

HECC Equity Roundtable Meetings Overview

October 9, 2019

In conjunction with our Talent, Innovation, and Equity (TIE) Partnership, over the past six weeks HECC staff have hosted 12 roundtable meetings with the equity populations that are the focus of our Lumina grant. Our focus has been to engage in authentic discussions with community leaders about equity disparities and degree attainment gaps facing underrepresented students of color and indigenous students in Oregon's postsecondary educational system. Each roundtable meeting across the state was a facilitated group discussion with the same key questions:

- What do you see as the main barriers to student success?
- What are the critical cultural issues to be aware of as we seek to erase equity gaps?
- What successful strategies are already underway?
- What has been done in the past that we should be aware of as context for this work?
- What will it take to move the needle?

Through these discussions, qualitative data was gathered to develop a clearer understanding of the main barriers to student success, critical cultural issues that need to be considered for student success, highlight and expand successful strategies, and understand past strategies that may have or not worked.

The 12 equity roundtable meetings took place in Albany, Eugene, Ontario, Portland, Redmond, Salem, and Medford, and engaged more than 185 community participants. Host locations included Chemeketa Community College, Warner Pacific University, Linn-Benton Community College, Treasure Valley Community College, Lane Educational Service District, Salem-Keizer Career and Technical Education Center, and the HECC office. The following is a breakdown of the community equity roundtable meetings that took place among the different communities.

- 4 Hispanic/Latinx Community Focus
- 3 Black/African American Community Focus
- 2 Native American/Alaskan Native Focus
- 1 Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander Focus
- 1 Mixed Community-Rural in Eastern Oregon
- 1 Additional Meeting in Southern Oregon Mixed Community in October 3, 2019

Each meeting was co-hosted by an Equity Champion (EC): an influential and recognized leader in their community with experience engaging with traditionally marginalized communities, helping them to flourish through transformational leadership, education, empowerment, building relationships, improving quality of life, and advocating for civil rights and equitable practices. HECC TIE Administrator Osvaldo Avila and the EC identified additional community leaders that engage, serve and support the people of their communities

to participate in the conversations discussing equity gaps to improve education attainment in postsecondary education. These individuals represented a broad spectrum of professions from: K-12, Higher Education Community College and University, Technical/Trades Schools, Business, Chamber of Commerce, Social Services, Foundations, Health Organizations, Community Organizations – Cultural, Education, etc., City and State Government representatives, and Community Leaders.

Below are two leading takeaways from each question that was posed at the community meetings. These are drawn from a longer HECC/TIE Equity Roundtable Meeting Summary report available upon request.

What are the barriers to student success?

- Too much talk not enough action, communities are tired of not seeing action from leadership, institutions, school districts, and being asked for input
- The system itself is a barrier and needs to be redesigned for the diverse student bodies and be inclusive; systems that we have in place are not designed to support the cultural needs of underrepresented, traditionally marginalized students and actually work against them to continuously create systemic and economic barriers, physical and mental emotional trauma

What are critical cultural issues that we need to address?

- Administrators, teachers, staff are blatantly dismissive and resistant of diversity trainings, no accountability to have them learn, no time, busy, tenured excuse – never going to learn of the impact of their continued behaviors on students with their implicit/racist views, sayings, actions, stereotype judgments
- Educators' lack of knowledge of student's' economic barriers due to familial economic and cultural responsibilities, access to family financial/tax statements, providing adequate outreach, education about financial aid opportunities, filling out forms and seeing the process completed from high school, community college and university personnel

What successful strategies are already underway?

- SB 13 Tribal History/Shared History statewide curriculum will address Native American experience in Oregon
- Programs that have community engagement providing wrap around services for the whole family, engaging the parents, the grandparents, the student and their siblings.

What are past efforts that we should be aware of?

- House Bill 2064 (Student Success Act) mandates a cultural competency audit to help identify higher education practices but needs to be aligned to the current K-12 Student Success plans
- State policies have increased the number of opportunities for students to take advanced classes in high school for college credit but not equitable for all communities especially poorer districts

What will it take to move the needle?

- HECC help sustaining community partnerships/coalitions and engagement with boards and institutional leadership for continued proactive community discussions, empowerment and support through existing taskforces or grassroots organizations/partnerships with CBOs
- Dramatic need to comprehensively address and bring to light the systematic, structural and historical barriers that continue to inhibit the success of indigenous and students of color, their families, from rural and urban school districts to the public two-year and four-year institutions, including trade schools

Next steps

These insights will be shared with the HECC and its staff, as well as with an experts' workgroup that we will convene later this year for the purpose of building the conditions within postsecondary institutions, in partnership with community, for closing equity gaps. Workgroup participants will include college/university presidents and other leaders, along with community members with expertise. This workgroup will identify and spread best practices within postsecondary institutions, advise the HECC on policy and budget strategies for the State of Oregon to deploy, and help oversee the process of making small sub grants to organizations/institutions to support promising efforts.

For further information regarding our Talent, Innovation, and Equity Partnership initiatives and reports please contact Osvaldo F. Avila, TIE Grant Administrator at Osvaldo.Avila@state.or.us or by phone at 503-508-2497.