



Pathways

PATHWAYS COACHING GUIDE

Introduction and Overview of the Guide

This *Pathways Coaching Guide* is intended as a resource for organizations that provide training and professional development for coaches who may be engaged to serve colleges involved in the work of planning and implementing guided pathways *at scale*—for all of their students. At the same time, it also serves as a resource for individuals—both current and prospective pathways coaches—who wish to explore and learn on their own.

The *Guide* reflects the assumption that people who are or wish to be pathways coaches for colleges are seasoned professionals, typically with extensive experience in institutional settings and/or in consulting roles. While respecting users' experience, the *Coaching Guide* also respects their time, providing succinct, practical information in summary form while also including links to a rich collection of resource materials available through the online Pathways Resource Center (www.pathwaysresources.org). In addition, references are made to the potential need for additional professional development in key coaching functions, depending on the experience and existing skill set of each individual.

The *Pathways Coaching Guide* begins with an overview of “The Pathways Model,” using a description originally developed by the Community College Research Center (CCRC) and the American Association of Community Colleges (AACC). The accompanying graphic, depicting essential practices in guided pathways work, is the consensus product of a group of ten national organizations that are deeply engaged in pathways work across the United States: AACC, CCRC, Achieving the Dream, Aspen Institute College Excellence Program, the Center for Community College Student Engagement, the Charles A. Dana Center at The University of Texas at Austin, Complete College America, Jobs for the Future, NCII, and SOVA.

A section on “Guidelines for Effective Coaching” briefly presents principles of practice that apply generally to organizational and leadership coaching but are stated in terms specific to the task of assisting colleges in their work on guided pathways reforms.

What follows then is the central content of the *Guide*, a section entitled, “Aligning Coaching with the Pathways Model.” A series of subsections closely follows the pathways graphic, which also is the organizing framework for the online Pathways Resource Center. For each topic addressed, the user typically will find the following resources: a brief introductory narrative; discussion questions for coach training/development; observations and advice from experienced pathways coaches; and selected resources and tools related to the topic (print and video).

It is important to note that the online presentation of these materials affords the opportunity to refresh, update, add and delete guidance and resource materials over time.

How to Use This Guide

To progress through the *Pathways Coaching Guide* “from cover to cover,” including exploration of linked print and video resources would require an impressive and unusual commitment of time. A more practical approach is to review the introductory sections and then to use the main section, “Aligning Coaching with the Pathways Model,” as a flexible resource when addressing particular aspects of work on guided pathways. Provided for each major topic are materials and tools useful in **designing coach training and professional development, creating presentations or handouts for various settings, structuring on-campus or institute-based coaching sessions, and so on.**

Acknowledgments

The work of designing and implementing guided pathways for students has become a movement, extending across an expanding number of community colleges and universities. Supporting that work is a collection of national organizations that are working collaboratively— sharing experience, intellectual capital, and a wide range of resources aimed at promoting institutional change efforts. For contributions to this *Coaching Guide*, and to the online Pathways Resource Center (www.pathwaysresources.org), acknowledgment and gratitude are particularly due to these organizations:



What is the Pathways Model?

The Pathways Model is an *integrated, institution-wide* approach to student success based on intentionally designed, clear, coherent and structured educational experiences, informed by available evidence, that guide each student effectively and efficiently from her/his point of entry through to attainment of high-quality postsecondary credentials and careers with value in the labor market. The approach involves large-scale institutional change, and the twin goals are dramatically increased **college completion and equity** in outcomes for diverse students.

Central to the pathways model are clear, educationally coherent program maps—including specific course sequences, progress milestones, and program learning outcomes—that are aligned to what will be expected of students upon program completion in the workforce and in education at the next level in a given field. Students are helped from the start to explore academic and career options, choose a program of study, and develop a full-program plan based on the program maps. These plans simplify student decision-making, and they enable colleges to provide predictable schedules, frequent feedback, and targeted support as needed to help students stay on track and complete their programs more efficiently. They also facilitate efforts by faculty to ensure that students are building the skills across their programs that they will need to succeed in employment and further education.

Guided Pathways Essential Practices

The four dimensions of the Pathways Model, together with essential practices under each, are the following (see also the graphic depiction below):

CLARIFY PATHS TO STUDENT END GOALS

- ▶ Simplify students' choices with default **program maps** developed by faculty and advisors that show students a clear pathway to completion, further education and employment in fields of importance to the region.
- ▶ Establish **transfer pathways** through alignment of pathway courses and expected learning outcomes with transfer institutions, to optimize applicability of community college credits to university majors.

