EQUITY LEADERSHIP ACADEMY FOR STATES: PILOT HIGHLIGHTS

Amplifying Equity in Perkins V

NAPE

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LETTER TO OUR COMMUNITY

Dear NAPE Community,

Every person on the NAPE team is committed to doing the difficult and necessary work to create a more just world. We have spent the past year working alongside representatives from 10 member states. Each person actively works to transform career and technical education (CTE) in their local postsecondary education systems by applying an equity lens to the Strengthening Career and Technical Education for the 21st Century Act, known as Perkins V, Comprehensive Local Needs Assessment (CLNA). Their dedication to put equity at the center of the CLNA process inspired collective learning and action among all participants and facilitators. Here is a summary of what we learned:

Amplifying Student Voice is Not Negotiable

Student representatives on each state team were our greatest teachers throughout the Equity Leadership Academy for States (Academy). Each one's perspective, expertise, and candor challenged our equity lens, fueled transformation, and held us accountable to our commitment to serve the most marginalized students in our respective communities and institutions. Thank you Henessae, Felix, Shad, Denisse, Edith, Issac, Isaiah, Dustin, Eva, and Lissinet. Your unwavering commitment to student voice and educational equity will help change education across our country.

Building Community Creates Sustainability

Relationships are at the core of equity work. Throughout the Academy, the group named relationship and community building as key drivers to making lasting change. The relationships we built highlighted the important roles self-care and collective-care play in avoiding burnout and remaining energized and supported in our work.

Equity Demands Action

Most of the participants had engaged in conversations around closing equity gaps for students for years, and in some cases, decades and lifetimes. The group agreed dialogue without action was ineffective at its best and harmful at its worst. Compassionate, informed direct action at the individual, organizational, and systemic levels are required to achieve our shared goal of equity for all.

Sincerely,
The Academy Facilitators

Ashley Conrad　　　　**Ricardo Romanillos**　　　　**Janay McClarin**

THANK YOU

The success of the Academy was possible because of our incredible funder, facilitators, and participants who made it possible.

Thank you to this group of participating leaders who co-created the learning and engagement space alongside us. They brought this work to life by dedicating their time and expertise to amplifying equity in the Perkins V CLNA.

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N A P E

ABOUT THE EQUITY LEADERSHIP ACADEMY

NAPE developed the Academy to help postsecondary state agencies center equity within Perkins V and the CLNA. The opportunity available to states and local education agencies through the CLNA process is broad and powerful, but the complexity hampers implementing such a process at the local level. NAPE brought its many years of supporting CTE leaders and educators to craft a space where state leaders, community college faculty and staff, and most importantly students, could come together and begin the important conversations necessary to transform our education systems. The Academy progressed through three distinct phases. This purposeful construction reflected the equity principles that guided the Academy, namely the importance of grounding work within participant experience.

PHASE 1: CO-CREATION

It was important to design an Academy that was responsive to our participants. To do so, this initial phase began with focus group interviews with each team. We constructed the sessions to understand each stakeholder group's experience with equity, particularly within CTE programs at community colleges. Facilitators also asked participants to guide us with their desires for a virtual Academy.

PHASE 2: TRAINING

We initiated the three-component training phase in October, 2020 and completed it by February, 2021. The Academy training was divided into three components:

▶ **Initial engagement:** We composed the initial professional learning sessions to include five, two-hour virtual sessions where all participants engaged in various topics around equity, including NAPE's Program Improvement Process for Equity™. This phase also included two, two-hour sessions where students met in an affinity group to build trust, develop leadership skills, and prepare to facilitate sessions with their non-student counterparts.

▶ **Technical assistance:** Over the winter, facilitators conducted four technical assistance calls with state department team leaders. During this time, teams engaged in purposeful conversations about how to translate theory into action. These small-group conversations also allowed states to learn from each other and provide critical feedback.

▶ **Capacity-building engagements:** All participants came back together for three, two-hour sessions to revisit central topics and provide extensions.

PHASE 3: EVALUATION

The final phase provided participants with the opportunity to reflect on the engagement's impact and value. Focus groups and post-training participant surveys yielded important data that we will use to guide changes to the Academy for future implementations.

ACADEMY GOALS

❶ **Adopting an equity lens:** You will learn how to place equity at the core of your work and build the skills necessary to have equity-minded conversations with colleagues in planning and implementing your state CLNA process.

