

# REGIONAL LEARNING COLLABORATIVE

## STRATEGIC PLAN 2020 – 2024

### EXECUTIVE SUMMARY



EDEVAL Group, Dr. Nazanin Zargarpour, Principal Investigator

Claremont Evaluation Center  
Claremont Graduate University  
January 2020

# RLC STRATEGIC PLAN 2020 – 2024

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

### MISSION

Connect researchers and practice leaders across the education pipeline, to co-create, execute, and continuously improve evidence-based strategic plans to facilitate student advancement across pipeline transitions

### VISION

100% of students to attain postsecondary education and stackable careers

## BACKGROUND

The Regional Learning Collaborative (RLC) is an intersegmental pipeline partnership of education leaders in Pomona and surrounding communities, with the mission to connect researchers and practice leaders across the successive segments of the education pipeline, to co-create, execute, and continuously improve evidence-based strategic plans to facilitate student advancement across pipeline transitions, to and through college and into stackable careers. Its shared vision is for 100% of students to achieve postsecondary education and contribute to their families and communities through living-wage and stackable careers.

The RLC's research-based framework leverages multi-segmental partners to achieve positive structural, systemic, academic, and social gains in the P-20 Education & Career Pipeline to advance student outcomes. The RLC operationalizes its vision by bringing together education leaders from P-12 districts, colleges, and educational organizations to align institutional policies, programs, and practices and implement high-impact strategies that ensure successful student transitions across successive segments of the pipeline, college and career readiness, and degree completion for all students, particularly low-income, first generation populations and students of color.

## **NEED AND OPPORTUNITY**

In 2014, the EDEVAL (Education, Development, and Evaluation) Group at Claremont Graduate University's (CGU) Claremont Evaluation Center (CEC) conducted a thorough Environmental Scan of Pomona Unified School District as part of an extensive, stakeholder-engaged strategic planning process. The scan identified significant challenges encountered by PUSD students. In the city of Pomona, 35% of adults do not graduate high school; only 15% complete college, and another 15% have some college. Over 85% of Pomona Unified School District (PUSD) students are low-income; nearly 30% are English Language Learners, and 87% are Hispanic. Across California, more than half of Black and Hispanic students in remedial math begin at three or more levels below. The more levels of developmental courses a student must go through, the less likely that student is to ever complete college English or Math. PUSD has been characterized by low rates of matriculation, persistence, and college graduation.

As students become aware of these challenges, college expectations drop. Whereas 90% of freshmen both aspire to go to college and plan to graduate from college, by senior year, students are less likely to believe they will attend a four-year college or be able to afford college. As college expectations drop, college-going behaviors also decrease. Only 37% of seniors complete A-G requirements (required by Cal State and UC schools), making a Cal State or UC school out of reach for most. Over the last decade, 63% of PUSD seniors attempted college directly after high school, and over the last 3 years, only 58% did so. Accordingly, college outcomes are also impacted negatively. Among PUSD graduates studied, most of those who attempted college did not complete it – only 18.5% completed college within four years, and another 9% within five years.

Over 35% of PUSD college attempters entered Mt. San Antonio College (Mt. SAC), the local district community college. Of those, nearly 86%, dropped out without earning a single college credit, often leaving the system financially and morally spent. These are striking numbers, especially when put into the context of what it means to earn a college degree. It is estimated that about two thirds of all jobs will need workers who have at least some college education: 35% with a bachelor's degree or higher, and 30% with associate or some college experience. College graduates enjoy higher lifetime earnings, greater civic engagement, and healthier lifestyles. Pomona students understand these realities but are faced with challenges that are often systemic and structural and, therefore, insurmountable without institutional intervention and support.

