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Middle Leaders in the Design and Development of Guided Pathways

Leading from the Middle 2018

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Introduction

The Research and Planning Group for California Community Colleges (RP Group) launched Leading from the Middle (LFM) in 2013 to support the development of middle leaders across the California Community Colleges. The term middle leader has typically been used to describe middle managers in business or principals and district leaders in K-12 schools. Community colleges have also used the term to designate positions, such as dean, that have formal leadership responsibilities, but are not part of executive leadership. Yet over the last decade, a more inclusive definition of middle leadership has emerged. Faculty, administrators, and classified professionals across all levels of the institution have taken on leadership responsibilities and acted to make their colleges more effective and more equitable.

LFM believes that these middle leaders are well positioned to make changes that advance student success at their colleges. Over the last six years, LFM has advocated for and supported the development of middle leaders. Such support has become even more important as California community colleges face major transformational changes.

The California Community College system has called for and supported the development of Guided Pathways in all 115 colleges across the state. At the heart of Guided Pathways is a vision of creating a coherent educational experience for students. This magnitude of change requires rethinking campus policies, procedures, and practices, and at the same time, incorporating good work that is in place. As colleges reimagine the student experience, middle leaders are critical agents in the process.

The Guided Pathways approach is not prescriptive; rather it is a framework that colleges adapt to fit their student populations, their local and regional economy, and their institutional history. In turn, there will be variation in implementation across colleges. The institutional transformation required for Guided Pathways adoption calls for leadership from the executive level and the middle. Middle leaders are positioned to build an infrastructure that stretches to all corners of the campus. LFM 2018 focused on development of Guided Pathways and the roles that middle leaders can play in institutional change.

LFM has recently grown and expanded to meet the needs of this current context. In 2017, LFM received funding from the California Community College Chancellor's Office (CCCCO). This subsidized college participation by decreasing cost per individual team member. As a result of increased financial support, LFM held two Academies in 2018. One academy served 13 Central Valley colleges to build on regional connections, including the Central Valley Higher Education Consortium. Fifteen colleges from across the state participated in the second academy (see Appendix for participating colleges). Together the two academies served 140 educators.

Readers' Guide

Every year LFM produces an internal evaluation report presenting what participants learned from their experiences; academy leaders incorporate that feedback into ongoing program development. This year's report focuses on the roles middle leaders can play in the early stages of design and development of Guided Pathways. The report begins with LFM's purpose, design, and outcomes, and describes recent programmatic changes. The body of the report then presents observations about middle leaders in the development of Guided Pathways in the following categories:

- The connection between LFM teams and college Guided Pathays leadership teams
- Application of LFM strategies and tools to development of Guided Pathways
- College progress in Guided Pathways
- Anticipated challenges and opportunities for the coming year

Subsequent sections continue exploration of how middle leaders develop their leadership identity, particularly in the context of Guided Pathways, and further describe the embedded coaching component of the LFM program design. Because coaching has been central to LFM's expansion, the final section covers participant descriptions of their coaches, along with the observations by coaches themselves about their own experiences. The conclusion looks to opportunities for continued growth in the coming year.

Participant stories and quotes—drawn from surveys of participants of both the Central Valley and statewide academies—are woven in to provide practical insight into the emerging roles of middle leaders in Guided Pathways adoption. In several of the topics below, multiple quotes have been included, even when they overlap to some extent, not only to illustrate that these examples are not isolated observations, but to add descriptions of the early stages of Guided Pathways development for the field.

Because many California community colleges are attempting transformational change through Guided Pathways, colleges across the state and programs that support them may find these observations relevant.

LFM Outcomes

LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT:

1. Develop leadership identity
2. Develop strategies to sustain and support leadership development

TEAM COLLABORATION AND LEADERSHIP:

3. Create and sustain professional relationships in which peers share ideas and strategize together

LEADERSHIP IN THE CONTEXT OF A COLLEGE INITIATIVE:

4. Engage with existing literature
5. Apply research and evidence to make informed decisions that advance institutional change efforts
6. Strengthen capacity to prioritize and lead departmental, institutional, and other changes through the process of evidence-based inquiry

LFM Program Design

The LFM Academy design reflects current literature on effective professional development: LFM is experiential, is undertaken collaboratively with colleagues, and is directly related to practice. The LFM Academy invites colleges to send cross-functional teams of five educators including administrators, faculty, and classified staff.

