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Using State-Equity Reform to Improve Latinx Student Transfer

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Abstract

This article focuses on Latinx transfer inequity and the role of state policy in addressing barriers faced trying to move from community college to four-year institutions. A recently passed initiative in California, known as the Student Equity Policy, offers community colleges the opportunity to address transfer barriers for racial/ethnic students through institutional planning. One of the largest challenges facing California Community Colleges are the persistent inequitable rates of transfer for Latinx students, the largest ethnic group in the system. Using critical policy analysis, I examined a subset of 33 Hispanic-serving community colleges to understand how they leveraged the policy to address the transfer barriers facing Latinx students. By examining equity plans, this study finds that although Latinx students are identified as facing disproportionate levels of inequity; the policy, planning process, and funding resources were left as unexploited opportunities to address Latinx students' specific equity gaps.

Today, Latinx[1] students find themselves at the center of the U.S. higher education system. As the fastest growing ethnic group, Latinx students seek opportunities of access and attainment espoused by previous generations of state public policy touting higher education as the engine of social transformation (i.e., Wisconsin Idea in the 1900s, California Master Plan in the 1960s). Although Latinx students have increased their college enrollment, the growth is primarily concentrated in community college (U.S. Department of Education, 2019). Once enrolled in community college, one of the areas of greatest inequity for Latinx students is transfer success (Acevedo-Gil et al., 2015). While studies have found that Latinx community college students aspire to transfer to four-year colleges at higher rates than their peers (Gándara et al., 2012), there are numerous challenges that make this goal unattainable (Castro & Cortez, 2017).

Though much of the education policy rhetoric of the last decade has focused on completion, such that there is an increase in baccalaureate degree holders by 2025, there has not been a focus on addressing educational inequity or transfer complexities in community college to reach these goals (Castro, 2013). In community colleges, completion has been defined as earning a certificate or associate's degree rather than transfer success (Lumina Foundation, 2014). Lester (2014) points out that an unintended consequence of the "Completion Agenda" in community college is deeming successful attainment as "just filling jobs" or providing "some level of education," which leads to diminishing the importance of transfer (p. 423). If increases in baccalaureate recipients motivate state completion goals, then the improvement of Latinx student transfer from community college to bachelor's degree-granting institutions is critical. The need to directly confront inequity in transfer is necessary across the nation, but even more so in a state like California with the largest community college system serving a significant percentage of Latinx students. Over 710,000 Latinx students enrolled in the California Community Colleges in fall 2016, accounting for over 44% in the state. Across the country that is nearly 22% of the 3.2 million Latinx students enrolled across U.S. higher education (California Community College Chancellor's Office [CCCCO], 2019; U.S. National Center for Education Statistics, 2019).

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[1] I use Latinx as the umbrella terms for Latinas, Latinos, and "Hispanic" students. "Hispanic" is only used to describe the formal designation of Hispanic-Serving Institution which includes campuses with over 25% full-time equivalent enrollment of Latinx students.

This article focuses on Latinx transfer inequity and the role of state policy in addressing barriers faced trying to move from community college to four-year institutions. A recently passed initiative in California, known as the Student Equity Policy, offers community colleges the opportunity to address transfer barriers for racial/ethnic students through institutional planning. Using critical policy analysis, I examined a subset of 33 Hispanic-serving community colleges to understand how they leveraged the policy to address the conditions and outcomes for Latinx students. By examining equity plans, this study finds that although Latinx students are identified as facing disproportionate levels of inequity; the policy, planning process, and funding resources were left as unexploited opportunities to address Latinx students' specific equity gaps. The subsequent section describes the conditions of Latinx transfer, outlining the state-level policy of interest and detailing the approaches taken to understanding how reform can better serve Latinx students in transfer. Next, I share the theoretical framework guiding this work followed by a discussion of methods employed. Then, I describe the results of this study and the potential implications to improve Latinx transfer within the context of policy and practice.

Latinx Students, the Transfer Process, and Educational Inequities

Transfer is one of the primary purposes of community colleges, serving as a pathway to the baccalaureate. Known as the "transfer function," it provides students the opportunity to accumulate college credits at a low-cost community college in route to the baccalaureate (Martinez et al., 2017). Though California's Master Plan articulates an ostensibly seamless transfer pathway for students not eligible for the University of California (UC) and the California State University (CSU) systems, transfer trends illustrate the process is incredibly complex and difficult to achieve. Researchers and practitioners describe the transfer pathway in California as "log-jams," "puzzles," and "labyrinths" (Dowd, 2007; Jain et al., 2020; Martinez-Wenzl & Marquez, 2012). Unclear transfer pathways from community college to 4-year institutions jeopardize the ability of California's students, notably Latinx students, from achieving a Bachelor's degree (Contreras & Contreras, 2015; Gonzalez, 2015).

Low transfer rates for California's community college students (Abrica & Rivas, 2017; Bensimon & Dowd, 2009; Campaign for College Opportunity [CCO], 2017), and Latinx students specifically (Acevedo-Gil et al., 2015; Gándara et al., 2012; Villalpando, 2004), are well-documented in the literature and bring to light the *Brown Paradox* (Contreras, 2011). Analyses by Yosso and Solórzano (2006) found that over 60% of Latinx students aspired to transfer, but

less than 14% of them were successful. In the same study, the authors reported that students who started in developmental education had a transfer rate of less than 1%. Hagedorn and Lester (2006) found that although the California invested significant resources between 1985 and 2005 to improve the transfer function, the number of Latinx students who transferred stayed relatively the same despite an increased percentage in student aspirations. In documenting the inequitable rates of transfer experienced by Latinx students, the *Brown Paradox* draws attention to disparities between espoused aspiration to transfer and their actualized transfer outcome (Castro & Cortez, 2017; Contreras, 2011). As demonstrated, the inequitable rates of transfer for Latinx students is both a historical and current issue that needs continued investigation.

