Transfer Among Rural Learners

Webinar
April 21, 2026
1:00 pm – 2:00 pm

TheRPGroup

Agenda

01 Voices from the Field
Results from Qualitative Study

02 Panel of Rural Practitioners

03 Q&A

The RP Group Team & Advisory Committee

RP Team

- Alyssa Nguyen, *Co-Lead*
- Daisy Segovia, *Co-Lead*
- Drs. Kate Mahar & Rogéair Purnell, *Qualitative Researchers*
- Dr. Katie Brohawn, *Quantitative Researcher*

Advisory Committee Members

- Dr. Dustin Acres
- Marisol Cuellar Mejia
- Julia Cunningham
- Dr. Fabio González
- Marisa Johnson
- Dr. Laura Lara-Brady
- Mike Le
- Mariana Macamay
- Dr. Siria Martinez
- Tim Morehouse
- Mayra Nunez Martinez
- Mayra Puente
- Jaclyn Randall
- Jerry Reyes
- Dr. Kevin Walthers
- Sean Whaley
- Caitlin Wheetley

01

Voice from the Field

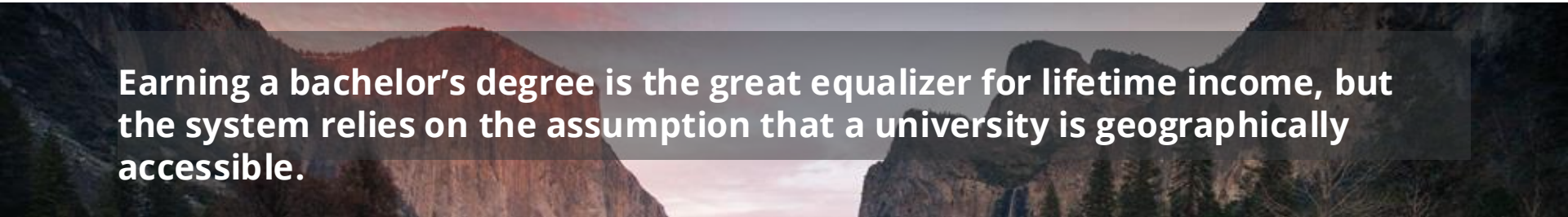
Research Problem

University degree offers a key lever for increasing income inequality

- Lifetime earnings are significantly higher
- More availability for jobs

Degree attainment is not equal across all groups or regions

- 51% of Latine students begin their journey at a community college, but only 31% of them transfer within 6 years
- Regional differences among transfer rates exist
- Positive association between the number of college options and likelihood of enrollment



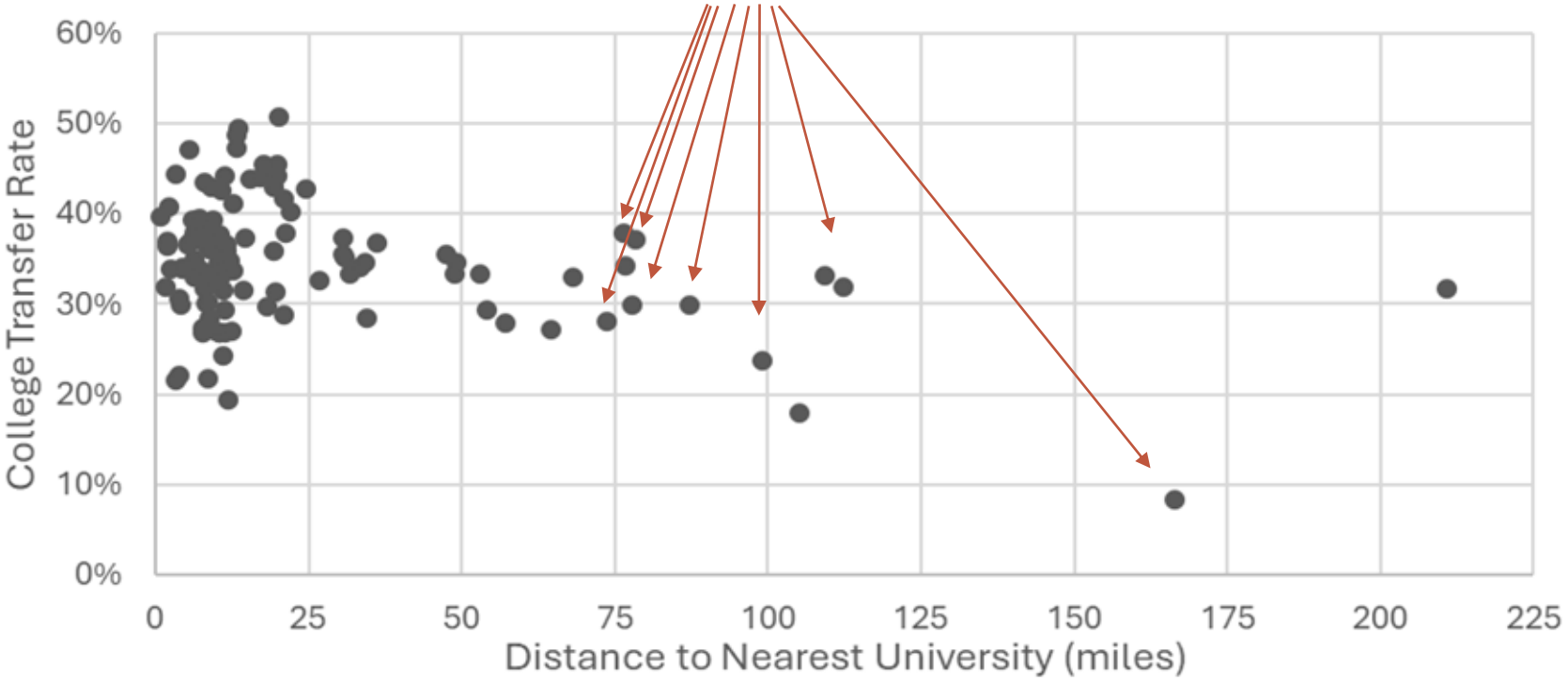
Earning a bachelor's degree is the great equalizer for lifetime income, but the system relies on the assumption that a university is geographically accessible.