The LFM Academy has two interconnected components:

- Three face-to-face convenings over a calendar year (February, June, and October)
- Coaching by a former LFM participant during and between convenings

For the first five years, LFM had three components: face-to-face convenings, webinars and other online activities between convenings, and coaching. Feedback on the convenings consistently showed that participants valued the activities and time together. Although LFM intended the webinars and asynchronous online activities to be a way for participants to stay connected between convenings, these activities were not found to be effective, despite trying and evaluating different online approaches.

As a result, LFM expanded the coaching component, which now provides support during and between convenings. In 2017, CCCCO funding increased staff time to develop and support coaches. LFM invites former participants for further training to serve as coaches. During convenings coaches join their assigned college teams, facilitating conversations, asking questions, and supporting planning activities. Between convenings coaches stay in touch with their college teams through calls, email, and visits. This embedded coaching role is designed to strengthen the experience for participants and offers coaches an opportunity for ongoing leadership development.

The LFM curriculum covers planning and communication tools, the change process, and challenges of leadership. The core curricular contents align with the LFM outcomes (see sidebar, *LFM Outcomes,* p. 4). The curriculum is presented through hands-on, project-based pedagogy. In prior years, college teams came to their academy experience with a proposed campus project. Planning and implementing the project gave each campus team the opportunity to apply the LFM strategies and tools at their college. Each year activities are adapted to address current conditions. In 2018, the exercises and examples focused on design and development of Guided Pathways

In addition, LFM provides a setting where participants interact with peers from other colleges across the state, providing an extended professional network and a broader context to understand their work.

LFM Academy 2018: The Role of Middle Leaders in the Design and Development of Guided Pathways

To be prepared for the transformational change requirements of Guided Pathways, middle leaders need a broad array of tools, skills, strategies, and perspectives. The topics below highlight the ways the college teams attending LFM are part of their campus Guided Pathways teams, the ways they are directly using LFM tools in institutional redesign, and reflections on the progress their college is making with Guided Pathways development. Finally, they look to the future to anticipate challenges and opportunities for the coming year.

Although there was a common focus on Guided Pathways, LFM teams entered the 2018 Academy with varying levels of understanding about the connection between LFM participation and the Guided Pathways work at their college. Along with a common focus, there was some shared confusion. At the first convening, some participants noted that they were not clear how the LFM Academy related to other Guided Pathways workshops that they or colleagues had attended. Some participants quietly reported that they had been "volun-told" to come and they were not sure why they were there. LFM facilitators clarified that the academy experience offered participants an opportunity to develop leadership skills that they could apply in the context of institutional change, specifically to Guided Pathways, as well as to other aspects of their work.

Connections between LFM Teams and Campus Guided Pathways Leadership

As the year progressed, participant responses from surveys administered at the second and third convenings described a direct connection between the LFM team experience and the broader college Guided Pathways planning and design effort. Because many of the LFM teams were part of the broader Guided Pathways leadership team at their college, they were able to see the relevance of and bring LFM activities directly to their campus planning process. Numerous LFM team members described both structural and strategic connections, including the cross-functional team design, saying the following:

> Our team has been crucial to the development of Guided Pathways on our campus because every LFM member is also a member of our GP Steering Committee. In many ways the work we do at LFM informs the work we do on Guided Pathways.

> *We were instrumental in starting the current workgroup on campus, and the time away for LFM has provided us with invaluable time to further the work of the group.*

The LFM team is the Guided Pathways Design Team; all LFM team members are on the Guided Pathways Steering Committee. Several LFM team members are serving as workgroup leads.

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Our LFM team included all of the key players for our GP group. We had the three GP coordinators, Dean of GP, Academic Senate president, and Lead Researcher. We have been able to strategize and map out how we are going to progress once we get back to our home campus.

Application of LFM Strategies and Tools to Guided Pathways Design and Development

The sense of urgency and immediacy about Guided Pathways meant that participants could see potential applications of LFM tools, activities, and strategies. An activity conducted during the first convening gave each team the opportunity to articulate and commit to the expectations of team participation. Participants directly translated this norm-setting process to their campus Guided Pathways planning committees, stating:

> *We shared the "developing norms" tool with our guided pathways inquiry teams over the summer, and plan to bring the consultancy protocol and listening activity to our guided pathways steering committee in November.*

> *We used the norming exercise at our first steering committee meeting. It was a good exercise for the committee to engage in as they are getting to know each other. We used a session on how to facilitate meetings so that people on the steering committee can have skills to help lead meetings.*

Participants also indicated that planning tools, particularly the logic model, were instrumental in creating campus wide plans, explaining:

> *Our team used the logic model and concept map we developed during the first convening to share information with campus colleagues. These were very helpful in allowing people to understand the big picture of GP and shaping the structure of the year 1 work plan.*

> *The logic model was the foundation of our GP plan. We used logic models again at a retreat to begin the work of the design teams.*

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The LFM team leads the core planning of the GP activities on campus. We had our first committee planning retreat where we had each work group produce a logic model for their inquiry projects.