## **EARLY PROOF OF CONCEPT**

In response, the RLC was founded in 2016, utilizing evidence-based, collaborative approaches to restructure the pipeline and support student transitions across the segments – elementary, middle, high school, technical training, community college, university, and career. The RLC achieved proof of concept in two academic years (2016-17 and 2017-18) by building capacity for coherent, evidence-based, and systematic cross-segmental institutional collaboration to restructure the pipeline in its first target area – the secondary to post-secondary transition. Serving as the RLC Core Support Team, the CEC's EDEVAL Group facilitated a research- and evidence-based and stakeholder-engaged collaborative strategic planning process across all institutions in the pipeline, based on an environmental scan, a needs

assessment survey of all RLC Partner Leaders, and focus groups with students, staff, parents, and administrators. Three high-impact strategic priorities were established, each with a set of goals and action steps: 1) Vertical Articulation, 2) Dual Enrollment, and 3) Near-Peer College Mentoring.

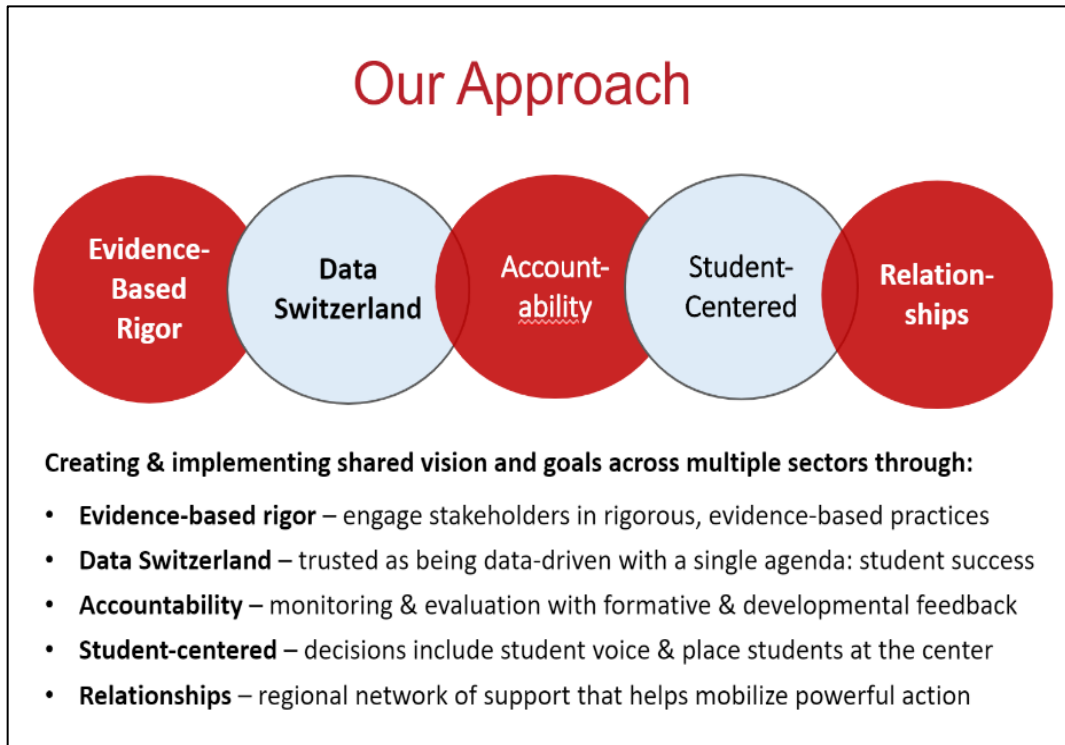
To lead implementation of each strategic priority, Working Groups, with intersegmental representation from all key RLC pipeline institutions, were developed and facilitated by the Core Support team. The result was significant gains in post-secondary student outcomes for low income and traditionally low-performing students. While previously 86% of PUSD students who entered the local community college dropped out without earning a single college credit, today 86% of PUSD students at Mt. SAC are in credit-bearing, transfer level courses. PUSD dual enrollment offerings increased from one course in a high school serving primarily high-income students to all 5 traditional high schools, serving the predominantly low-income population of Pomona. By 2018-19, over 60% of graduating students from Ganesha, a high-needs site, graduated with college credit. In Fall 2019, 16 dual enrollment courses were offered across PUSD's high school campuses, and students cumulatively earned 696 college credits through dual enrollment, with a completion rate of 87% (182/209) and a pass rate of 98%. Further, RLC post-secondary institutions leveraged RLC strategies to expand impact to over 100,000 students in the region.