California's Education System

- **32 CA Public Universities**
  - 23 California State University campuses
  - 9 University of California campuses
- **116 CA Community Colleges**
  - 115 Community Colleges with physical locations
  - 1 fully online Community College

College Transfer Rates by Distance

The majority of community colleges located the furthest away were situated in rural regions of California.



Current Project

Interviews & Focus Groups

- Interview administrators about transfer facilitation
- Focus groups with students about transfer experiences.
- *Sample:* 30 college practitioners across 15 rural colleges; 62 students across 10 rural colleges

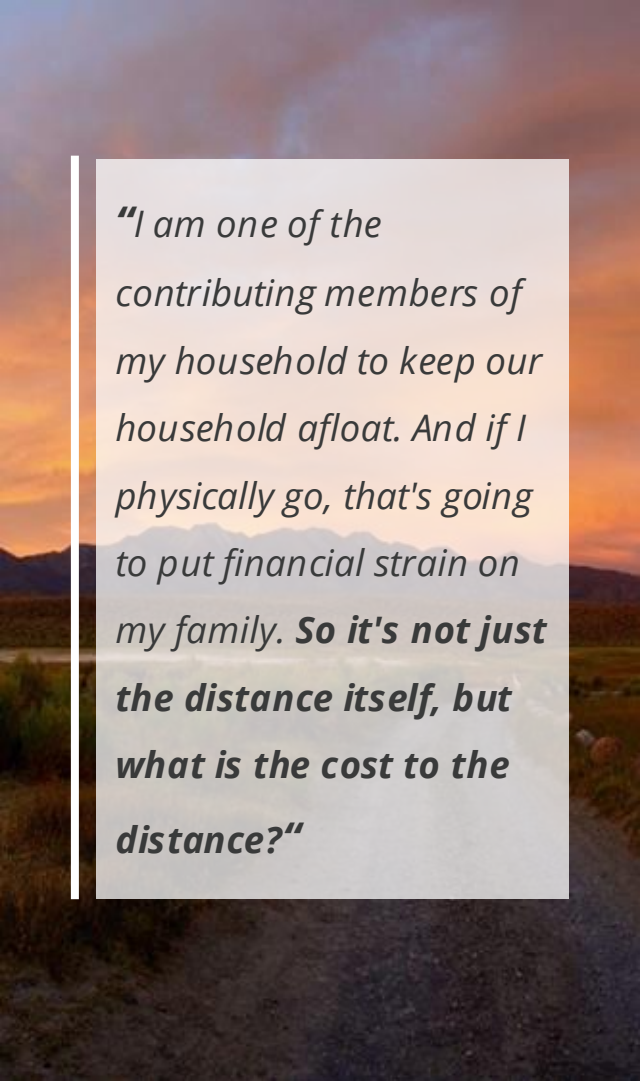
Distance Equals...