As part of communication and campus outreach, some college teams reported that they applied the LFM participatory pedagogy to organize FLEX day activities, described as follows:

Three members of our LFM team are GP facilitators on our campus so we are front and center in the development of GP at our college. We have used several LFM strategies and ideas in development of GP. For example, we have used card sorts to begin exploring meta-majors, we have conducted outreach presentations to all of the departments at our campus, we have used communication strategies to deal with resisters/supporters, and created an ambassador program, an idea that grew out of an LFM session. The activities that we have done at LFM have forced us to rethink our processes and have taught us the importance of building alliances throughout this process.

We used the "discuss among small groups and then 'share'/'report out' structure" of LFM for our flex day activities. We posed a series of questions about our recent students, and tables of faculty and staff participants were given approximately 1-1/2 minutes to discuss and identify the range of the answer (e.g., 0-10%, 11-20% ...) and hold up a color-coded card with the answer. Following each set of questions, we posted the actual answers and gave them several minutes to discuss the results (what surprised them, etc.). A few tables then shared/summarized their discussions. We did the activity for 3 questions at a time…in the areas of student population, enrollment patterns, and goal attainment.

Participants recognized that focused communication with stakeholders was a vital component of building the network of engagement across the campus. They reported that hands-on experiences at LFM provided a framework to plan their local efforts. Participants shared examples that illustrate the ways that LFM tools became resources for their campus-wide communication, including:

The first LFM retreat was instrumental in development of our work plan – and the tools (especially the logic model) really helped that to come together. Thinking about communications and deliberately engaging different stakeholders was also helpful…we use logic models and other planning tools as part of our work generally. But our logic model for the initial work plan was very helpful in communicating with wider audiences – Academic Senate and the college planning council.

We have used a lot of the philosophical conversations from LFM to inform our work (e.g., engaging with resistance). We used logic models during our GP committee retreat, and used products from the first retreat to share our intentions for the work plan …

Our work at the first LFM meeting heavily informed the work plan, which was essentially put together by our team. We also became the initial "face" of GP, so people would come to us with questions. We have used a lot of the philosophical conversations from LFM to inform our work (e.g., engaging with resistance). We used logic models during our GP committee retreat, and used all three products from the first retreat to share our intentions for the work plan with the rest of the campus.

Educators who have been part of any campus change initiative have encountered an array of obstacles, negative responses, and resistance in one form or another. The LFM activity on engaging resistance surfaces the underlying motivations for negative responses and explores ways to meet them with understanding and empathy. The possibility of engaging resistance—rather than opposing it head on—offered participants a way to anticipate and feel prepared for the experience. Participants noted:

We've also been able to strategize about how to handle resistors and saboteurs, and the tools from LFM have been helpful for that. We've used some of the communication and listening tools, and they've been very helpful.

We have practiced the communication strategies in dealing with resisters, we have shared the timeline that we created in LFM and we used the idea of making GP the theme of Opening Day (including a student video, plenary speakers who spoke about equity, and breakout sessions all dedicated to GP).

College Progress on Guided Pathways

Although the LFM Academy had a common focus on Guided Pathways, colleges were in different places in the design process when they started the year. A few colleges were part of the national American Association of Community Colleges Pathways Project or the California Guided Pathways Project and were further along in the process. Most other colleges were in early stages of inquiry. This variance provided an opportunity for college teams to learn from each other. Those taking first steps reported appreciation for the opportunity to hear from schools that were already in the process. At the end of the year, each college reported making progress from wherever they had entered.

Colleges in the early stages of adoption reported using LFM to create plans to inform and engage colleagues, sharing:

We used our LFM group to plan the college-wide publicity, develop trainings, and oversee the work for writing the college's meta-majors, including the 30 recommended units. There was a lot more involved in this, and LFM helped us concentrate on all of the not-so-little details. We actually accomplished this goal and had moved on to doing this with program mapping by session 3!