❷ **Building institutional capacity:** Our guidance and technical assistance will prepare you to support LEAs conducting the new analysis of special populations, particularly on how to analyze data to identify performance gap root causes.

❸ **Creating community:** The Academy will provide a platform to build relationships with other states spearheading CLNA efforts.

❹ **Sharing lessons learned:** Sharing participants' lessons learned with members across the nation will help us create sustained support paths to implement the CLNA in accordance with Perkins V.

PARTICIPANT REPRESENTATION DEMOGRAPHICS

❝ No one is better situated to speak to the problems within CTE and education in general than the very students and families experiencing depressed outcomes. ❞

– Ricardo Romanillos, Academy Facilitator

The individuals who participated in the Academy were centrally important to program success. Academy organizers instructed State Departments of Postsecondary Education team leaders who applied for the program to prioritize a diverse team across the key stakeholders that reflected the various groups their colleges serve.

Team leaders considered gender and race/ethnicity as they thoughtfully recruited participants, including students and adult participants that belong to the groups identified as Special Populations within Perkins V, including Students of Color.

100% OF STUDENTS REPRESENTED ONE OR MORE SPECIAL POPULATION DESIGNATION

50% | 50%
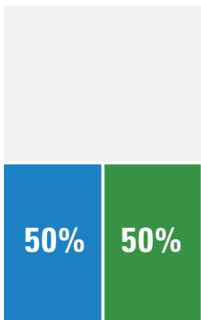
- **50% Black**
- **50% Women**
- Age 19-38
- English Learner, Active-Duty Military, Low Income, Differently Abled

MAJORITY OF ADULTS (30) BELONG TO ONE OR MORE SPECIAL POPULATION DESIGNATION

21% | 70%
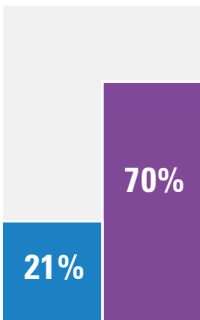
- **21% Black**
- **70% Women**
- Low Income, Active-Duty Military, Single Parent, Differently Abled

State teams led extremely rich discussions and interactions within Academy meetings that reflected the experience diversity.

TEAM SIZES	
Arkansas	6
Delaware	7
Idaho	4
Iowa	7
New Jersey	5
Oregon	6
South Carolina	5
Texas	7
Wisconsin	7
Wyoming	4
Total	**58**

TEAM STAKEHOLDERS	
Community college students	10
Community college faculty/staff	15
Community organizations	3
State department staff	30

ACADEMY HIGHLIGHTS

❶ CO-CREATION

Interviews with Academy participants extended the program goals in important ways. State and local leaders expressed gaps in using the CLNA as an equity tool that led to these need areas.

State and community college staff and community representatives expressed the need to:

- ▶ Level-set with participants on defining equity.
- ▶ Build participants' skills, confidence, and competence on how to educate others about centering equity.
- ▶ Build participants' skills in developing a CLNA and co-constructing equity strategies with students and families.
- ▶ Offer state-specific training opportunities or state-pairing work to allow skill sharing.

Community college students expressed the need to:

- ▶ Build on students' strong commitment to and advocacy for equity.
- ▶ Share best practices to help students connect more strongly with their community colleges' equity efforts and practices.
- ▶ Center student voices in the training spaces.
- ▶ Identify critical and tangible skills to build students' readiness to advance and advocate for equity on their college campuses.

With these areas in mind, we extended Academy training to include authentic community engagement, delving in conversations about equity and creating support and accountability systems.

❷ TRAINING

The Academy used an effective NAPE approach to model many principles facilitators shared with participants. One initial and pivotal training component centered students' voices as they helped co-facilitate a session on authentic student engagement. By bringing community college students into a place of authority, NAPE effectively illustrated an important pivot that colleges and states must incorporate to bring about equity.

COHORT MEMBER SESSION GOALS

Note: Each session was a two-hour virtual meeting.

2020

❶ **Kick-off Session:** Friday, October 16 Welcome teams to the Equity Leadership Academy, review what we learned from the co-creation phase, introduce the event schedule, session objectives, and session themes, and demonstrate how to use and navigate Absorb.

❷ **Meeting 1:** Tuesday, October 20 Provide an overview of the Program Improvement Process for Equity™ (PIPE) framework and introduce NAPE's equity principles to help participants implement and evaluate CLNAs with an aligned equity lens.