Examining recent transfer cohort data, Latinx students comprised over 31% of all transfer aspiring students in California's community colleges in 2009, but only 23% of those who successfully transferred to a four-year college or university after six years (CCCCO, 2019). In comparison, the average transfer rate across the state is 37.9%, while Asian students, the highest performing group have a transfer rate of 53%. The 2008-2009 transfer cohort of first-time college students with a "behavioral intent to transfer"[2] consisted of 138,000 students, of which 43,000 (31%) were Latinx students. After six years of community college, only 12,600 (29%) were successful in transferring. Although community colleges were built on the promise of educational access and social mobility, the data shows a clear disconnect between the transfer aspirations and outcomes of Latinx students (Bensimon & Dowd, 2009; Jain et al., 2020).

A State Response to Inequity in Community College

California has a long history of developing policy reforms to address the barriers in transfer with mixed success. Since the 1980s, the state has passed several bills (See Appendix A) that attempt to restructure pathways across systems, create new guaranteed transfer degrees, and expand the information and materials available for students on campus. In 1988, the declining rate of transfer prompted legislators to pass the Community College Reform Act (AB-1725). The policy focused on aligning lower-division curriculum among the three systems and called on the Board of Governors (CCC), the Board of Regents (UC) and the Board of

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[2] For more information on California's Transfer Cohort Methodology, see this report: http://www.ccctransfer.org/TransferReport.pdf

Trustees (CSU) to jointly develop "a common core curriculum in general education courses and lower division major preparation curricula for purposes of transfer." Part of the directive was designating the "Articulation System Stimulating Interinstitutional Student Transfer" (ASSIST), which had been created by the UC, as the official "repository of the articulation for California's college and universities." ASSIST allows students to map out their transfer pathway from their respective community colleges to any of the state's public four-year institutions by noting the coursework required by each institution for particular majors. While the creation and eventual adoption of ASSIST statewide improved the ability of students to "navigate" transfer, the barriers to transfer success remained nonetheless.

Two decades later, California passed the Student Transfer Achievement Reform Act in 2010 (SB-1440). The policy addressed the lack of coherence in transfer pathways by creating a streamlined process between California Community Colleges and the California State University system to ensure greater efficiency of transfer. Heralded as historic legislation (CCO, 2015), SB-1440 changed the structural aspects of transfer by taking a more comprehensive approach to curriculum requirements, unclear transfer pathways, credit acceptance/redundancy, and time to degree completion (Felix, 2018; Public Policy Institute of California [PPIC], 2014). Central to this policy was the mandate to create entirely new degrees known as Associate Degrees for Transfers (ADT) that provide certain guarantees for community college students. These guarantees include admissions to the system, junior status, and pre-scribed major curricula to expedite degree attainment. Recent data points to the modest success of SB-1440 as the number of students transfer with ADTs and graduating appears to be greater than traditional transfer students (PPIC, 2014; Legislative Analysts Office, 2015). Despite these improvements, the data do not indicate that students who have faced greater disparities in transfer have benefited from the enacted reform. Indeed, recent research finds that those student groups (i.e., white, Asian, middle-income students) who already had successful transfer trends are the ones who benefited most from the policy change (Baker, 2016).

Missing from both these policies were the explicit mention of specific racial groups that have faced longstanding inequities in community college that could benefit from a more streamlined transfer pathway. AB-1725 focused on creating new common courses and shared curricula to enhance transfer in California. SB-1440 addressed transfer for all students by

creating new transfer degrees that streamlined the process but failed to incorporate language or instruments that helped to ameliorate inequities for groups that needed additional support in the transfer process. Most policies drafted in the state have failed to include language that seeks not only to improve transfer, but also make it equitable for specific student racial groups (Ching et al., 2018). These types of policies can be described as race-neutral or color-evasive, where history, context, institutional racism, and structural determinants of educational success based on race and ethnicity are ignored by policymakers or restricted by law (Gill et al., 2017; Winkle-Wagner et al., 2014). As Harper et al. (2009) suggest, color-evasive policies seeking to improve outcomes for racial groups create an illusion of progress where students "essentially take three steps forward and two steps back" (p. 410). The two previous policies discussed, were in effect race-neutral, seeking to improve transfer for all students, regardless of racial background which can lead to overall improvement of transfer rates but maintain the disparities across groups.

Examining California's Student Equity Policy

In California, policymakers have used legislation as a primary vehicle to address transfer inefficiencies in the state's higher education system. These policies have not been comprehensive or race-conscious, usually addressing a specific aspect of the transfer process such as realigning curriculum (AB-1725) or developing new transfer degrees (SB-1440) that target "all students" in California. The Student Equity Policy, which is central to this study, offered an opportunity for community colleges to explicitly address Latinx students transfer inequity if disparities in outcomes were identified. The state's adoption of Student Equity Policy (SEP) in 2014 prompted community colleges to document the extent of inequity in five areas—access, basic skills, course completion, degree completion, and transfer—for over 14 different target groups, of which racial/ethnic groups were one. Through these equity plans, institutions a) identify equity gaps in student success, such as transfer inequity; b) target specific student groups to address inequities, including racial ones such as Latinx students; and c) utilizes special funds to mitigate equity gaps as an institution deems appropriate, including race-conscious strategies.

The SEP policy's inclusion of transfer as an indicator coupled with the requirement to calculate disproportionate impact by race and ethnicity gives colleges the atypical opportunity to address the Latinx transfer crisis through intentional and transparent race-conscious

strategies. This article's focal point then is on understanding how community colleges used this state policy to address Latinx transfer inequity. The motivation to study how the SEP compels institutions to address Latinx transfer inequities is undergirded by two claims. First, the SEP offers community colleges the opportunity to plan, target, and address equity gaps in race-conscious ways, only *if* the college possesses the institutional conditions and individual actors to recognize and act upon the opportunity. Second, given the size of Latinx students and the inequities they face in the community college system, institutions should be compelled to take advantage of the opportunity to address Latinx student-specific needs. Given these two claims, it is critical to study the way the Student Equity Policy in California is used by community colleges to address longstanding student inequities. The following questions guide the research conducted in this study:

1. In what ways are state-required equity plans used as an opportunity to address Latinx student inequities in educational conditions, experiences, and outcomes?
2. What are the areas of inequity identified and focal efforts described in institutions' equity plans that address Latinx equity issues?
3. What types of interventions/solutions are proposed to address Latinx transfer inequity?