HELP STUDENTS CHOOSE AND ENTER A PATHWAY

- ▶ Bridge K–12 to **higher education** by assuring early remediation in the final year of high school through the application of courseware technology in strong K12/higher education partnerships.

- ▶ Redesign traditional remediation as an “on-ramp” to a program of study, which helps students explore academic and career options from the beginning of their college experience, aligns math and other foundation skills coursework with a student’s program of study, and integrates and contextualizes instruction to build academic and non-academic foundation skills throughout the college-level curriculum, particularly in program “gateway” courses.
- ▶ Provide **accelerated remediation** to help the least prepared students succeed in college-level courses as soon as possible.

HELP STUDENTS STAY ON PATH

- ▶ Support students through a strong **advising** process, embedded and ongoing in the pathway experience and supported by appropriate technology, to help students make informed choices, strengthen clarity about transfer and career opportunities at the end of their chosen college path, ensure they develop an academic plan with predictable schedules, monitor their progress, and intervene when they go off track.
- ▶ Embed **academic and non-academic supports** throughout students’ programs to promote student learning and persistence.

ENSURE THAT STUDENTS ARE LEARNING

- ▶ Establish program-level **learning outcomes** aligned with the requirements for success in employment and further education in a given field and apply the results of learning outcomes assessment to improve the effectiveness of instruction across programs.
- ▶ Integrate **group projects, internships, and other applied learning experiences** to enhance instruction and student success in courses across programs of study.
- ▶ Align pathways with **co-curricular experiences** appropriate to the program.
- ▶ Ensure incorporation of **effective teaching practice** throughout the pathways.





Essential Capacities for Guided Pathways Reforms

Research and experience in the field indicate that the following capacities are essential for motivating and supporting higher education institutions and systems to undertake the broad-scale institutional reforms involved in implementing guided pathways effectively and at scale.

- ▶ **Leadership** demonstrating skills for managing and sustaining large-scale transformational change.
- ▶ Broad and authentic **engagement** of college faculty and staff—particularly advisors—in the design, implementation, evaluation, and ongoing improvement of pathways for students.
- ▶ **Institutional will and capacity to use data and evidence** to design academic and career pathways, monitor student progress, and implement needed improvements over time.

- ▶ Technological tools and infrastructure appropriate to support student progress through guided pathways.
- ▶ Commitment to the level of **strategically targeted professional development** that will be required to design and implement pathways at scale.
- ▶ **Policy conditions** established at the state, governing board, system, and institutional level that provide incentives, structures and supports for pathway design and implementation at scale, while removing barriers.
- ▶ A **continuing action research agenda** that examines the efficacy of guided pathways and develops practical knowledge and tools to support effective implementation at scale.