Current structures inadvertently impose a **"rural penalty"** on geographically isolated institutions

Money

Connections

*"**Distance is the key.** Everything is harder because of distance. They haven't seen the college, they don't know what to expect, they have to leave home, they have to get an apartment. **All that is distance.**"*



"I am one of the contributing members of my household to keep our household afloat. And if I physically go, that's going to put financial strain on my family. ***So it's not just the distance itself, but what is the cost to the distance?"***

The Student Penalty

- **Costs of Relocation**

  Transferring requires moving to expensive urban centers, leading to higher housing costs and the loss of local employment or family-sustaining wages.

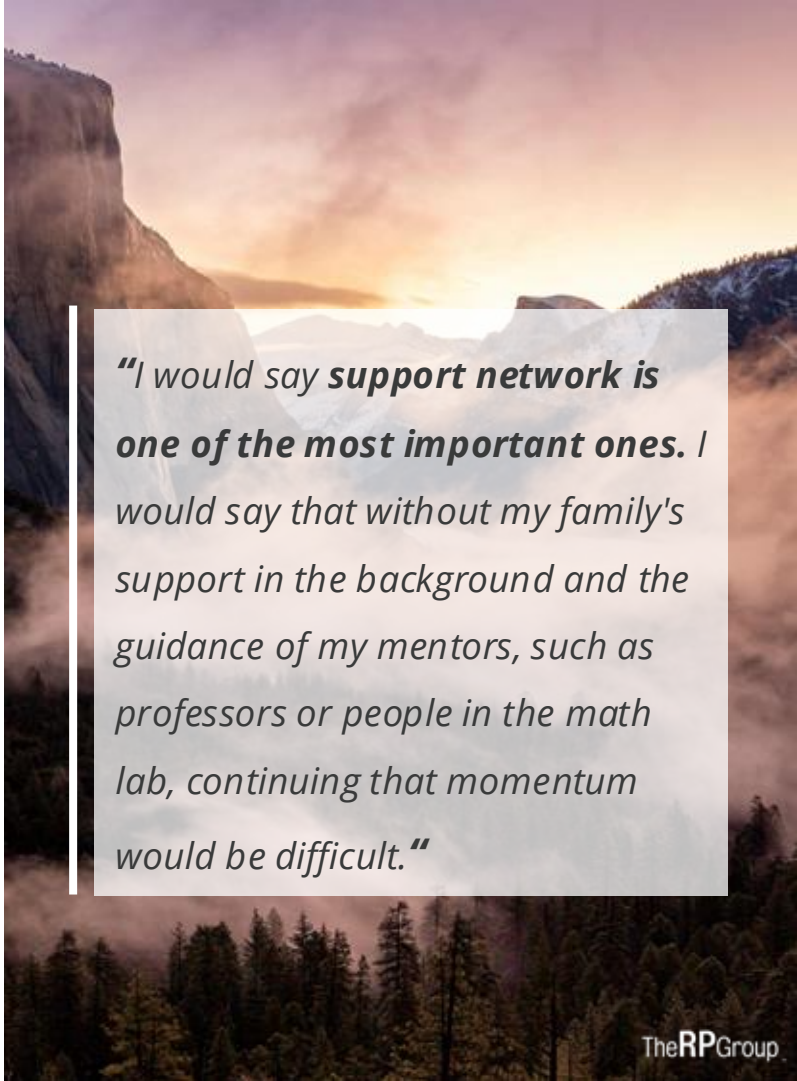
- For many students, this **"distance penalty"** is often enough to deter them from transferring to a university altogether.

- **Cost-saving measures were essential**

Social Capital is Critical

- In rural areas, **students' transfer decisions are often shaped by strong community ties** and severe transportation limitations.