Theoretical Framework

Critical policy analysis (CPA) was employed to examine the student equity plans submitted across the state to understand how Latinx students are identified as facing disproportionate levels of inequity, the activities and strategies proposed to address equity gaps, and the ways new funding were allocated to implement the institutional equity plans. Unlike traditional forms of policy analysis, which assume a rational-scientific framework, CPA begins with the idea that policies are inherently biased and value-laden (Felix & Trinidad, 2019; Young & Diem, 2017). CPA foregrounds dimensions such as race or gender in the analysis of policy and attempts to uncover issues of power, social reproduction, racism or sexism. Taking a CPA approach allows me to foreground race to study the student equity plans and to consider how the policy may differentially impact Latinx students. To complement CPA, I use the concept of equity-mindedness (Bensimon, 2007; Bensimon & Malcom, 2012) which foregrounds the need for institutional interventions, like the student equity plan, to be a) race-conscious, b) see inequity as a problem of practice not student characteristics, and c) work towards institutionalized strategies that improve and advance equity on campus.

In recent work, I have been able to weave theoretical elements from CPA and equity-mindedness to develop an analytic approach that allows for a critical interrogation of policy and planning documents such as master plans, accreditation self-studies, and student equity plans that purport to identify and address disparities in student success (Ching et al., 2018; Felix & Fernandez, 2018). This approach highlights the discourse within the text, how race and racial disparities are discussed, and the ways practitioners frame the causes for inequity for Latinx students as well as the potential solutions. Building on this research, I examined 33 student equity plans from Hispanic-serving community colleges to learn *if* Latinx students were identified in equity plans, *how* their inequities were framed, and the *ways* institutions crafted more equitable strategies and solutions to mitigate identified gaps (Garcia et al., 2019).

Methods and Sources

Data were drawn from publicly available documents including formal policy documents, implementation memos and training guidelines, and particularly, the individual student equity plans. To make sure all equity plans were the "final version," a formal request was made to the California Community College Chancellor's Office for all 2015-2016 student equity plans. The state provided all equity plans submitted as well as other documents such as internal memos and guidelines used to evaluate plans. Possessing formally-submitted equity plans increased the validity of the data collected as they are stable, precise, and obtained in an unobtrusive manner (Winkle-Wagner et al., 2014). As data sources, student equity plans are artifacts of implementation that allow me to look into each campuses' development of the policy. Of the 113 community colleges, I developed a sample of institutions based on the enrollment of Latinx students and their transfer rates. Setting the criteria at over 50% enrollment of Latinx students and transfer rates below the state average (37%), 33 institutions were identified. This purposeful sampling was driven by the assumption that institutions with a higher concentration of Latinx and below average transfer rates would potentially focus more on this issue in their equity plan. It is important to note that the subsequent analysis and findings are bound by the data used in this study. The data focuses on the California Community Colleges system and a subset of Latinx-enrolling campuses. Although results can be considered across the community college sector, it is important to highlight that this study is bound by a specific state-policy context.

Data Analysis

Analysis proceeded in three stages. The first stage refined an analytic protocol to evaluate the student equity plans based on previous related work (Felix & Fernandez Castro, 2018; Fernandez, 2011; Strunk et al., 2016). The protocol has been used successfully to conduct analyses of student equity plans by recent scholars (Ching et al., 2018; Harris et al., 2017). Second, I reviewed the thirty-three plans from the sample using the assessment framework. As the analytic process unfolded, memos were written to capture emerging insights as well as to synthesize the findings reported. Based on this analysis, several themes were identified to help illuminate how plans were developed and conceptualized to address student inequities. The final stage of analysis examined the aggregated data from all plans and conducted a focused coding for Latinx-specific discourse. To answer research questions two and three, a secondary coding process occurred to understand where Latinx students were identified, mentioned, and targeted. During this process, I used guiding questions to focus the analysis, asking are Latinx student equity issues addressed in specific areas of the plan (i.e., transfer)? What do interventions and activities targeting Latinx students look like? What do these efforts attempt to accomplish?

Findings

The purpose of this research was to learn how Hispanic-serving community colleges used a newly passed state-wide equity planning effort to identify, address, and mitigate inequities for Latinx students. Within the California Community College system, Latinx students are the largest racial group and while they report above-average aspirations for transferring their rates of success are amongst the lowest of any group (Campaign for Community Opportunity, 2017). Attention was placed on understanding how equity plans from 33 colleges with high-Latinx enrollment—between 28% and 80% of all students on campus—addressed the inequities in transfer faced by this student population. Based on my analysis, I detail three critical areas. The first theme provides an overview of the planning process, including the total number of activities planned across the sample and the percentage focused on addressing Latinx transfer inequity. The second theme explores how many of the equity activities developed were supporting Latinx students, only in name since the strategies proposed were not Latinx-specific or culturally relevant to the group. The final theme then

highlights strategies and activities that centered on the experiences of Latinx students and were more equity-minded and cultural-relevant in trying to mitigate equity gaps in transfer.

