and as a society, we need equity in education to help us continue to grow and flourish.**

The 31 Frontier Set sites have already begun to work together to generate innovative new approaches to student success. As outlined in this report, they start with a student-centered mission, and never lose sight of who they are doing this work for. They confront data and use it to drive and validate change efforts. They intentionally create collaborative environments in which all levels of staff and faculty feel deeply connected to this work and empowered to make change. They regularly review their progress and report back with radical transparency. And they continually set goals that are ever bolder, communicating them openly in the hopes of drawing more and more people and institutions into the journey toward equity and student success.

In the coming years, the Frontier Set sites will engage with one another more deeply. The intermediaries and other support partners have plans to enable deeper connections so sites can learn from each other and implement better solutions, faster—the way Sam Houston State University revamped their advising center after visiting Northern Arizona University. Additionally, the sites' most promising practices will begin to be refined and distilled, with the plan to share them with the broader field.

And, most importantly, thousands of students will graduate with meaningful degrees and set off toward better lives— lives with stable careers that foster economic prosperity and fulfillment, rippling out to their communities to build a healthier, more equitable society.

FRONTIER**SET**