Print Resources

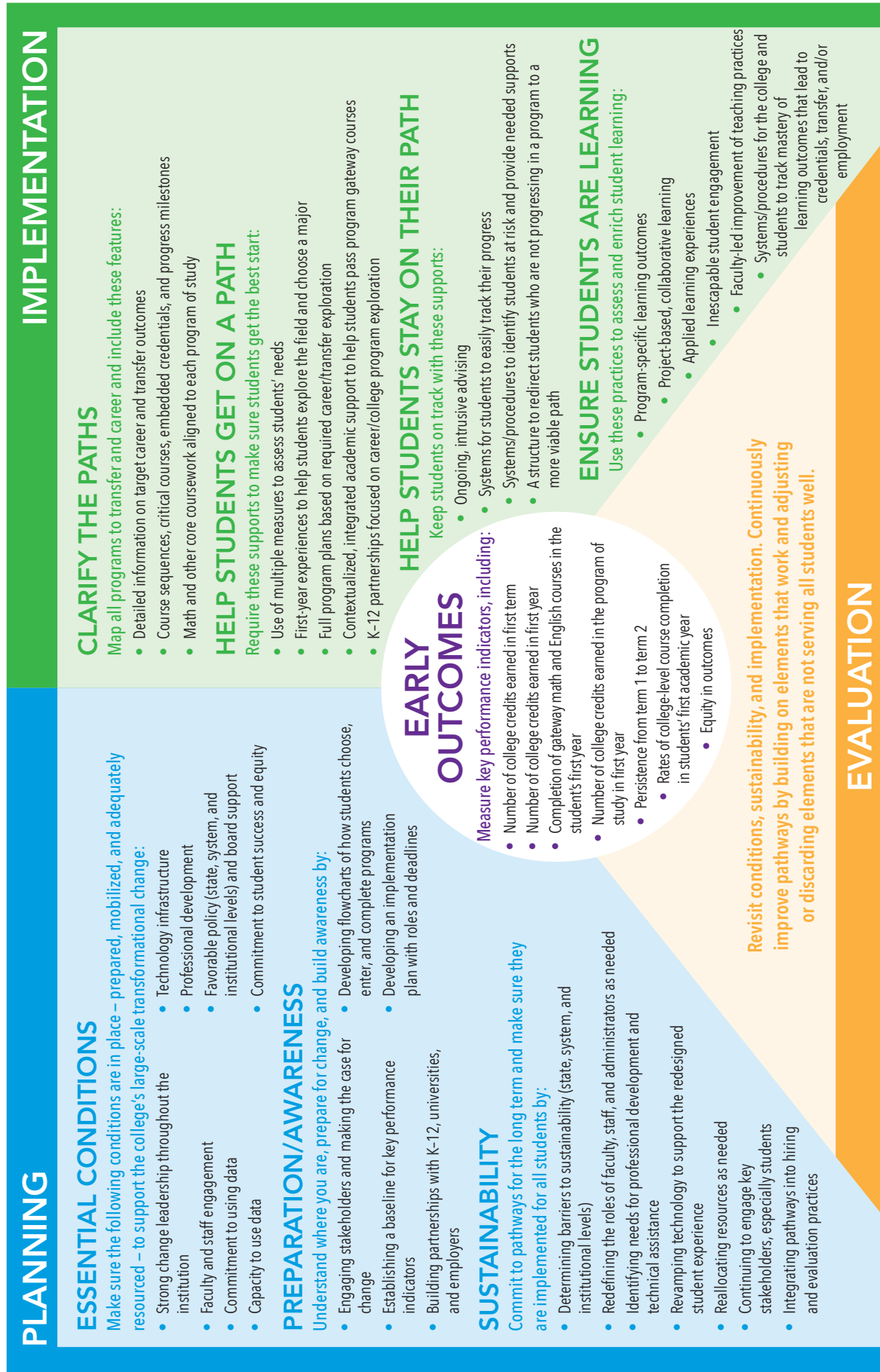
-  [What Is the Pathways Model?](#) (American Association of Community Colleges and Community College Research Center)
-  [The Movement Toward Pathways](#) (American Association of Community Colleges and Community College Research Center)
-  [Redesigning America's Community Colleges](#) (Community College Research Center)
-  [The Pathways Model](#)



Guided Pathways: Planning, Implementation, Evaluation

Creating guided pathways requires managing and sustaining large-scale transformational change. The work begins with thorough planning, continues through consistent implementation, and depends on ongoing evaluation. **The goals are to improve rates of college completion, transfer, and attainment of jobs with value in the labor market — and to achieve equity in those outcomes.**

Pathways



Contributors to this model for Guided Pathways are: American Association of Community Colleges (AACC), Achieving the Dream (ATD), The Aspen Institute College Excellence Program, Center for Community College Student Engagement (CCCSSE), Community College Research Center (CCRC), Complete College America (CCA), The Charles A. Dana Center, Jobs for the Future (JFF), National Center for Inquiry and Improvement (NCII), and Public Agenda (PA).

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The Pathways Coaching Role: What It Is, What It Is Not

The pathways coach serves as a credible, trustworthy, and supportive resource for the colleges with which she/he works. The coach asks probing questions, challenges assumptions, facilitates discussions, questions the *status quo*, helps the college attain clarity, offers substantive knowledge, provides resources (such as references, links, college examples, referrals), celebrates progress, and occasionally, when appropriate, provides guidance or advice.

On the other hand, the pathways coach is not a consultant, not an expert on every topic, not a therapist, and not ever to be confused with the college CEO. The coach refrains from attempting to set the college's agenda, specify the college's priorities, or solve the college's problems, opting instead to help the people of the college do those things for themselves.

Guidelines

The following guidelines for effective coaching are experience-based and intentionally succinct. Additional guidance and resources are provided in subsequent sections of this *Coaching Guide*.

DO THE APPROPRIATE HOMEWORK.

Prior to initial meetings with college leaders and others, review key print and digital materials: the institution's strategic plan, website, catalogue, and documents describing both foundational and advanced work on guided pathways. Continue review of pertinent materials throughout the coaching engagement.

BUILD TRUST AND RELATIONSHIPS.

Time spent with key individuals and small groups in the college pays important dividends in terms of earned trust and strong relationships. Building informal time into coaching engagements—as well as occasional unstructured conversations—is helpful, as are efforts to explicitly acknowledge the college's work, achievements, and challenges. Confidential communications will always remain confidential, even as the coach encourages openness and candor.

LISTEN AND OBSERVE ACTIVELY.