## COLLABORATIVE APPROACH AND PARTNERSHIPS

### *RLC CORE SUPPORT TEAM*

CEC's EDEVAL Group serves as the Collaborative's Core Support entity. The Core Support approach (Figure 1) applies evidence-based rigor, engaging stakeholders in evidence-based practice; maintains focus that is student-centered and agenda-agnostic; manages a neutral data system ("Data Switzerland") that is trusted to have a single agenda: student success; provides accountability through monitoring and evaluation with formative and developmental feedback; strengthens relationships across institutions; identifies high-impact and strength-based strategies; and provides support to Partners for implementation. The neutral, third-party status of the Core Support Team (CST) is essential to the success of the Collaborative. The CST facilitates strategic planning among partners; plans Convenings and Working Group meetings; conducts research and leverages expertise to inform RLC decisions and practices; facilitates implementation of the Strategic Plan; collects and reports process and outcome data and learnings; spearheads professional presentations and publications; and secures funding support. The CST leads a regional network of communication, coordination, facilitation, and support that helps mobilize powerful cross-segmental and cross-sectoral collaborative action under a shared vision, with shared goals, shared planning, shared data and metrics, and evaluation, reporting, and dissemination of all its work.

Figure 1. Core Support Approach



### **CLAREMONT GRADUATE UNIVERSITY'S EDEVAL GROUP**

The RLC Core Support Team is comprised of faculty, staff, and students of Claremont Graduate University, including established scholar-practitioners with decades of experience and expertise in Applied Research, Evaluation, Education, and Education Reform, as well as, current and former MA and PHD students in Organizational Psychology, Education, and Evaluation programs at CGU, who contribute expertise to the work of the RLC. Current staff includes a Director, Assistant Directors, Facilitators, and administrative support.

The CEC's mission is to provide rigorous strategic planning, applied inquiry, and evaluation services that support and strengthen organizations to contribute to the betterment of society. Dr. Nazanin Zargarpour, CEC faculty and Principal Investigator, is Founding Director of the RLC. Dr. Zargarpour's EDEVAL Group at the CEC operates on the core belief that every individual has unique capacities and contributions to make in the world, and that this potential is unleashed through education. This core belief fuels the work, contributions, and impact of the Regional Learning Collaborative.

## COLLABORATIVE PARTNERS

The RLC includes over 30 pipeline partners from 12 institutions (Figure 2). RLC Partners include Cabinet level leaders from 4-year colleges, California State Polytechnic Pomona (Cal Poly Pomona) and University of La Verne; Presidents, Vice Presidents, and Directors of local 2-year colleges, Mount San Antonio (Mt. SAC) and Citrus community colleges; and the Superintendent, Cabinet and Directors at anchor feeder school district, Pomona Unified School District (PUSD). Together, the college partners serve over 50% of PUSD’s college attempters.

Effective local college attainment organizations, such as Bright Prospect, provide support as RLC partners. State and national expert partners include California College Guidance Initiative (CCGI), Educational Results Partnership, Career Ladders Project, and Jobs for the Future. College Futures Foundation, California Community Foundation, and ECMC are among RLC funders, each supporting various aspects of the Strategic Plan. The Office of the Mayor of the City of Pomona endorses the RLC and promotes its activities and outcomes.

As a testament to the effectiveness of the RLC, today all original RLC pipeline partners remain engaged in the Collaborative and additional members and institutions have joined, resulting in a membership of nearly 100 individuals committed to restructuring the pipeline for low-income and first generation students and students of color.