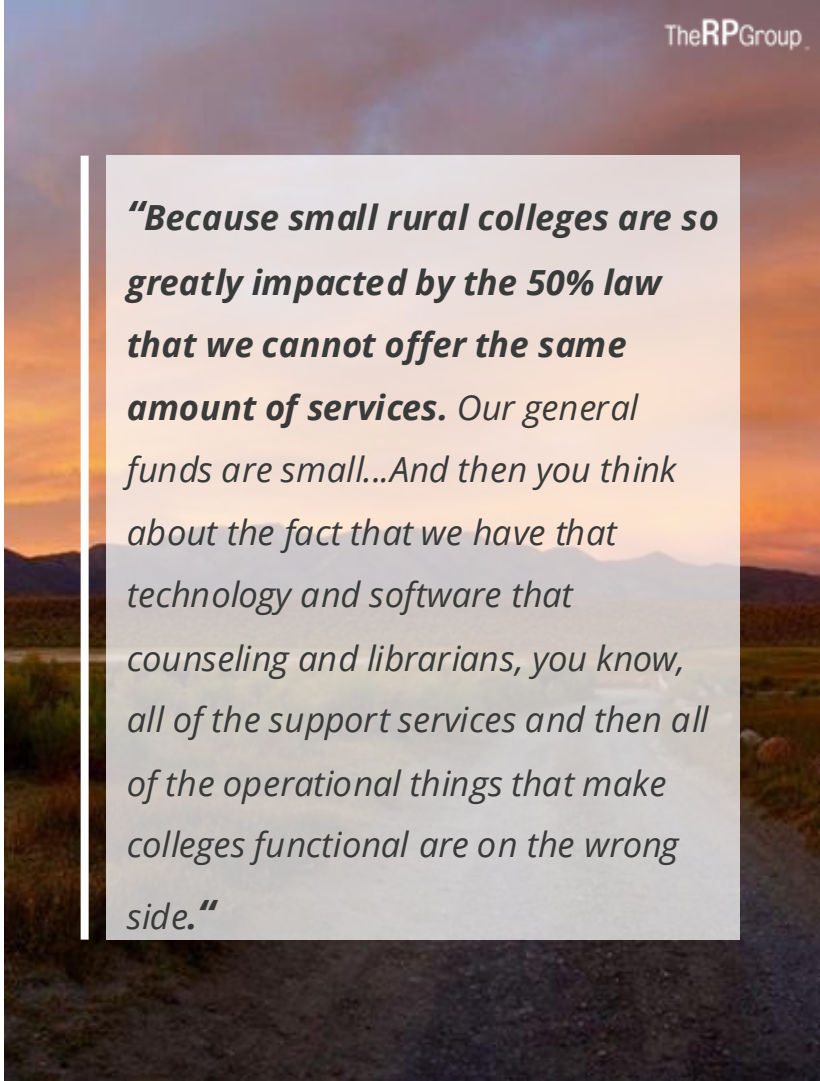
- **Social capital is the direct driver of their persistence and success.**



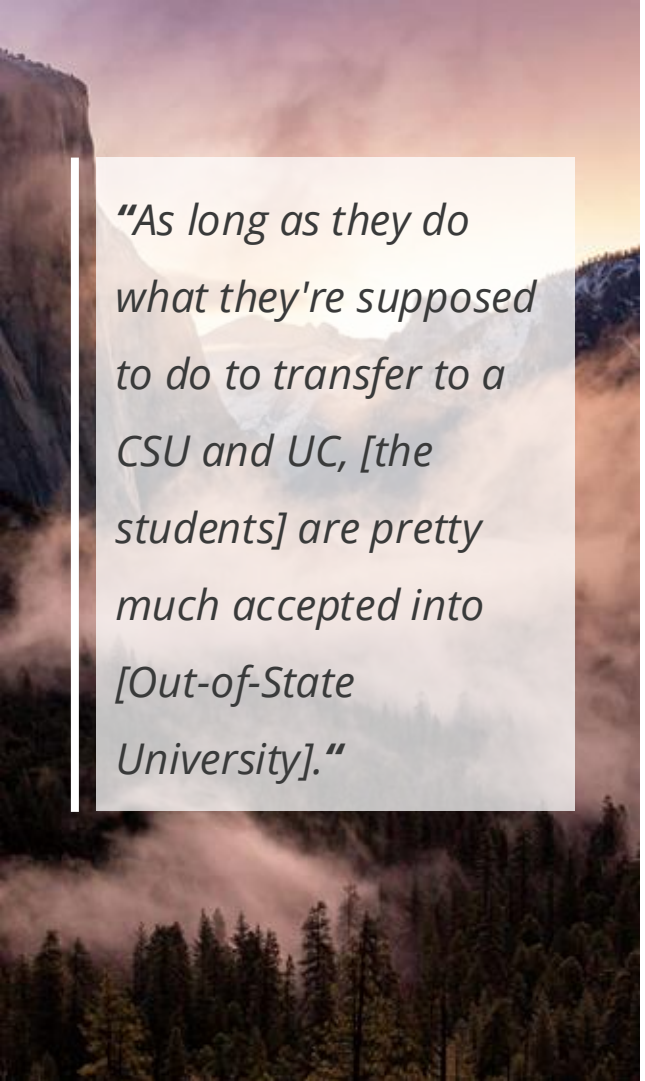
The Institutional Penalty

- **Rural colleges spend more per student to deliver comparable services** because of travel time, limited staffing, and a lack of nearby partners or wraparound service providers.