Effective coaching typically involves more listening than talking.

Astute listening and observation can produce insights for the coach regarding college culture, as well as about particular factors that may strongly affect approaches to and

progress on large-scale institutional change: role definitions, communication and leadership styles, competing priorities, decision-making processes, relationships, and so on. Thoughtful and timely reflection of these insights, delivered with care and in the appropriate setting, may help college personnel recognize aspects of their culture and their organizational behavior and processes that have not always been made explicit.

ASK STRONG QUESTIONS.

Central to effective coaching is the art of asking good questions—that is, questions that produce information important to the coach’s understanding of the college, and also questions that help to illuminate (for the coach *and* for the client) college values, achievements, challenges, policies, processes, strategic decisions, and operational choices. Worth noting is that “why” questions often communicate an implied critique, so coaches will be aware of the difference in tone, for example, between “Why would you do that?” and “Please elaborate on your thinking in regard to that decision.”

REQUEST, REVIEW, AND REFER TO DATA ABOUT STUDENT PROGRESS, OUTCOMES, AND EQUITY.

In particular, pathways coaches will strongly encourage colleges to collect, disseminate, and discuss key performance indicators that reflect early momentum of students in guided pathways. KPIs typically should include the following:

- ▶ Number of college credits earned in students’ first term
- ▶ Number of college credits earned in students’ first year
- ▶ Completion of college-level gateway math and English courses in students’ first year
- ▶ Number of college credits earned in students’ programs of study in the first year
- ▶ Persistence rate from term 1 to term 2
- ▶ Rate of college-level course completion in students’ first academic year

To monitor progress toward equity in student progress and outcomes, all of these data will be routinely disaggregated by student race, ethnicity, gender, and (if possible) economic status. Further, colleges should track each entering first-time-in-college student cohort through these early momentum points and then on to completion (or not) of certificates, degrees, and transfer. Ultimately, the efficacy of guided pathways also will be reflected through strengthened tracking of post-transfer and post-graduation outcomes in transfer institutions and in the labor market.

Coaches will seize the opportunity to model good questions and observations about the data— to understand data definitions and denominators, to commend clear and uncluttered data presentations, to encourage use of short, plain-English explanations of data, and so on. Often coaches will also model facilitation of data discussions, beginning with structured questions about what the data say and progressing to questions about “what else do we need to know?” and “so what?” and “what now?”

HELP THE COLLEGE AFFIRM, CELEBRATE, AND BUILD ON PRIOR WORK AND ACHIEVEMENTS.

Guided pathways reform involves institution-wide change and thus extensive work by many people within the college. The tasks of embarking and progressing on that work benefit greatly from frequent messages about the college's prior work, achievements gained in terms of improved student success and equity, and the ways such work can serve as building blocks for the next level of improvement effort. An important step in planning for pathways is in fact to ask cross-functional college groups to map their previous and current initiatives in terms of the pathways model—that is, appropriately categorizing work that helps the college to (1) CLARIFY THE PATHS, (2) HELP STUDENTS CHOOSE AND ENTER A PATH, (3) HELP STUDENTS STAY ON THEIR PATHS, and (4) ENSURE LEARNING through the pathways. Thus can committed people see both the fruits of their labor and also how disparate initiatives might be integrated into a clearer and more coherent educational experience for the college's students.

PROMOTE CAMPUS-WIDE ENGAGEMENT.

There can be no substitute for broad, authentic engagement of the college's constituent groups, first in informational and case-making discussions about guided pathways, and then in sessions wherein the work of designing and implementing pathways actually gets done. Good intentions notwithstanding, effective engagement does not happen by itself, but must be intentional and systematic. Further, engagement is not an event, but a continuing and multi-faceted process, and the topical focus will evolve as the work proceeds. The pathways coach can provide valuable assistance in prompting development and frequent updating of an explicit engagement plan.

FACILITATE DISCUSSIONS.

Prospective pathways coaches typically will bring considerable experience in facilitation of discussions and will bear in mind key techniques for these tasks: making clear the purpose of the discussion and the desired outcomes (information sharing? input on a decision? setting an agenda? solving a problem? developing a proposal? planning an event? making a final decision? etc.); ensuring that all voices are heard and welcomed; keeping discussions on task, on topic, and on time; summarizing the discussion clearly and succinctly; helping the group identify conclusions, decisions, and next steps; and managing emotion and conflict in ways that preserve civility and personal dignity while encouraging openness and candor. These are learned skills, honed through observation and practice; and training/professional development opportunities are available from a variety of sources.

SUPPORT DIFFICULT DISCUSSIONS.