Addressing Latinx Transfer Equity through the Planning Process

As described earlier, student equity plans required community colleges to a) identify inequity for student groups (i.e., Latinx students, former foster youth, low-income) in six academic areas (i.e., basic skills, degree completion, transfer) and b) develop activities (i.e., interventions) to improve outcomes on campus. The 33 equity plans reviewed in this study proposed 759 activities across all indicators to address student inequity. Through my analysis, I was able to learn how campuses prioritized the improvement of transfer through activities proposed and resources allocated. The transfer indicator had the least amount of funds allocated among the six indicators, receiving $5.7 million in equity funds (10%). In comparison, basic skills received $10.5 million (18.6%), and course completion received the most at $14.2 million (25.2%). Appendix B shows the full sample of institutions, how much they funded toward transfer, and which activities identified and explicitly addressed Latinx students. As for funding, colleges within the sample allocated between .7% and 26% of their total student equity funds towards transfer. The average amount spent on transfer activities across the 33 institutions was $175,122. The average funds allocated by campus was 9.2%. within the sample. Seven colleges spent over 20% of their allocation toward transfer; for these institutions, they spent on average $459,332, nearly three times more than the full sample average. In terms of absolute funding, only six community colleges allocated more than $400,000 towards transfer activities.

During the analysis process equity activities were categorized into three types—all, identified, and explicit—to better understand how Latinx students were served. The first type includes *all* 759 activities proposed in the sample. The second type includes 91 activities (12%) that *identified* disproportionate impact for Latinx students but did not necessarily propose a targeted intervention to support the group. The third category includes 28 activities (3.7%) that *explicitly* targeted Latinx students in the details of their proposed strategy to improve student success (See Table 2 below). This breakdown highlights the low number of activities proposed within equity plans to explicitly address and attempt to improve Latinx transfer on campus.
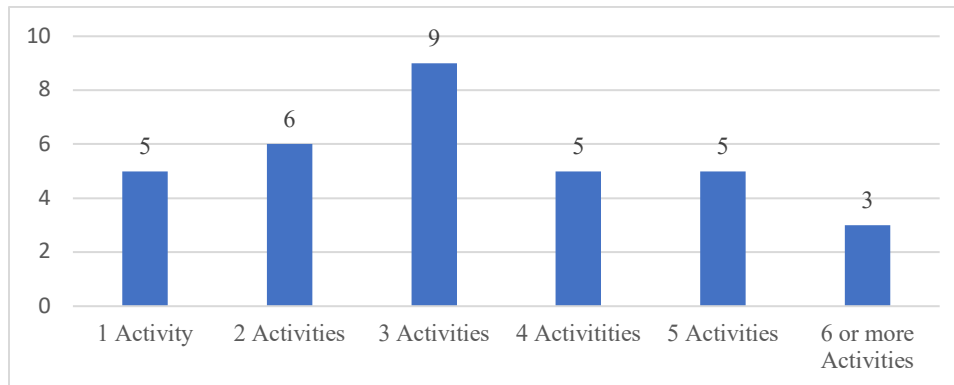
Table 1

Breakdown of Student Equity Funding by Indicator Area

Indicator Area	Amount Allocated	% of Total
Access	$ 6,668,638	12%
Course Completion	$ 14,279,036	25%
Basic Skills	$ 10,532,990	19%
Degree Completion	$ 5,944,334	11%
Transfer	$ 5,779,013	10%
Campus-Wide Support	$ 13,373,216	24%
Total Equity Funds Allocated	$ 56,577,227	100%

Table 2

Breakdown of Student Equity Plan Activities

Activity Category	#	% of Plans
All Activities Proposed Across Equity Plans	759	100%
All Transfer Activities	108	14.2%
Activities Indicating Transfer Inequity for Latinx Students	91	12%
Activities Explicitly Addressing Latinx Transfer Inequity	28	3.7%

Of the 759 total activities in the sample, the transfer indicator was the least emphasized academic area with only 108 activities (14% of all activities) proposed. Of those 108 activities, even less of them had identified (91) Latinx students as a beneficiary of the activity. Although low rates of success were identified across all 33 Hispanic-serving community colleges in the sample, campuses varied in the amount of strategies developed to mitigate transfer inequity. Campuses ranged between 1 and 7 activities proposed to address transfer. As Figure 1 shows, the majority of campuses proposed 3 or fewer activities to mitigate the inequities they identified in transfer. Only 8 campuses in the sample developed five or more strategies to support Latinx students along the path to the bachelor's degree.

Figure 1

Transfer Activities Proposed

The lack of attention in developing transfer activities was exacerbated by the disparity in funding (See Table 3). As shared above, there were 759 total activities and across those activities transfer had the least attention placed in terms of proposing and developing strategies to address inequity. The state policy provided over 61 million dollars for the campuses in the sample to develop, implement, and carry out their activities. When examining the number of activities proposed and the funding allocated, we see an even smaller fiscal emphasis on transfer in general, and addressing Latinx transfer equity specifically.

Table 3

Comparison of Equity Activities and Fund Allocation

|	Activities			
	Proposed		**Funds Allocated**	
Total Activities Proposed and Funds Allocated	759	100%	$61,075,049	100%
All Transfer Activities	108	14.2%	$5,779,013	9.5%
Only Identified Latinx Students	91	12%	$4,984,767	8.2%
Explicitly Address Latinx Students	28	3.7%	$1,361,956	2.2%

After describing the activities proposed and funding breakdown across the six indicators, the next theme dives into the equity activities that identified (91) and explicitly addressed (28) Latinx transfer disparities on campus.

Proposing Latinx Specific Transfer Activities

Examining these activities, two things became clear. First, there was a misalignment between identifying Latinx students and proposing a race-specific, culturally relevant strategy. Second, there was a distinction between activities where Latinx students were the only group or one of two targeted groups (focused) compared to activities targeting Latinx students as well as three or more other groups (aggregated). Of the 108 transfer activities in the sample, 84% (91) included Latinx students as an identified target group, but being identified as a target group could mean that Latinx students were the only target or one of six groups targeted within a single activity. Since colleges could identify Latinx students as a target, but fail to address them in their proposed activity, I conducted a second coding within the activity implementation plan section to learn if and how Latinx students were explicitly described/identified. After reviewing all 108 transfer activities through the second coding process, only 28 explicitly described and addressed Latinx students. Figure 2 below displays the number of Latinx-explicit strategies developed to address transfer inequity. Seventeen of the 33 equity plans evaluated did not explicitly address Latinx students at all. Of the 15 equity plans that included a Latinx-explicit activity, nine proposed only one strategy while six equity plans proposed two or more strategies.