❸ **Meeting 2:** Thursday, October 22 Offer strategies that foster authentic community engagement in the CLNA process while also amplifying and thoughtfully integrating student voice into decision making that directly impacts students' lives in postsecondary education.

4 **Meeting 3:** Monday, October 26
Equip teams with tools and support to engage in tough equity conversations so team members can move from agency into action in their work and learning environments.

5 **Meeting 4:** Wednesday, October 28
Demonstrate how to create support systems within institutions while simultaneously creating healthy accountability systems that foster community, wellbeing, and belonging.

STUDENT SESSION GOALS

1 **Meeting 1:** Wednesday, October 21
Facilitate students through a process where they define student voice. Prepare a segment for students to co-facilitate in the next meeting with cohort members.

2 **Meeting 2:** Tuesday, October 27
Introduce the history and importance of movement building and grassroots organizing through a student-centered lens. Prepare for upcoming technical assistance call on student voice with team leads.

2021

CAPACITY-BUILDING SESSION GOALS

1 **Meeting 1:** February 2
Creating a culture of care, respect, and equity begins with internal awareness and knowledge building. The final session used equity principles as knowledge as well as centered personal identity work and how this shapes our lens. This new culture also leads to what we expect as we bring together office colleagues to have difficult equity-focused conversations.

2 **Meeting 2:** February 4
This session revisited student voice. We asked participants to bring questions or plans to receive friendly feedback from the team and NAPE. We also shared resources to help participants form focus groups and speak with students in respectful, empowering ways.

3 **Meeting 3:** February 8
We knew this work would be difficult. Mirroring again the culture we set out to establish, we revisited self-care as a focus of work and how we need to embody this work outside of work.

Session Summary

Initiated August 2020

10 2-hour training sessions
4 2-hour technical assistance sessions
15 90-minute focus groups

Completed February 2021

LESSONS LEARNED

The Academy proceeded as expected in every way except the context of the training. Since the national shutdown limited travel, we pivoted from in-person training to a wholly virtual engagement. With participant feedback through focus group conversations, we identified how to shift content delivery to meet participants' needs. We restructured the event into multiple, shorter sessions and provided supplemental reading in advance of training sessions for learners to digest at their own pace.

The other challenge with virtual training was the ability to develop a safe and open environment that supported the Academy's objectives. To do so, we purposefully structured each session to engage participants in conversations that would build community between participants. Feedback within sessions and within the evaluation showed we were successful in supporting participants and creating a safe and open environment.

Through the focus groups following the Academy, participants identified lessons that would inform future engagements in this format.

❶ HANDS-ON EXPERIENCE
Participants expressed the need for more hands-on experience using the information provided within the session. Converting ideas into practice and moving learners to a stronger sense of empowerment and to action is always an important consideration. Future work with this Academy will require modeling, practice, supplementary support resources and other structured support to close the hands-on experience gap.

❷ STUDENT VOICE
Students' perspectives are invaluable. However, as only one member of a larger group, the team dynamic is an important consideration. We could achieve greater impact and student support within each team if we invite additional students to participate.

❸ TRAINING DURATION
The duration of any professional development is always an important variable that influences effectiveness. While we spaced the Academy over many sessions and across a wide breadth of time—both hallmarks of impactful training—participants expressed a need for ongoing conversations and learning to support their growth. This response is hardly surprising considering the context in which many work. Many participants are the sole equity champion within their institution. The space the Academy created for them to show up was invaluable for many.

ACADEMY OUTCOMES

NAPE partnered with WhitworthKeeConsulting to evaluate the Academy pilot's effectiveness. We combined the qualitative data collected through focus group conversations with survey results to better determine impact.

Survey findings collectively highlighted program success evidence to provide the equity-related knowledge, tools, and skills among key CTE stakeholders. They pointed to opportunities to enhance the program's training and professional development offerings. Findings also highlighted a need to continually support stakeholders who expressed strong commitment to further advance and advocate for equity in CTE. The vast majority of participants perceived a great deal of trust, respect, and overall strong relationships from Academy members.

Evidence of success included a strong positive participant reaction to training and professional development. Survey findings indicate training was strong and effective in building equity knowledge and skills. Opportunities for growth included:

1 Engage more students since the importance of centering student voice was a big training takeaway,

2 Promote stronger engagement and relationship building by creating smaller working groups and continue to leverage technology tools that bolster collaboration,

3 Create systems to provide ongoing team support and set clear expectations.

Focus group participants at the state leadership, community college, and student levels consistently discussed the need to authentically engage students and community within the Perkins V CLNA around equity-focused outcomes. This would also require states to highlight the importance of student and community engagement as a component within local programs.

