



ATTAINING COLLEGE EXCELLENCE AND EQUITY

Since taking office, the Biden-Harris Administration and the U.S. Department of Education (Department) have been committed to a new vision of college excellence—one that uplifts inclusivity, equity, and excellence, rather than exclusivity and privilege.

The Raise the Bar: Attaining College Excellence and Equity initiative reflects the Department’s commitment to ensuring that students of all backgrounds, ages, disability statuses, and income levels can succeed in any postsecondary pathway. This initiative is focused on supporting institutions and states to implement key evidence-based strategies that address critical loss points along students’ postsecondary journeys, including data-driven improvement, holistic advising and wraparound services, credit mobility and transfer support, and career-connected learning pathways.



Key Focus Area: Credit Mobility and Transfer Support

College students are increasingly mobile across institutions and other learning environments. As student pathways have become more complex, however, credit transfer policies and practices have not kept pace. Though 40 percent of students transfer during their studies, students lose more than 40 percent of their accumulated credits on average when transferring between institutions,¹ which costs them time, money, and too often the credentials they sought to earn.

This issue is particularly acute given that many undergraduates (44 percent) begin their studies at predominately certificate- or associate-granting institutions.² While nearly 80 percent of community college students intend to transfer to earn bachelor’s degrees,³ actual transfer and degree completion rates have remained stubbornly low. Only 16 percent

of students who start in community colleges earn bachelor’s degrees within six years, with lower rates for students from low-income communities (11 percent) and students of color (9-13 percent).⁴ Addressing this problem can help diversify baccalaureate pathways, especially in the wake of the recent U.S. Supreme Court ruling on affirmative action.⁵ This gap between student aspirations and success is due in part to the many barriers students face with credit mobility and transfer.

Fixing the broken transfer system is one of the key strategies the Department is focused on to help the field improve completion rates, close completion gaps, and ensure students are graduating with credentials of value that lead to economic success. These are four key levers states and institutions can consider using to address the transfer problem.



1.

**ENACTING STATE
TRANSFER POLICY**



2.

**IMPLEMENTING
INSTITUTIONAL
TRANSFER POLICY
AND PRACTICE**



3.

**PROVIDING
PROACTIVE TRANSFER
ADVISING AND
NAVIGATION SUPPORT**



4.

**LEVERAGING DATA
AND TECHNOLOGY
TRANSFER
SOLUTIONS**

1. <https://www.gao.gov/assets/gao-17-574.pdf>

2. Department analysis of NPSAS:20 data for undergraduates at <https://nces.ed.gov/datalab/>

3. <https://ccrc.tc.columbia.edu/publications/community-college-transfer.html>

4. https://higher.ed.aspeninstitute.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/02/CCRC-ASP-NSCRC-TT-2Y-Report_Final.pdf

5. <https://sites.ed.gov/ous/files/2023/09/Diversity-and-Opportunity-in-Higher-Education.pdf>



1. ENACTING STATE TRANSFER POLICY

There are a range of policies that states have implemented and designed to improve transfer, including defined transfer pathways, transfer guarantees, financial aid for transfer students, and other reforms. States may consider using these resources to conduct transfer policy audits, develop transfer councils, and ensure transfer policies are aligned with attainment and workforce goals.

- *The Transfer Reset: Rethinking Equitable Policy for Today's Learners* by HCM Strategists et al (2021): <https://hcmstrategists.com/resources/the-transfer-reset-rethinking-equitable-policy-for-todays-learners-by-the-tackling-transfer-policy-advisory-board/>
- *The Emerging Role of Public Higher Education Systems in Advancing Transfer Student Success* by the National Association of System Heads (2022): <https://nash.edu/wp-content/uploads/2022/04/Power-of-Systems-Transfer-Report-2022.pdf>



2. IMPLEMENTING INSTITUTIONAL TRANSFER POLICY AND PRACTICE

Many institutions are also working to update their own transfer policies and practices. There are several resources that offer a roadmap for actions that have the potential to improve transfer such as upgrading transcript review processes, creating clear transfer program maps, engaging staff and faculty across campuses, and fostering regional transfer partnerships.

- *The Transfer Playbook: Essential Practices for Two- and Four-Year Colleges* by the Aspen Institute (2016): <https://www.aspeninstitute.org/publications/transfer-playbook/>
- *Reimagining Transfer for Student Success* by the American Council on Education (2021): <https://www.acenet.edu/Research-Insights/Pages/Student-Support/Reimagining-Transfer-for-Student-Success.aspx>



3. PROVIDING PROACTIVE TRANSFER ADVISING AND NAVIGATION SUPPORT

Transfer students face numerous hurdles as they navigate their new campuses, interpret program requirements, and understand how their prior learning has been applied to their credentials. These resources may help institutions support transfer students with proactive guidance and navigation to help them through this critical transition.

- *Supporting Transfer Student Success: Five Key Faculty Practices* by Achieving the Dream (2021): <https://achievingthedream.org/supporting-transfer-student-success-nists/>
- *Transfer Advising: Sharpening a Powerful Tool for College Success and Equity* by SOVA et al (2021): <https://tacklingtransfer.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/09/TT-Transfer-Advising-Report.pdf>



4. LEVERAGING DATA AND TECHNOLOGY TRANSFER SOLUTIONS

To help improve transfer, states and institutions can track their student outcomes data and assess the success of policy and practice reforms. States and institutions can also explore new solutions including technology-enabled tools to map transfer pathways, assess course equivalencies across institutions, and empower students with their own transcript data.

- *Tracking Transfer: New Measures of Institutional and State Effectiveness* by the Community College Research Center (2016): <https://ccrc.tc.columbia.edu/publications/tracking-transfer-institutional-state-effectiveness.html>
- *Technology as an Enabler of Credit Transfer* by AACRAO in *Reimagining Transfer for Student Success* by ACE (2021): <https://www.acenet.edu/Research-Insights/Pages/Student-Support/Reimagining-Transfer-for-Student-Success.aspx>