Figure 2

Number of Explicit Activities Proposed Across Sample
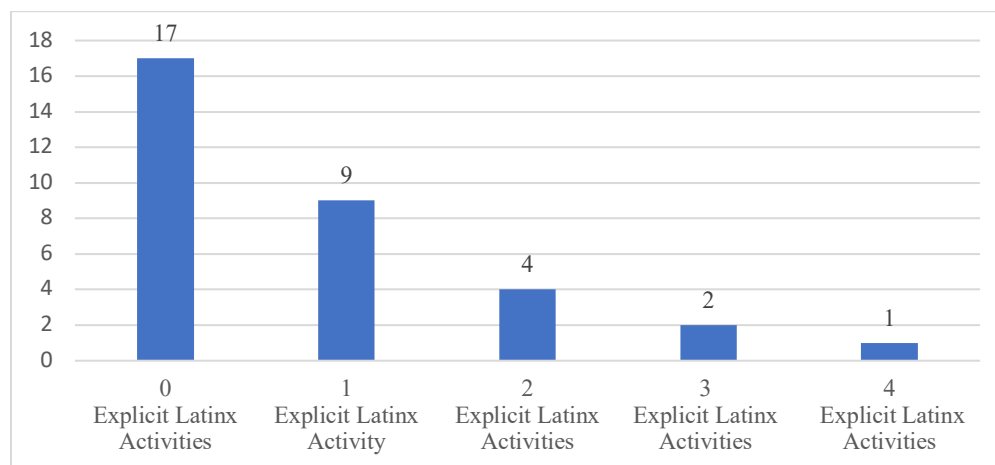
Two examples help make this distinction between "identified, but not addressed" and "identified and explicitly addressed." In one case of identified, but not addressed, Campus 10

had identified Latinx students as facing the greatest gaps in transfer success and proposed that "the college will increase access to four-year transfer institutions through increased, coordinated, on-campus visits to UCs, CSUs, and Independent colleges and universities." Within this activity, five other student groups were identified and the actual details to achieve the proposed goals failed to mention, acknowledge, or include any information related to Latinx students, the barriers they face, or ways to explicitly support them. The majority (75%) of activities were categorized as identified, but not addressed since they identified Latinx students as a target group but did not describe how they would be supported through the proposed solution.

On the other hand, 28 examples emerged from my analysis where a campus identified and explicitly addressed Latinx transfer inequity. For example, Campus 1 identified Latinas as the student group facing the largest gaps in transfer within their equity plan. In the description of the activity intended to mitigate this equity gap, the college proposed to develop a "Latina Transfer Program" built on "Chicana epistemology" that provided culturally relevant support. Explicit activities have a clear connection between the identified group and the approach taken to address the equity gaps. Similarly, Campus 14 identified Latinx students as facing disproportionate impact in transfer and proposed comprehensive services "to Latino and African American students, particularly males. 1) Develop a learning community or cohort model that would pair a Chicano or African American Studies or Sociology, English and Counseling class." These two activities exemplify an explicit transfer program addressing Latinx students.

Lastly, of the 91 Latinx identified activities only 18 were categorized as focused on Latinx students compared to 73 aggregated. Focused activities had some similar characteristics including lengthier intervention descriptions, naming target groups in activity details, and creating new strategies or tailoring existing strategies to support specific groups. These activities that focused on an individual group or pair of groups were labeled "culturally relevant strategies" as they were more race-specific, detailed, and included relevant strategies related to the identified student group(s). In contrast, aggregated activities with three or more identified targets had short and vague descriptions. Also, these activities used umbrella terms such as "diverse groups," "historically marginalized," and "identified targets" to describe the students facing inequities.

Lastly, these activities proposed to scale-up existing strategies or proposed an intervention that could support all students. This type of activity was coded as "equity for all" since the proposed strategy focused on interventions that did not intentionally target students identified with equity gaps but could benefit all students. This finding was salient as 80% of all activities developed in the sampled student equity plans were aggregated, targeting three or more groups. In the final theme, I share excerpts from different plans that highlight the strengths of focused activities (i.e., one or two student group targeted) that explicitly targeted the barriers faced by Latinx students in transfer through race-specific, culturally-relevant approaches.

Using Policy to Address Latinx Transfer Inequity: In Search of Promising Practices

One of the objectives of this study was to uncover if and how Hispanic-serving community colleges used the equity planning process to meet the needs of Latinx students seeking to transfer to four-year institutions. This last section provides examples from these equity plans as potential opportunities to improve the conditions and outcomes for Latinx students, and potentially other racially minoritized groups, through equity planning process and the opportunities to develop new activities with equity funds provided to institutions. Although, there were limited examples of equity activities that explicitly targeted Latinx students, the 28 identified in this study provide distinct approaches to improve transfer success for Latinx. For community colleges that did include these types of activities in their equity plan they focused on increasing exposure to transfer opportunities or creating new culturally-relevant programs.

Increasing Exposure to Transfer Opportunities

The first set of equity activities sought to improve Latinx transfer success through improved marketing, awareness campaigns, and campus visits. One campus proposed to "develop marketing and awareness campaigns that help Hispanic students learn early on" what type of support was available including resources in the transfer center as well as transfer partnerships with nearby four-year institutions. A second campus took a similar approach as they planned to modify their "matriculation and orientation programs" to include more information about transfer early on. In the activity, the campus focused on developing bilingual materials in Spanish and English that "advertise[d] degree programs and courses that lead to transfer" as well as "identify[ing] Latino students during the orientation process that express interest in four-year degrees and assist them in selection majors that align with transfers."