Our larger GPDT has divided itself into six workgroups, aligned with the five-year work plan. Our LFM team has brought back information and tools to help these groups move

forward. As a result of LFM, we decided to table the discussion of meta-majors and instead start with program mapping.

Our LFM team worked well together at the convenings to help bridge the gap on campus with our work on Guided Pathways. Because of LFM, our team helped the college to structure the work after our LFM team structure alongside each Guided Pathways pillar. Yes, we helped to shape the structure of the work at our college. Our college decided to use the LFM team members as a model for how to structure the other teams to work on Guided Pathways along the pillars. So each GP Pillar now has an admin from instruction and student services, a faculty from instruction and student services, a student and a classified staff. We have four teams to represent each pillar.

The handful of colleges where Guided Pathways was already in progress before this year used the time and setting to go deeper into details and continue advancing their work, stating:

As GP was already fairly well-established at our college, our function was more to develop and drive ideas for professional development activities within the GP process. We used some of the tools presented to develop our ideas, such as logic models, but to be honest, I think most of our progress came from the opportunity to spend time together, to get to know one another, and to develop a working partnership.

We created an engagement plan for the college that included asynchronous online and face-to-face college-wide meetings we call Paving the Path Sessions. We used these to do our sorting activities, find commonalities to present the common areas as basic meta-majors (Schools), and then vetted and named them. We used session 2 to develop a template for a first and second flexible 15 units for each School, and to develop a two-day training and writing session. We then finished all nine Schools over the summer. Our coach came to the presentation of the finished product at our School's in-service day in August. Session 3 was used to plan our rollout for program mapping training, and to develop the project and name personnel for our LFM 2 team.

At [our college], we have met some major milestones in our Guided Pathways work, however, we are currently trying to drill down and accomplish more fine-tuning. Our [LFM] team project was creating a Strategic Plan for Professional Development aligned with Guided Pathways. We have done that, and now there is momentum in bringing this plan through our shared governance processes and using it to apply for a CCC Innovation grant.

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Anticipated Challenges and Opportunities in the Coming Year

LFM does not explicitly define strategic thinking. However, through hands-on activities and discussions with colleagues from other colleges, participants gain a broader view of how Guided Pathways is developing across the state. This gives participants the capacity to see their own work in a broader perspective, which in turn helps them identify upcoming challenges. Anticipating challenges gives teams the opportunity to address them strategically. When LFM participants were asked in the final survey to identify challenges and opportunities for the coming year, common concerns emerged.

One common challenge centered on broadening engagement on campus. Participants had taken to heart the message that Guided Pathways would require active participation across the campus community. Participants anticipated pushback from various stakeholders; in particular, faculty engagement was frequently named as a challenge, as several participants noted:

We will need to recruit more individuals to leadership. We will have some challenges with faculty who believe we might be diluting our rigor.

Challenge of getting faculty outside of the GP work groups to agree to assist and support the efforts.

Working with the faculty union will be a challenge.

The challenges will probably lie more so with older faculty who claim scrutiny but in reality, are more about resistance to any change.

Challenges include changing the teaching culture to be more inclusive of our strategic/equity goals.

Participants also identified implementation issues as potential challenges; three participants, for example, highlighted the transition from discussion to action as a challenge that also embodied opportunity, stating:

The biggest challenge is, of course, moving from inquiry to implementation phases. We've done a great deal of work on recruitment and getting campus "buy-in," so it's time to begin implementation starting with some of the infrastructure we already have in place.

We are focusing on planning and inquiry, so I anticipate challenges when we move into

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implementation. We have good engagement and it feels like there is real opportunity for positive change, but there are also factors beyond our control that could be barriers (e.g., technology issues which are controlled at the district).

We are in inquiry. Creating an implementation plan and implementing will be huge challenges. I am hopeful, though, that this year brings us together as a campus and trust will have been built as a foundation for the more difficult work ahead.

Participants additionally named concerns about all the stages of meta-major creation, from mapping to implementation, as illustrated in the quotes below:

Finishing mapping. Getting clustering approved by the Academic Senate.

Mapping projects and IT ability to implement technology.

Meta majors may not happen.

Challenge = meta-major (or whatever we will call it) mapping. Course sequencing.

I see a challenge in implementing Meta Majors.

Picking up LFM language from the momentum mapping activity, where teams mapped highs and lows of the project to date and projected into the future, several participants framed their perceived challenges in terms of maintaining forward motion:

There will be momentum dip. However, we are anticipating it and planning activities (e.g, retreats) to ensure we get a momentum bump.