A special kind of facilitation involves the difficult discussions that almost inevitably will need to occur when a college takes on the work of large-scale institutional change—change that involves questioning long-held assumptions, beliefs, and practices; potential shifts in role definitions and daily work; perceived threats to cherished traditions, jobs, teaching load, position power, and/or territory; and so on. The experience of colleges that have worked through these conversations suggests the need to expect a certain amount of genuine and understandable *grief* as people see that they must let go of past practice in order to emerge better and stronger and ever more student-centered. The grieving process should be recognized, respected, and supported.

Pointedly, most colleges will need also to consider head-on both unacceptably poor student outcomes across the board and the persistent equity gaps that separate groups of students by race, ethnicity, income level, and first-generation status. Helping colleges to identify disproportionate outcomes for certain student groups and then to address potential causes—including unconscious bias and institutional racism—is a central challenge for coaches.

These conversations are critical and not to be under-estimated or taken on without serious thought and a respectful, non-judgmental approach. Coaches without extensive experience may well wish to seek expert assistance, mentoring, role-playing opportunities, and additional training.

PROVIDE SUPPORT FOR CHANGE LEADERSHIP.

This explicitly includes leadership at all levels of the college organization—governing boards, CEOs and their leadership groups, mid-level administrators, faculty, and staff. In each instance, current and prospective leaders will need to understand critical roles that they can play in promoting transformational change with students at the center. Across the institution, leaders will need to be equipped with strategies and tools for key tasks: describing the pathways approach; making the case for large-scale change and creating a sense of urgency; developing systematic plans for continuing and authentic campus-wide engagement in pathways planning and implementation; constructive uses of data depicting the student experience; resource allocation and reallocation aligned with the pathways work; policy review and modification; and effective communication regarding the work, how people can be involved, the timeline, who makes what decisions, and what is being accomplished.

LIFT UP STUDENT VOICES.

The work of designing and implementing guided pathways is, above all, about *students*. It is about ensuring effective, efficient, and coherent educational experiences for *students*. It is not about us (the college, the faculty, the advisors, the administrators, the coach). To keep students at the center of the work requires that colleges listen *systematically* to students. That is to say, while there may be value in having student representatives on work groups or committees, the greater value is in work that helps faculty, staff and administrators gain understanding of the *typical* student experience, as contrasted with *one* student's experience or *the best* student experience. Thus, the pathways coach will encourage the college to elicit students' perspectives on their experience through well-designed surveys and focus groups.

REMEMBER ALWAYS WHO IS THE COLLEGE CEO.

No one other than that individual understands so intimately the expectations of the governing board and/or system leader, the political pressures of the job, the competing priorities for limited attention and resources, the array of disparate challenges that need to be addressed. An effective coach can serve as a sounding board, help to clarify options and priorities, encourage focus, provide examples, and aid in delineating the path forward; but it is the CEO who was appointed to the leadership position and who is accountable for decisions made and actions taken. That position warrants respect and support.

Additional Pathways Resources

A larger collection of selected resources for the work of planning and implementing guided pathways is provided in the online Pathways Resource Center at www.pathwaysresources.org. There the user may click on the graphic model of pathways work to find additional information.

The screenshot displays the Pathways Resource Center website. At the top, there is a navigation bar with the Pathways logo and links for "View Full Pathways Model", "Why Pathways?", "Toolkits", and "Pathways Collaborative". The main heading reads "GUIDED PATHWAYS RESOURCE CENTER" and "TOOLS AND RESOURCES FOR COLLEGES". Below this, a paragraph explains that bringing guided pathways to scale involves substantial redesign of students' educational experience. Another paragraph states that the resource center is organized around the guided pathways model, with sections for planning, implementation, early outcomes, and evaluation. A central graphic model shows a triangle divided into three colored sections: blue for "PLANNING", green for "IMPLEMENTATION", and orange for "EVALUATION". A white circle in the center of the triangle is labeled "EARLY OUTCOMES". Below the graphic, there are three boxes: "Why Guided Pathways?" with a thumbnail image, "View or download the full guided pathways model", and "Toolkits" with buttons for "Pathways Institutes", "Engagement Toolkit", "Tools for Leaders", and "Pathways Coaching Guide". At the bottom, a section titled "PATHWAYS COLLABORATIVE" lists various partner organizations including AAACC, Achieving the Dream, The Aspen Institute, Carnegie Math Pathways, WestEd, CCRC, Complete College America, The University of Texas at Austin Charles A. Dana Center, JFF, National Center for Inquiry & Improvement, and SOVA. The footer contains the email address "info@pathwaysresources.org" and the year "©2018 Pathways".