These proposed activities focused on making transfer more visible on campus, making small tweaks to existing orientation, matriculation, and counseling processes.

Increasing exposure also included equity activities that proposed the expansion of campus transfer fairs as well as day-long and week-long university field trips. Another equity activity shared, "Hispanic students will be exposed to universities and gain knowledge on transfer and admission requirements through the following activities: university field trips, expanded campus fairs, and a Transfer Conference to be held [on campus] for students and their parents." These activities were specific in stating that the campuses invited to fairs as well as those visited would be minority-serving institutions such as Hispanic-Serving Institutions and Historically Black Colleges and Universities. Similarly, equity activities sought to expose Latinx students to campuses and areas beyond the local community. One community college proposed:

> The goal of the equity-funded trips will be to expose potential opportunities beyond the Los Angeles region to Latino students who come from traditionally underserved areas. Although [our Community College] conducts several activities that engage students with universities, many students never leave the Los Angeles area, tend to delay transfer or apply to more competitive options closer to home. Therefore, this program visits lesser known, out of area universities to share new options for Latino students to transfer to.

Community colleges described how these equity activities would work towards "foster[ing] a transfer-friendly environment" or "expanding a culture of transfer across the campus." One campus stated that their equity activity would "create an environment that provide Hispanic students with the tools, knowledge and awareness for transfer." These first set of activities sought to expand awareness of transfer on campus as well as offering more Latinx students the opportunity to see themselves at a four-year institution through transfer fairs and campus tours.

Culturally-Relevant Transfer Programs

The second type of activities focused on developing new programs tailored specifically to support Latinx students through the transfer process. These programs described working with the Chicano Studies department, Latinx faculty, and embedding elements of community cultural wealth (Yosso, 2009) into their program models. One such program targeted the inequities faced by Latinas, the equity activity proposed a new transfer academy for Latinas that

"provide[d] wraparound services for Latina women that include[d] Math and/or English bridge programming, student support, and learning services (tutoring, supplemental instruction, advisement), and leadership training/self-agency support." Within the activity details, the campus shared that the program coordinator, participating faculty, and tutors hired would all be Latinas who successfully transferred from community college.

A second campus drew on Latinx scholars and their research implications (Gándara et al., 2012; Perez & Ceja, 2010) to build new transfer pathways based on evidence of what works to improve outcomes for Latinx students in community college. The campus plan included:

> In order to build a transfer-sending culture, especially for Latino students, institutions must implement outreach strategies, adequately address students' developmental needs and financial needs to eliminate barriers to enrollment. Most importantly, institutions must adequately train counselors in evidence-based practices which facilitate transfer and properly inform them of articulation agreements between various universities.

This campus used their equity plan to develop a counseling program that provided advising, resources, and support in more culturally-relevant ways. A third campuses proposed a "Latino Leadership Academy" to provide targeted and comprehensive services to Latino students. The purpose of this Academy was to first "develop [a] learning community or cohort model that would pair a Chicano Studies course with transfer programming" then "hire a program coordinator to plan and administer program activities," and lastly "secure a permanent location with adequate facilities to house the Latinx Scholars program." Within the description of this program, it was mentioned "our program, we provided intrusive counseling, developed some awesome resources, and cultivated leadership skills that benefit black and brown students… we are creating something differently, staying away from the student deficit model." These three examples showcase the ways that community colleges can use the equity planning process to develop and offer transfer-related programs tailored specifically for Latinx students. Especially ones that espoused to center Latinx culture and community to support students to move from community college to four-year institutions. In addition, these identified promising programs proposed collaboration across student services and academic instruction, especially drawing from ethnic studies department curriculum and faculty (Rivas et al., 2005).

Implications: The Unexploited Opportunity to Address Latinx Transfer Equity

Using critical policy analysis as a guiding theoretical framework allowed me to examine the ways these institutions which had above-average Latinx enrollment and below-average transfer rates used state reform efforts to target one of the largest educational issues facing the state of California (Alemán, 2007; Gaxiola Serrano et al., 2019). Given that these 33 equity plans came from Hispanic-Serving Institutions (HSI), there was an expectation that more activities within the transfer indicator would be Latinx-related; however, that was not the case. The 33 equity plans produced a total of 108 activities focused on improving transfer, but of those, only 28 strategies addressed Latinx students explicitly. For those plans that did address Latinx students in transfer, there were slight variations in approach.

Of the 33 equity plans analyzed, five community colleges stood out for explicitly addressing Latinx transfer through their allocation of significant funds (20% or greater) for tailored activities. For example, one institution paired targeted services with their Chicano Studies to improve Latinx transfer. Another college dedicated $25,000 to expand a transfer program that provided college field trips and leadership development opportunities to help students identify colleges for transfer. An outlier campus allocated over $500,000 to address Latinx transfer inequity, which included the development of a Latina Transfer Academy that aimed to increase transfer preparation as well as decrease the time-to-transfer for Latinas. These equity activities can serve as models for future strategies, especially as research finds a strong connection between ethnic studies curriculum and increased retention and completion rates (Campbell et al., 2019; Dee & Penner, 2017; Gaxiola Serrano et al., 2019; Sacramento, 2019).

Beyond the five, the majority of the plans did not include Latinx-specific goals and activities. There were few examples of plans that offered goals that were developed with Latinx students in mind. Several included Latinx students in their goals, but they were mentioned alongside the other student groups experiencing disproportionate impact. Again, only a handful of plans presented Latinx-specific and more generally race-conscious strategies to addressing transfer inequities. Most, in contrast, shared one-size-fits-all activities, which may maintain outcome gaps even while raising success rates for all students.