In terms of challenges, I think the main one will be maintaining momentum. Now that we no longer have these retreats around which to schedule deadlines, how do we make sure we remain active in terms of our team project?

Keeping up the momentum and getting tasks completed. Concerned that some of our people will burn out because they are taking on so much in many different areas across campus.

Another issue participants highlighted focused on the changes in funding to support student success. In the last decade, a series of reforms—including the Basic Skills Initiative, Student Success and Support Program, and Student Equity Plans—have each come with their own acronym and funding stream, and colleges created programs and positions to implement the initiatives. In a move to recognize that these initiatives have similar overall purposes and often serve similar student populations, the CCCCO combined these separate allocations into a single source as Student Equity and Achievement (SEA). Some participants anticipated that this change in funding may be a challenge at their college, noting:

A challenge I anticipate is deciding how SEA funds will be used to support Guided Pathways work. People involved in equity need to be in those conversations, and we need to ensure that equity is aligned with Guided Pathways.

In my opinion, budget is the biggest challenge. The opportunity is that since we have identified this as a challenge, we can find enablers that will help us to start the conversations about sustainability of the work and building the staff/faculty resources to continue in this GP model.

As we develop new structures and processes, we will need to clearly communicate how these changes are going to be funded. The SEA funds are specifically for that, but there are some on our campus who are NOT going to like that.

Participants also shared concerns about governance issues and the absence of clear and consistent college leadership—explaining:

The transition of leadership within the college.

Determining the governance structure and getting that approved may be the largest challenge in the near future. We have opportunity to continue work on the workgroups outside of the governance structure.

Lack of vision and leadership. Initiative fatigue. A desire from members of the administration to confound the guided pathways work with things like accreditation, outcomes assessment, program review, etc.

[Challenges?] Lack of vision and leadership. Initiative fatigue. A desire from members of the administration to confound the guided pathways work with things like accreditation, outcomes assessment, program review, etc.

Executive/district leadership disengagement, cross-campus planning within the district, burnout across the college.

We have a challenge in that the administration needs to come on fully and not just treat this as another thing to do with budget ramifications.

While less frequent, other local issues expressed by participants—including developing a sufficient IT infrastructure, accessing data, and the need to cross silos—are worth noting. Examples include:

Mostly IT issues, but maybe some regular conflict among people who support GP but have different ideas about implementation.

Accessing data has been a challenge; however, it will be important to work with members to really target and determine the expected utilization of information.

We are slow on the move and things are happening in silos.

We have program mapping as an issue, but I think integrating the work done in Instruction and in Student Services will be our biggest challenge. We designed our LFM 2 project to be focused on onboarding to get a new team cooperating that spans Instruction and Student Services.

I think the biggest challenge is going to be helping the campus community coalesce around a unified vision of how to implement Guided Pathways.

Along with challenges, participants identified opportunities they foresee in the coming year. Examples included collaborating, crossing, and building on existing work:

Put our heads down and get the work done. Join forces (for the first time) between student services and instruction.

Opportunities are with working with the rest of our campus and moving the work groups forward.

We are working to combine our ATD, SSSP, Equity, and GP so that we are not all duplicating efforts.

Further examples of building on and expanding work in progress included:

Leverage the momentum of an enthusiastic committee and strong committee leadership, use inquiry year to gather support and improve culture.

Opportunities to build off of the great work that is already being done and look at areas where we can do better to improve equity gaps across programs…I think there is great opportunity in that we are moving forward with our maps and implementing new on-boarding processes.

Opportunities to build off of the great work that is already being done and look at areas where we can do better to improve equity gaps across programs…I think there is great opportunity in that we are moving forward with our maps and implementing new on-boarding processes.

Middle Leadership Identity in Guided Pathways

From the onset of LFM, program initiators understood that developing identity as a leader was a critical outcome of academy participation and consistently listed it as a first outcome for the experience. Over time, observations and evaluations have shown that rather than development of leadership identity happening first and serving as a source of action, one's sense of leadership grows out of action and experience. As middle leaders gain knowledge and apply skills and strategies, their identity and confidence as a leader grows.