Figure 2. RLC Partners



## 2020 STRATEGIC PRIORITIES

### STRATEGIC PRIORITIES

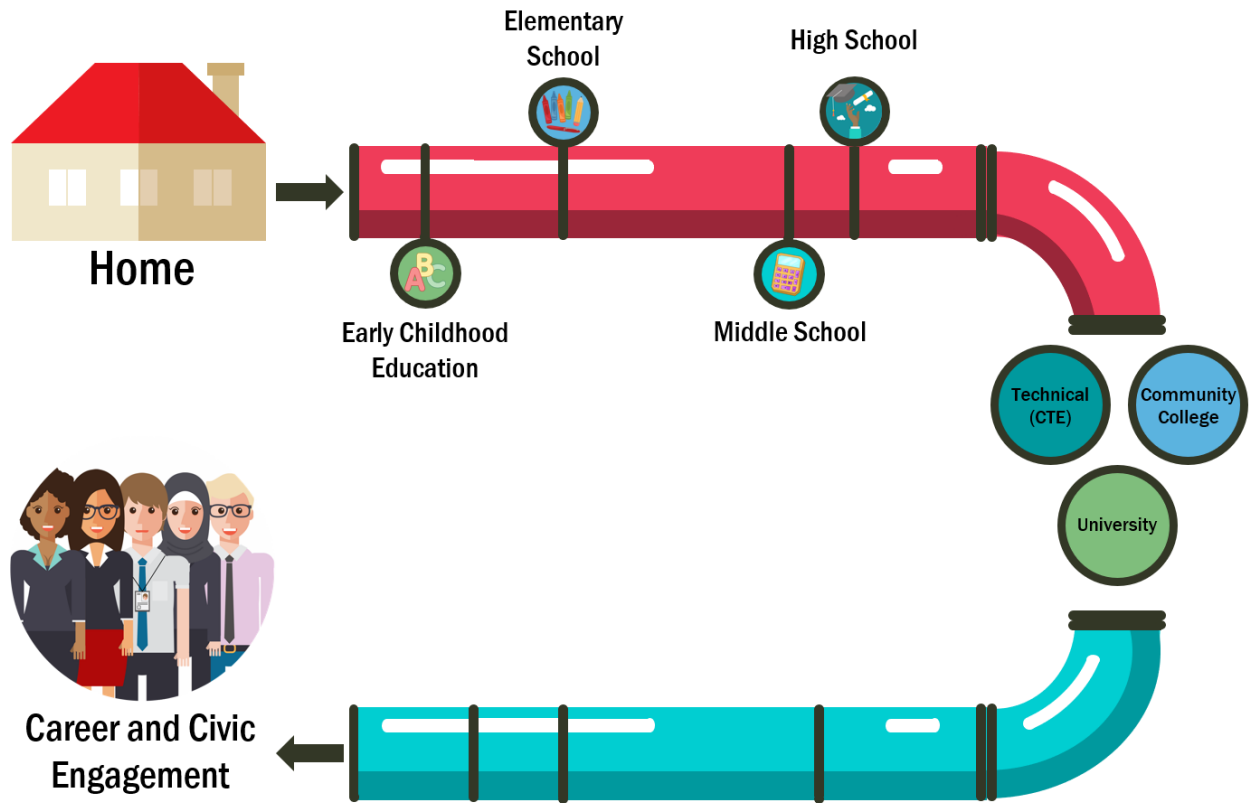
- PIPELINE ARTICULATION, ALIGNMENT, AND ADVISING
- DUAL ENROLLMENT
- NEAR PEER COLLEGE MENTORING
- TRANSFER CULTURE, INFRASTRUCTURE, AND ADVISING