This study also reflects recent work by Garcia (2017, 2019) and Vargas and Villa-Palomino (2019) examining the ways institution with high Latinx student enrollment fail to use

grant dollars such as Title V to explicitly address the needs of Latinx students. Analyzing recently awarded Title V grants, Vargas and Villa-Palomino (2019) found that "HSIs often fail to center the Latinx students who permit their very eligibility" (p. 1). Similarly, this work finds that the largest ethnic group in the state which faces the largest inequities in several academic areas was not explicitly served through the equity planning process. Neither the types of equity activities developed nor the ways equity funds were allocated benefit Latinx students in community college, especially the ones seeking to transfer to four-year institutions. Given the findings of this work, I provide recommendations for policymakers to improve the equity policy as well as ways institutions and practitioners can better utilize the planning process to address the inequities Latinx students face in community college.

Recommendations Moving Forward: Seizing the Opportunity of Equity Planning

Over the last five fiscal years, the state of California has provided over $680 million dollars for the implementation of equity plans in its community colleges. The Student Equity Policy mandated formal planning as a process to identify and address inequities, providing colleges with new data and funding to propose new interventions, scale-up current ones, or bring in external organizations for professional development and support. By requiring community colleges to develop equity plans, the SEP creates a space for close examination of the transfer rates for Latinx students, meaningful conversations on why these students face disparate outcomes, and strategic development of interventions that promise to eliminate the inequities they experience. Moving from research to practice, I provide some recommendations to seize student equity as an opportunity to address Latinx transfer inequity. The first recommendation asks state-level actors overseeing the reform effort to invest more professional development to help campus planners use the opportunity to address racial inequity. The second suggests that practitioners develop equity strategies that are directly aligned with groups facing disproportionate impact since generalized solutions will not remedy race-specific inequities.

Expanding Race-Conscious Planning

State-level actors need to increase the capacity for race-conscious planning by committing more resources and professional development to the campus leaders overseeing student equity. Student equity planning provided implementing committees with guidelines, methods, and training to collect and analyze campus data and identify equity gaps. However,

there was much less support for committees to propose and develop data-driven, evidence-based, culturally relevant, and equity-minded solutions to mitigate the disparities facing racially minoritized students. Practitioners must be trained, if not empowered, to develop and create appropriate solutions for equity gaps identified. As Patton et al. (2015) suggest, there is a need for capacity-building tools such as professional development workshops and trainings that focus on the realities of race, systemic causes of inequities, and ways well-intended policies at times are detrimental to students of color in higher education. I recommend that state agencies overseeing implementation consider the level and depth of change required to implement the SEP, particularly understanding ambiguous concepts such as equity, disproritionate impact, and racial disparities.

Aligned with the call for race-conscious planning is the need to operationalizing equity. A shortcoming of the Student Equity Policy was the assumption that individuals and institutions across the community college system had a working understanding of equity. Recent research (Ching et al., 2018) found that the policy leaves equity as an ambiguous concept by providing more than three differing descriptions of what equity means. If the policy does not provide clarity in *what equity is*, campuses must invest time to discuss their own meaning of equity, how it is to be understood on campus, and the ways proposed equity activities can achieve it. Crafting equity-driven activities to support Latinx students is an initial step, but what is required is knowing the structural causes of inequity and the role interlocking systems of oppression like racism, sexism, and capitalism play in maintaining and perpetuating inequity (Solórzano & Ornelas, 2002). Once root-causes are understood by practitioners, equity activities seeking to dismantle barriers to transfer for Latinx students may begin to achieve their intent.

Tapping into a Community Colleges' Cultural Wealth

As noted in the findings, the equity planning process allowed for some campuses to envision a more comprehensive approach to address Latinx transfer inequity. The promising practices outlined focused on creating pathways supported by both student services and academic affairs. Specifically, there was a clear connection to Chicana/o Studies and developing more culturally-relevant transfer programs, curriculum, and resources. Recent research illuminates both individual and collective benefits for ethnic studies in community college: individuals gain critical consciousness and institutions see dramatic increases in success rates. Dee and Penner (2017) explored the causal effects of enrolling in ethnic studies courses and

found students increased both their average GPA and credits earned. Additionally, they found that enrolling in multiple ethnic studies courses "reduced dropout rates" and provided effective support for underrepresented students (Dee & Penner, 2017, p. 131). What is made clear is the ways ethnic studies can serve as a tool for increased completion. Community colleges should expand efforts that connect instructional and student services through ethnic studies, which center Latinx students' experiences, identities, and community. Within these programs, ethnic studies can "disrupt dominant ideologies" as well as illuminate "systems of oppression" that may help Latinx students understand the structural conditions they face as transfer-aspirants (Gaxiola Serrano et al., 2019, p. 246).

Developing Latinx-Specific Equity Activities

Within the guidelines to develop an equity plan, the state Chancellor's Office reminded campus practitioners that "Title 5 regulations specify that colleges must review and address the following populations when looking at disproportionate impact: American Indians or Alaskan natives, Asians or Pacific Islanders, Blacks, Hispanics, Whites, men, women, and persons with disabilities (§54220(d))." Although the mandates of the policy allow for a more race-conscious approach to student success, very few equity plans included goals, activities, and strategies that could target and improve racial/ethnic equity gaps. Without a race-conscious and equity-minded approach, even well-intended activities can be framed through a deficit-minded framework and fail to address institutional causes of equity gaps (Bensimon & Malcom, 2012). Practitioners and institutions may be hesitant to be race-conscious during their equity planning and funding processes given the "anti-affirmative action" legal and public discourse, especially in post-Prop 209 California (Gandara et al., 2012). Although affirmative action in education mainly applies to admissions and not to services for enrolled students, public discourse tends to frame race-conscious decisions as reverse discrimination (Garces & Jayakumar, 2014). However, color-evasive policies and practices tend to negatively affect students of color and thus hinder efforts to mitigate equity gaps (Bensimon, 2007; Bonilla-Silva, 2009). In order for activities included in student equity plans to address equity gaps among racially-minoritized student groups, equity committee members must be able to talk about race, racism, and the causes of persistent racial inequity (Carter et al., 2017).