BUILDING COMMUNITY AND CENTERING STUDENT VOICES

Participants appreciated the space to build community across states and have conversations on equity issues. All Academy focus groups expressed the need to call student voices into conversations and hear from students about what they wanted to see happen with the program. Students agreed and also appreciated the space to have equity-focused conversations when the Academy presented the opportunity. Student participants expressed frustration after having conversations and providing feedback but seeing no action from administration that centered on equity goals. This frustration further demonstrated students' increased awareness and ability to advocate for equity issues within their institutions. The group also highlighted barriers because of COVID-19, accessibility, and constraints of virtual learning spaces.

❝ I always struggle with community college engagement because the models differ so much state-to-state. Sometimes I can spend more time trying to find the common ground. ❞

– State Leader

ACADEMY OUTCOMES continued

Need for State Staff to Engage in Ongoing Professional Development

The second theme consistent across state leaders, community college staff, and student participants was the need for ongoing professional development that prioritizes their internal equity

they would be prepared to engage with colleagues. For our primary participants, state department staff (n = 11), at the end of the training 82 percent (n = 8) expressed they felt confident to train others on equity, as compared to 73 percent (n = 7) at Academy inception. This data reflects an increase in one

> **❝** *I think people hear us. My concern is: will those experiences be translated into actual action?* **❞**
> – Student Participant

work, including conversations among peers, defining equity, and more. This professional development would build their capacity to lead external work with stakeholders. Community college participants felt unprepared to initiate training and work with their own teams following the Academy. There was a subtheme of insufficient time during training sessions and too much time passing between training meetings.

### Need for Other Accountability Modes and Incentives

The last theme consistent across the state leader and community college focus groups was the need for equity work accountability measures and incentives. State and community college leaders highlighted the need for consistent equitable practice and outcomes goals across the state. Accountability measures would allow for timelines and implementation benchmarks in order to move the NAPE equity goals forward.

Evaluation results indicate the Academy was very successful in developing all participants' equity lens and skills so

more participant who felt confident to train others—a very high threshold of action when considering equity.

On the surface, these numbers suggest two things, first a high level of comfort and expertise with equity topics at the beginning of the training, and second, the training had a moderate impact on outcomes, missing the 90 percent threshold. Small measure gains can often cloud respondent self-assessed capacity scoring. For example, widely documented studies show minor gains in educator self-efficacy following training. These results can be explained by an exaggerated sense of skill. As such, researchers re-assess participants by asking participants to re-evaluate their initial preparation level given their heightened level of understanding following an engagement. In the case of the Academy, researchers asked participants to reevaluate their ability to support colleagues in equity. Upon reevaluation, 59 percent expressed an initial confidence to support others in equity, versus 100 percent at Academy completion. This re-assessment shows a strong training impact for Academy participants.

59% ACADEMY BEGINNING

100% ACADEMY END
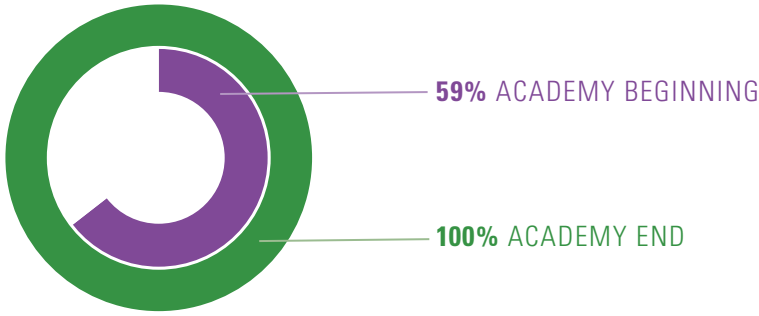
RECOMMENDATIONS

Throughout the Equity Leadership Academy, a number of recommendations emerged that can help guide postsecondary leaders across the nation working to keep equity at the core of the Perkins V CLNA process.