#### ***STRATEGIC PRIORITY 1: VERTICAL ARTICULATION, ALIGNMENT, AND ADVISING***

An ongoing strategic priority of the RLC is to articulate and align programming across transitions in the segments of the pipeline, back mapping from postsecondary attainment indicators down the pipeline, and aligning structures, policies, programming, resources, and supports within and across institutions as needed. In the early years of RLC strategic plan implementation (2016-18), this alignment priority focused on an urgent need for adoption of multiple measures placement practices and provision of corequisite education supports. This focus on the transition between high school and community college aimed to address the staggering trend in which over 95% of PUSD students going to its most significant feeder college, Mt. San Antonio Community College (Mt. SAC ), were placed in developmental courses and over 86% of those dropped out without earning a single college credit. Owing in large part to the forward-thinking leadership at Mt. SAC and the collaboration of all RLC Partner Leaders toward early implementation of multiple measures and corequisite education supports, the RLC successfully reversed the trend in just two years, with 86% of students at Mt. SAC now in credit bearing, transfer level courses. Thus, the RLC achieved proof of concept with significant outcomes, and its participating post-secondary institutions leveraged RLC strategies to expand impact to over 100,000 students in the region.

With Phase 1 implementation successfully achieved, the 2020-24 strategic plan focuses on expanding articulation both up and down the education pipeline to ensure alignment of policies, structures, curriculum, resources, and advising infrastructure to promote ongoing student success from elementary school, to middle school, high school, technical education, community college, transfer to four-year university, and into viable, life-supporting, and stackable careers that are aligned with labor market trends. In this Pipeline Articulation, Alignment, and Advising (PA3) effort (Figure 3), staff and faculty will identify collaboratively key college and career readiness indicators across the pipeline and will discuss how to align educational outcomes and resources for student success.

Figure 3. RLC Pipeline Articulation, Alignment, & Advising (PA3) Across Segmental Transitions



Articulation and alignment are coupled with advising to help students navigate their individual paths to and through postsecondary. Our approach to advising is holistic and long-term. Students receive advising from counselors, near peers (see below), and in a course designed to develop the skills needed to be successful in school, career, and life, as well as to develop a long-term plan as a tool to navigate toward their career. In addition, parents receive supports to aid their children in seeing their career plans through.



## PRIORITY ACTIONS

- Define and refine postsecondary pathways across partner institutions
- Develop, pilot, and evaluate Career & Life Planning (CLP) course with dual enrollment credit for sophomores, juniors, and seniors
- Strengthen role of counselors with student education plans and financial aid
- Articulate Learning Objectives vertically to 5<sup>th</sup> grade
- Integrate CCGI Tools to support student planning
- Continue implementation of Post-Secondary Attainment Survey to inform vertical articulation to and through college
- Identify components for corollary parent advising training

### STRATEGIC PRIORITY 2: DUAL ENROLLMENT

A related but distinct strategic priority, based on findings from the needs assessment conducted, is to increase the number of dual enrollment opportunities for students in the district. A report by the Community College Research Center demonstrates the advantages of dual enrollment, including how it affects students based on family income. After six years of matriculation, 52% of low-income students who did not pursue dual enrollment did not enroll in an institution of higher learning, compared to 39% of high-income students; whereas only 32% of low-income students who did participate in dual enrollment did not enroll in an institution of higher education, compared to 22% of high-income peers. Thus dual enrollment participation reduced both the percentage of students who did not go on to postsecondary education and reduced the gap between poor and wealthier students. Building on dual enrollment (DE) research, the RLC has focused on expansion of DE, with particular focus on low-income and low-performing students, to encourage college identity, college credit acquisition in high school, and enrollment in post-secondary education.

In only 2 years, PUSD DE offerings increased from one course in a high school serving primarily high-income students to 16 courses across all 5 traditional high schools. In 2018-19, over 60% of graduating students from Ganesha, a high-needs site, graduated with college credit. In Fall 2019, students cumulatively earned 696 college credits with a completion rate of 87% (182/209) and a pass rate of 98%. The 2020 Strategic Plan aims to further expand DE offerings and to expand RLC research to postsecondary outcomes including degree completion, transfer and ADTs, and time to completion.