This final recommendation is rooted in the original intent of student equity policy (Guichard, 1992) and the emphasis on addressing the disparities facing racially minoritized

students. Without a focus on specific student groups, equity gaps experienced by racially minoritized students will likely persist even if overall performance outcomes improve (Dowd & Bensimon, 2015). Thus, practitioners should be encouraged to create new structures, programs, and practices that center the experiences of specific student groups, as was the case with 28 explicit activities and the promising practices shared in the findings.

Conclusion

Latinx transfer equity is a critical issue in California, yet only a handful of community colleges used the reform effort to improve transfer outcomes. Although it may be clear that Latinx transfer outcomes are inequitable, community colleges in the sample did not take advantage of the new opportunities provided by the SEP to address these known areas of student inequity. As designed, this state reform effort provided practitioners with the flexibility to envision new possibilities to address inequity but were mostly unable to take advantage of the opportunity to create Latinx-focused, race-conscious, or equity-minded strategies. Without envisioning new policies, practices, and strategies, transfer for Latinx students continues to be a dream deferred where the aspirations of students are never actualized.

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Appendix A: State Policy Initiatives to Improve Transfer, Select years from 1960-2014

Policy/Statue	Year	Description
AB23 – Donahoe Act	1960	Established a central mission and governance structure for the state's higher education system
AB1725 – Community College Reform Act	1988	Called for a common curriculum of lower division requirements to be accepted at UC and CSU and established the IGETC transfer pathway.
SB121 – Hart Amendment	1991	Provisions focused on improving transfer by formalizing agreement programs across the state segments of higher education known as "community college transfer plans."
AB617 – Hayden Amendment	1991	Proposed recommendations that would revise the master plan and emphasize transfer as the "central institutional priority" among the systems
SB724 – Scott Amendment	2005	Made exceptions to the structure of the Master Plan, allowing CSUs to award educational doctorates and established committee to explore the ability of community colleges to grant four-year degrees.
SB1440 - Student Transfer Achievement Reform Act	2010	The new law enabled the creation of new transfer degrees in collaboration with the CCC and CSU system. The Associate Degree for Transfer as it is known provide guaranteed transfer to the CSU system with priority admissions and junior status.
SB1456 – The Seymour-Campbell Student Success Act	2012	Established new matriculation processes in community college to improve the degree completion and transfer success of students by providing "effective orientation, assessment and placement, counseling, and educational planning services."
California Code – Section 54220 Amendment – Student Equity Plans	2014	State education code was amended to require every community college in the state to "maintain a student equity plan" that document the extent of equity on campus and promoted student success for all. In conjunction with SB-860, new funds were attached to the statue to incentive the development of these plans.

Appendix B: Institutional Funding Allocation and Activities Proposed

Institution	Total Allocation	Allocated to Transfer	% of Allocation to Transfer Activites	Total Transfer Activities	Explicit Latinx Activities	% Latinx Transfer Activites
Campus 1	$ 3,241,105	$ 668,521	20.6%	3	2	67%
Campus 2	$ 2,121,860	$ 495,116	23.3%	3	1	33%
Campus 3	$ 1,951,457	$ 447,000	22.9%	5	0	0%
Campus 4	$ 1,957,324	$ 428,635	21.9%	1	0	0%
Campus 5	$ 1,610,914	$ 407,873	25.3%	2	0	0%
Campus 6	$ 1,956,682	$ 407,840	20.8%	3	0	0%
Campus 7	$ 2,410,224	$ 398,062	16.5%	6	0	0%
Campus 8	$ 1,385,652	$ 360,341	26.0%	2	0	0%
Campus 9	$ 3,387,056	$ 216,000	6.4%	6	1	17%
Campus 10	$ 1,848,676	$ 187,000	10.1%	4	0	0%
Campus 11	$ 2,180,810	$ 178,680	8.2%	1	0	0%
Campus 12	$ 2,543,627	$ 169,600	6.7%	4	0	0%
Campus 13	$ 2,112,177	$ 169,000	8.0%	4	1	25%
Campus 14	$ 1,603,301	$ 168,500	10.5%	5	5	100%
Campus 15	$ 1,475,652	$ 145,568	9.9%	5	1	20%
Campus 16	$ 2,144,665	$ 125,000	5.8%	2	1	50%
Campus 17	$ 1,835,099	$ 110,719	6.0%	3	1	33%
Campus 18	$ 1,394,815	$ 87,000	6.2%	4	2	50%
Campus 19	$ 1,359,752	$ 77,000	5.7%	2	0	0%
Campus 20	$ 2,232,711	$ 71,942	3.2%	3	0	0%
Campus 21	$ 1,346,524	$ 70,000	5.2%	5	2	40%
Campus 22	$ 1,013,726	$ 67,484	6.7%	1	0	0%
Campus 23	$ 1,607,947	$ 67,134	4.2%	1	1	100%
Campus 24	$ 2,379,281	$ 65,000	2.7%	2	0	0%
Campus 25	$ 1,153,750	$ 53,694	4.7%	7	0	0%
Campus 26	$ 1,903,831	$ 44,580	2.3%	3	3	100%
Campus 27	$ 2,088,925	$ 42,724	2.0%	3	0	0%
Campus 28	$ 1,477,111	$ 41,500	2.8%	5	1	20%
Campus 29	$ 1,070,740	$ 7,500	0.7%	1	1	100%
Campus 30	$ 1,359,414	$ -		3	0	0%
Campus 31	$ 1,345,114	$ -	0.0%	3	0	0%
Campus 32	$ 2,116,653	$ -	0.0%	4	3	75%
Campus 33	$ 1,458,474	$ -	0.0%	2	0	0%
Total	$ 61,075,049	$ 5,779,013		108	26	