PRIORITIZE YOUR INTERNAL WORK BEFORE LAUNCHING SYSTEM-WIDE CHANGE

Systemic change first begins with our individual, internal work. Our experiences, our awareness, and our perspective constrain our ability to deeply engage in transformational change within our institutions. The rush to interventions meant to uplift marginalized student groups too often reinforce and replicate existing power structures that limit student access. To truly counter institutional momentum and entertain new solutions, educators must first interrogate their understandings with the help of professional learning before launching system-wide change. This is magnified for state department staff responsible for guiding local education agencies in implementing the Perkins V CLNA process.

Reflection Questions:

1 How have your experiences shaped your perspective?

2 What work can you do to expand your understanding of the space you occupy as a professional educator?

3 What resources are readily available to support your personal growth?

❝ *The one big takeaway for me has been how many times we make decisions without student voice, and especially as the Department of Education.* ❞

– State Leader

RECOMMENDATIONS continued

❷ DEFINE A SHARED EQUITY VISION

Defining equity and developing a framework of action are necessary steps to guide institutions' work. Just as an individual must grow in their understanding of their place in marginalization, so too must governments and schools.

How do institutions define equity?

A Develop a framework of equity to guide state work with local education agencies

B Engage interdepartmentally - work with personnel across departments to define and communicate the equity vision

To help ensure teams work from a similar place of understanding, Departments of Education and institutions must begin by crafting a shared equity vision and understanding. Interdepartmental and intradepartmental conversations on important issues will ensure that the collective is moving forward together, both engaging in self-analysis within, and guiding groups externally in a cohesive manner.

Reflection Questions:

❶ Does your department and organization have a common understanding of marginalization and the organization's role in dismantling bias?

❷ What would it mean to your organization for individuals to regularly engage in difficult and honest conversations centered on systems of marginalization?

❸ Is your department honestly ready to support colleagues and other educators on access and equity issues?

❸ ENGAGE STUDENTS AND COMMUNITY

All too often, student and community voices are viewed as afterthoughts when addressing CTE equity gaps. While stakeholder engagement is mandated in Perkins V, student and community engagement often is not done in ways that honor the experiences and expertise of the very students, families, and communities our institutions are meant to serve. Organizations that allow authentic student and community voices to drive and guide our grounded action will see equity gaps narrow. The very populations who are often excluded from decisions that directly impact their opportunities and success will drive solutions.

Reflection Questions:

❶ Reflect on your own experience as a student. Were you engaged in decision making that directly impacted you? If so, what did that process look like? Did you feel heard? How does that relate to your current engagement with students?

❷ Are you actively cultivating relationships with the students you serve? If so, what students are you currently listening to? Why? Who is missing?

❸ Do you have the appropriate staff and training to authentically amplify and integrate students in your institutional decision making? If not, what support do you need?

❹ CREATE A CULTURE OF SHARED ACCOUNTABILITY

Perkins V legislation provides states and local education agencies with a critical framework to center equity within CTE through the CLNA. The needs assessment process is the primary lever within Perkins V for educators to highlight factors limiting the CTE success of marginalized communities and underrepresented student groups. However, regulations within this legislative framework should not be the only accountability levers to ensure we meet students' needs. We must create a culture of shared accountability within ourselves, our institutions, and the larger systems in which we participate if we are to truly create the change our students deserve. This level of accountability relies heavily on trust, relationships, and a shared commitment to redistributing power and resources to ensure the most marginalized students get to define and achieve what success means to them.

Reflection Questions:

1 What does shared accountability mean to you? What does accountability mean in your institution?

2 How do you hold yourself accountable to the most marginalized students' voices?

3 How do you ask for accountability when you do not have it? What support do you need to facilitate healthy shared accountability systems in your institution?

❝ *The whole point of saying I'm coming from the same perspective or different perspective, and interacting with everybody is expanding my world.* ❞

– Student Participant

NEXT STEPS

The Equity Leadership Academy for States clearly demonstrated the need for an applied equity lens when guiding and implementing the Perkins V CLNA. The Academy simultaneously solidified the readiness and willingness of state, community college, industry, community, and student leaders to unite for change.

We also know the responsibility to achieve equity in CTE programs nationwide cannot rest upon the actions and commitment of a handful of our community members. Transforming our systems requires us all.

While the Academy was a pilot program, we hope to continue growing the equity in CTE movement by equipping postsecondary leaders with the tools they need to keep equity at the core of the CLNA process. Increasing capacity at the local, state, and national levels necessitate continued learning, growing our support community, co-creating shared accountability systems, and amplifying authentic student voice.

We look forward to continuing this important work alongside you!

NAPE

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