## PRIORITY ACTIONS

- Assess dual enrollment needs, trends, and Bright Spots
- Expand dual enrollment to include more transfer-level courses
- Intentionally connect dual enrollment to Guided Pathways and transfer to a four-year university

### ***STRATEGIC PRIORITY 3: NEAR PEER COLLEGE MENTORING SYSTEM***

Another strategic priority to emerge from the needs assessment was the need for expansion of advising to include a coherent peer mentoring system. Through its extensive work with PUSD and as strategic partner and evaluator to several college attainment organizations, the EDEVAL Group has found that academic support is most effective when paired with psychosocial skill development. Psychosocial skills—also known as socioemotional skills include grit, growth mindset, self-efficacy, self-regulation, etc. Peer mentoring programs directly address *both* academic support and psychosocial skills by building a trusting bond with a mentor who helps the mentee establish academic and personal goals, raises expectations about school and career, and models positive values and behaviors.

Mentors are selected from PUSD feeder colleges and from similar demographic backgrounds, to provide relevant, real-world examples of college success with whom students can readily identify. These mentor-mentee relationships become a vehicle for imparting college knowledge and skills, financial knowledge and skills, and SEL/PSL competencies needed for college access and success. In addition, the mentors themselves also gain valuable training, knowledge, and experience and benefit from the program.

## PRIORITY ACTIONS

- Recruit and train near peer college mentors through work study programs
- Identify and mentor high needs 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> grade students
- Evaluate 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> grade program curriculum implementation and outcomes
- Develop and pilot 9<sup>th</sup> grade curriculum to include:
  1. College knowledge
  2. Financial knowledge
  3. Exploration of career pathways in preparation for 10<sup>th</sup> grade CLP course
- Continue Post-Secondary Attainment Survey to inform mentoring needs

## **STRATEGIC PRIORITY 4: TRANSFER CULTURE, INFRASTRUCTURE, & ADVISING**

Building on its successes in the transition from high school to community college, through development of capacity for coherent, evidence-based, and systematic cross-segmental institutional collaboration that restructured the pipeline in this first target area and improved outcomes significantly for students, the RLC is expanding to a fourth strategic priority area – the secondary to post-secondary transition. In this fourth strategic priority area, RLC partners will collaborate to support students in the transition from two-year to four-year colleges by (A) creating a positive transfer culture, (B) strengthening transfer infrastructure, and (C) developing a coherent system and resources for advising students regarding transfer and associate degrees for transfer (ADTs) in the context of local realities such as guided pathways, ADTs, and labor market trends. This work will help provide seamless pathways for students in a positive culture and will help students and parents navigate these pathways. Counselors and near peer mentors will be trained to help students connect their individual education plans to the pipeline pathways and resources identified.

### **PRIORITY ACTIONS**

- Establish Transfer/ADT Working Group of RLC Partners
- Establish baseline realities at 2-year and four-year institutions within the RLC
- Identify and share research on promising practices
- Develop and implement Transfer Culture Campaign across the pipeline
- Develop and implement Transfer Advising across the pipeline
- Develop and implement a RLC Transfer Resource Portal

## **CONCLUSION**

These priorities set forth a 4-year vision for the Regional Learning Collaborative. During this time, additional action steps will be identified as part of our ongoing strategic thinking, and annual progress and evaluation reports will be prepared with focus on respective strategic priorities relevant to funders and partners. At the heart of this work stands our ongoing commitment to the values that animate our mission – *to connect researchers and practice partners across the educational pipeline to co-create, execute, and continuously improve strategic plans that drive the shared vision of supporting 100% of students through secondary and postsecondary educational transitions into life-supporting and fulfilling stackable careers.*