- Rural administrators must **innovate by necessity**



"Because small rural colleges are so greatly impacted by the 50% law that we cannot offer the same amount of services. *Our general funds are small…And then you think about the fact that we have that technology and software that counseling and librarians, you know, all of the support services and then all of the operational things that make colleges functional are on the wrong side."*



"As long as they do what they're supposed to do to transfer to a CSU and UC, [the students] are pretty much accepted into [Out-of-State University]."

Strategic Partnerships

- For rural colleges, **strategic partnerships act as an engine for innovation**, enabling colleges to overcome geographic isolation by deploying bold strategies that fundamentally transform access to transfer pathways.

Identifying Statewide Solutions

01 **Strengthen the Transfer and Degree-Completion Culture on Campuses**
Institutionalize the vital social and financial supports

02 **Expand Place-Based Baccalaureate Degree Options**
Focus on bringing educational opportunities to students

03 **Address the "Rural Penalty”**
Create more flexible and student-centered funding and implementation guidelines that take location into considerations

02

Panel

Panel

Davis Murphy

Dean of Student Services

Lassen College

Antonio Benitez

Director of Lake Tahoe College Promise

Lake Tahoe Community College

Reagen Dozier

Director, Student Success Programs (MESA Coordinator)

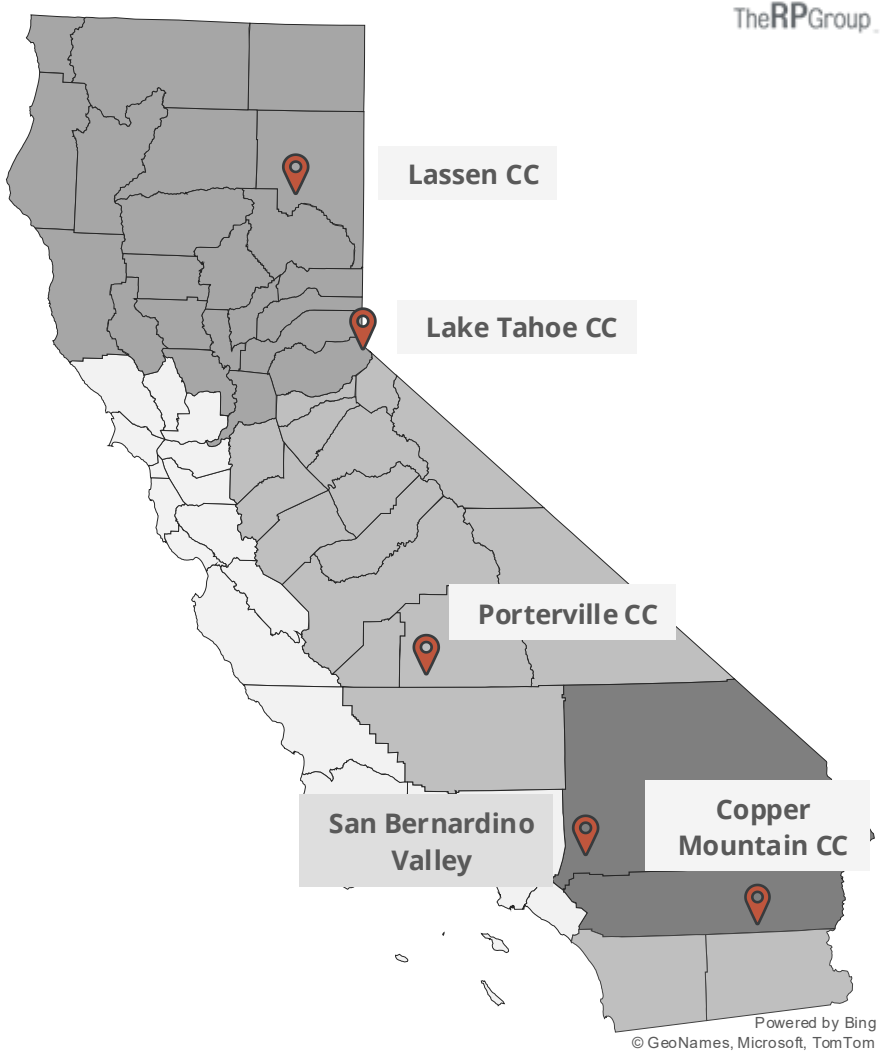
Porterville College

Haly Mattson

EOPS/CARE Counselor

San Bernardino Valley College

(formerly at Copper Mountain College)



Questions?

Thank you!

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Alyssa Nguyen,
anguyen@rpgroup.org

Daisy Segovia,
dsegovia@rpgroup.org

www.rpgroup.org

Rural Transfer Project Page
www.rpgroup.org/projects/rural-transfer

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