This evolution of leadership identity over time has been particularly salient for participants who enter LFM hesitant or reluctant to describe themselves as leaders. Many of these novice or emerging leaders surprise themselves by stepping up to the challenges and satisfactions of leadership. In the LFM 2018 cohort, understanding this evolution of identity was relevant to a number of participants who initially said they were "volun-told" to attend. The many aspects of Guided Pathways design—planning, communication, engaging colleagues, using relevant data, working collaboratively in teams, and adapting the Guided Pathways framework to the local

culture—provided opportunities for participants to apply the skills they have learned and develop a sense of leadership identity.

Individual Leadership

The reflective comments about leadership identity at the end of the 2018 Academies were similar to comments from prior years when participants described their growth in skills, confidence, and leadership identity. Because teams came with clear intentions about developing Guided Pathway at their colleges, participants had direct opportunities to apply the leadership skills individually and as a team; this in turn gave them experiences that supported leadership identity.

When asked what they had learned both about leadership and about themselves as leaders, a few participants articulated their awareness:

> *Before, I didn't really view myself as a leader because I'm new to full-time faculty. But now I see that I am, by default, in a leadership role and I just need to make my voice heard. I learned about how values relate to building coalitions.*

Before, I didn't really view myself as a leader because I'm new to full time faculty. But now I see that I am, by default, in a leadership role and I just need to make my voice heard.

> *My involvement in LFM made me see how I have come a long way not just in my eleven years as a full-time instructor but even in just the past five years. During the third session in particular, it was good to talk with people from other colleges to see how their frustrations don't differ much from what I have with colleagues at my campus. It is clear that leadership is a trait that can be possessed by virtually anyone yet is taken up by very few.*

> *I have learned that I need to get more involved in leadership on my campus. As I have done this I have received really very positive feedback for the leadership roles I have taken on and I have a lot of support in my growth as a leader.*

As noted above, LFM teams are part of their broader college Guided Pathways leadership teams. In Guided Pathways, middle leaders are essential in building the infrastructure for college-wide networks of communication, innovation, and support. One leader reflected on how the LFM experience gave encouragement to actively take on a leadership role in Guided Pathways:

> *I think the biggest takeaway for me in regards to leadership is that leadership takes on many different forms and that it doesn't necessarily come from the top. Leaders can step forward and step back allowing others to take on leadership. It was through LFM that I even considered stepping up and applying as one of our GP faculty leads. It was also through our LFM team that I received encouragement to even apply for the position.*

Another participant described the breadth of opportunities to apply leadership skills in the

department, and in campus functions such as program review, sharing:

> *I have used the leadership and group-work skills to design better program review and lead within my discipline as well. LFM has empowered me to become a leader within my own department as well as in the college at large and made me very interested in the structure and personalities of the institution and how I can help my students outside the classroom using policy*.

Collective Leadership

In former reports, LFM described the many ways that middle leadership is inherently collaborative and collective. Middle leaders need colleagues and coalitions to address issues that are larger then than their individual domains, departments, or offices, particularly in the context of Guided Pathways development, which calls for a more integrated and coherent approach to the student experience. One participant noted:

> *For me, I have used my sense developed at LFM of the need for communal decision-making processes. I am still new in my career and so don't have much of an institutional voice at the moment, but in anticipation of becoming more of a leader, I think I've learned the power and, more significantly, the importance of bringing people together and making decisions in an environment in which multiple stakeholders are consulted and considered.*

The LFM team provides a setting where educators develop relationships, in their team and beyond, and practice learning to work collaboratively. This can provide models for broader collaboration. One participant described the arc of their team's development:

> *Our team struggled at first from a real lack of vision. We had so many different ideas as to what we wanted to do, and no real process yet for how to choose our actual focus, that we staggered around for the first few months, bringing up ideas and just as quickly dropping them for the next shiny opportunity. We really came together, I believe, when we started to accept each others' roles. When we were able to be honest about each other's strengths and weaknesses as individual team members, we were able to communicate far more effectively and coalesce around a specific plan. Figuring out individual roles was the key step for us in working as a team.*

LFM provides participants the opportunity to not only to build relationships and forge coalitions with colleagues at their college, but also to develop a collaborative network with individuals on other campuses. LFM 2018 participants, as with prior participants, expressed appreciation for these connections, the perspective they offer, and the reassurance that they are not alone in the

> LFM motivated me to be a bigger player in Guided Pathways design on our campus. It also helped me see that there are many other people doing the same work across the state, and gave me the confidence to consult with those people when necessary.

difficult work of middle leadership, particularly in the context of Guided Pathways reform. Given that challenges and resources are common across colleges, participants noted the value of the extended network they established through LFM involvement. As two participants described:

> *I was able to connect with people from other colleges and encounter some worthwhile texts. It also helped me to see that other individuals at other colleges experience frustration as well.*

> *LFM motivated me to be a bigger player in Guided Pathways design on our campus. It also helped me see that there are many other people doing the same work across the state, and gave me the confidence to consult with those people when necessary.*

Perspectives on LFM Coaching

The embedded coaching role has supported program expansion in the last two years. Coaching co-leads have created a curriculum and organized a face-to-face orientation that continues as a virtual community of practice to give coaches an opportunity to share and address common issues. In 2018, participants and coaches offered reflections that underscore the value of this approach. The focus on Guided Pathways gave coaches the opportunity to share their own campus experiences as well as to see the ways the flexible framework could be developed for another college.

Participants' Perspectives

Participants' responses indicate that the teams valued the support, relationships, and encouragement that coaches give them individually and as a team. Coaches offered observations, feedback, questions, and resources and they brought a perspective that is outside of the team and college.

Talking about communication and interaction, participants said that their coach's ability to listen and give feedback was a great asset; two participants described their appreciation:

> *[Coach's] listening skills are amazing and her feedback is even greater.*

> *[We] regularly channel her – to remind us that we don't need to do all of the work and that we should consider how we might apply the tools and strategies that we have learned at the LFM convenings.*

[We] regularly channel [our coach] – to remind us that we don't need to do all of the work and that we should consider how we might apply the tools and strategies that we have learned at the LFM convenings.

Participants also noted that a coach's own positive outlook and enthusiasm could help maintain a team's energy.

Participants described coaches responding to whatever need was presented, offering resources, contacts, and possible strategies. Participants shared multiple examples, including:

> *Two things that [Coach] did really well were reframing and encouraging. In terms of reframing, particularly early on, [Coach] did an excellent job of listening to our various ideas and reframing them to point out our commonalities and our potential points of progress. This really helped shape our discussions in a positive way. [Coach] was also in general incredibly positive. It helps to engage in this kind of work if one has a cheerleader, someone who is supportive and on your side.*

> *Generally, [Coach's] background as a researcher has been helpful and his enthusiasm has fueled our motivation.*

> *[Coach] is very supportive. She encourages our efforts while providing resources or making connections with other teams when necessary.*

> *She put us in touch with a person who leads a facilitator training. She has provided us with feedback that summarized all that we had accomplished (which we sometimes overlook or forget about as we move forward...always good to get acknowledgement that we have had accomplishments).*

> *Our coach often had ideas for other strategies we could try and was really good at probing us and really understanding the full situation.*

Participants appreciated that their coaches kept their teams focused and on track. Two participants observed:

> *Our coach was amazing! He kept us on track and helped us to focus and think through our problems critically. He was challenging us but very supportive. I really enjoyed the time we got to work with him.*

> *[Coach] has a very effective way of bringing us to task. She is guiding and coaching without being too directive. She was perfect for our team.*

Participants also described how their coach's outside perspective offered different insights into their situation. Several participants noted:

> *[Coach's] presence was great! When she attended our leadership meetings she could offer input as an "objective observer" which I think was really helpful.*

> *Just being an outside person and seeing things from a different perspective and asking the group good questions.*

> *Having the outside perspective to bounce things off was really helpful and kept us from getting stuck too long on any one issue.*

As part of the expanded role to maintain connection between convenings, coaches visited teams at their college. Teams used this time in different ways. Sometimes the coach stepped in as a facilitator, other times the coach became an appreciative audience. Participants described their coaches' visits, sharing:

> *Our coach joined us as part of our presentation of our professional development plan to our executive council. [Coach] played a key role in that presentation, helping to address concerns and answer questions.*
>
> *[Coach] attended one of our Design Team meetings and was helpful in talking through our Flex Day plans.*
>
> *It was wonderful to have [Coach] visit! She got to see what was happening on our campus and the great work we had been doing.*
>
> *It was amazing! It wasn't because [Coach] did much coaching at the time. It was because we bit off more than we thought we could chew, and she got to be there when we presented a finished product to a very receptive college.*

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Coaches' Perspectives

Although coaches had previously participated in LFM, they reported that being a coach was a different experience from being part of a team. Coaches described the ways they applied their skills and shaped their coaching style in response to their team's needs, including:

> *First, I expected as a coach that I would be directive. But the team wanted support, not direction. I listened, and got to know them. As I developed into the role, I found ways to interject occasionally.*
>
> *As coach, my job is to affirm their abilities and tell them, "You guys are leaders."*
>
> *At first I scaffolded moves for them, then they were on their own. It felt good being part of their growth.*

Coaches also shared what they gained from the experience, learning about the team, about the change process, and about themselves. In fact, several coaches relayed that they felt they gained more than they offered others. Three coaches described their personal growth, stating:

> *I gained a lot, I found out a lot about how I react in life and in my job. My instincts around education are good. This was a chance to marry action and curriculum, to be in the situation and rely on curriculum and inquiry.*

I came with a jaded view as an administrator. The team was so positive, so energetic. They reminded me of me in the day.

[I] wondered at first, what do I have to offer? I asked a lot of questions and started to facilitate conversations. I learned more from them.

Coaches identified shared humor and laughter as essential ingredients and indicators of team development:

It felt like it reinforced my core values of compassion and empathy. Listening, watching, collaborative effort, and affirming individuals…. It comes with trust. There are no short cuts, you get to share time/ food/giggles.

I went in as a learner and learned hands-on. They shaped me [as a coach].

I went in as a learner and learned hands-on. They shaped me [as a coach]. Coaching is listening. By the second convening, they were really working, using tools and laughing. They loosened up.

Conclusion

This internal evaluation report is based on responses from participants from the 28 colleges that participated in the two LFM 2018 academies. The report provides insights into both the development of middle leaders and the possible roles of middle leaders in the design of Guided Pathways.

Developing Guided Pathways requires leadership at all levels of the college, spanning executive and middle leadership. The responses in this report illustrate multiple ways that middle leaders are central to the Guided Pathways design process. Almost all of the LFM teams were part of their college-wide design teams and were able to share planning tools and strategies. In addition, several LFM participants took on roles such as faculty Guided Pathways coordinator or design team lead.

From the first convening, participants could see the usefulness of the LFM planning and communication tools presented to their Guided Pathways design work, including the norming process, logic models, and the participatory pedagogy. The hands-on activities gave college team members a chance to practice, prepare, and plan how to apply those same activities directly to their college Guided Pathways planning process.

The participating colleges came to LFM at different stages of Guided Pathways development. Although a few had started the process years earlier and were part of the national or state initiatives, most colleges were in the early stages of inquiry and design. Even colleges further along in the process reported that they found the time and curricular content useful to advancing their design effort.

The feedback from participants underscores the importance of middle leaders as change agents in the current movement towards institutional transformation and the role LFM can play in

equipping middle leadership with the knowledge, skills, confidence, and vision required for Guided Pathways reform. Looking to the experiences of colleges even a step or two ahead in the Guided Pathways process, it is becoming evident that not only will middle leaders will play essential roles in changing their institutions, they will also be vital in sustaining the change, keeping the focus on the student experience, and maintaining a sense of continued improvement and innovation.

Future Directions for LFM

The system-wide support for Guided Pathways continues to open opportunities for LFM to grow and expand. Many participating colleges are seeing the value of middle leadership development for Guided Pathways through LFM and sending teams in successive years. Judging from the LFM 2019 enrollment, several colleges are sending overlapping teams comprised of a few continuing members mixed with new team members to expand the pool of middle leaders.

LFM will attempt to balance continuity and change in content and activities. New content for LFM 2019 focuses on data coaching, which draws on a strength of the RP Group. LFM 2020 will draw on the RP Group findings from *Student Support Re(defined)* to incorporate a focus on the student experience in institutional redesign. LFM will continue to listen to team experiences to understand when new issues emerge so that they can address the skills middle leaders need to navigate and shepherd the ongoing process.

Appendix: Participating Colleges

Central Valley Academy

Bakersfield College
Cerro Coso Community College
Clovis Community College
Columbia College
Fresno City College
Madera Community College Center
Merced College
Modesto Junior College
Porterville College
Reedley College
San Joaquin Delta College
West Hills College Coalinga
West Hills College Lemoore

Statewide Academy

College of San Mateo
Crafton Hills College
Cuesta College
Cuyamaca College
East LA College
El Camino College
Irvine Valley College
Las Positas College
Los Medanos College
Mission College
Napa Valley College
Norco College
Sacramento City College
San Diego City College
West Valley College

The Research and Planning Group for California Community Colleges

The RP Group strengthens the ability of California community colleges to discover and undertake high-quality research, planning, and assessments that improve evidence-based decision-making, institutional effectiveness, and success for all students.

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