

# THE STATE OF STATE TRANSFER POLICY

A Typology to Evaluate Transfer and Recognition of Learning Policies

A TACKLING TRANSFER REPORT | WORKING PAPER | 2021



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## A Typology to Evaluate Transfer and Recognition of Learning Policies

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### TACKLING TRANSFER

The Aspen Institute College Excellence Program, HCM Strategists, and Sova have joined together through the Tackling Transfer initiative to partner with institutional leaders, policymakers, and practitioners in Minnesota, Texas, and Virginia to dramatically improve transfer outcomes for baccalaureate-seeking students who begin at community colleges.

This comprehensive effort incorporates policy, practice, research, and strategic communications to foster the conditions for scaled and measurable improvements for baccalaureate-seeking transfer students, including the large number of students from low income backgrounds and students of color who begin their education at community colleges.

**The Aspen Institute College Excellence Program** aims to advance higher education practices and leadership that significantly improve student learning, completion, and employment after college—especially for the many students from low income backgrounds and students of color on American campuses.

**HCM Strategists** is a public policy and advocacy consulting firm committed to removing barriers and transforming how education is delivered. Our work focuses on developing sound public policy, aligning teaching and learning practices and advancing meaningful accountability and equitable strategic financing. HCM works to support leaders and organizations that prioritize the voices and outcomes of Black, Hispanic, Native American, recent immigrant, low-income and adult students.

**Sova** focuses on improving the quality and accelerating the pace of complex problem solving in the areas of higher education and workforce development. Animated by a core commitment to advancing socioeconomic mobility for more Americans, Sova pursues its mission through distinctive approaches to will-building, strategic planning, change leadership and process improvement.

Our work on transfer is made possible by the generous support from Ascendium, ECMC Foundation, Joyce Foundation, and the Kresge Foundation.

### ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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# Executive Summary

## Introduction

The COVID-19 global pandemic upended college plans and attendance for countless Americans. Enrollment is down, particularly at open-access community colleges<sup>1</sup>, as students contend with resultant health and financial challenges, logistics of campus reopenings and shifts to online learning, and a general veil of uncertainty.

Yet for transfer students in particular, the pandemic has further complicated an already difficult process. Over 80 percent of students entering community college intend to earn a bachelor's degree at a four-year institution, but only 14 percent do so within six years.<sup>2</sup> Systemic barriers to completion for Black and Hispanic community college students are higher than for White students, producing a six-year bachelor's degree completion rate that is about half the rate of White students.<sup>3</sup> Similarly, higher-income students are more likely to transfer and complete a bachelor's degree than their lower-income peers.<sup>4</sup>

In far too many instances, transfer students' aspirations are derailed as they confront opaque and disjointed transfer information, disrupted student aid, lost time and money when credits do not apply toward a degree at their new institution, and other hurdles. The U.S. Government Accountability Office found that students who transferred from 2004 to 2009 lost an estimated 43 percent of their credits as they switched institutions.<sup>5</sup> For many transfer students, these barriers become major speedbumps—if not roadblocks—to the personal and financial rewards of a college degree.

HCM Strategists (HCM) has long tracked state higher education policies and budget developments, collecting detailed metrics to inform policy development, analysis and advocacy on a host of issues. With the launch of Tackling Transfer in late 2018, HCM began aggregating data elements from our ongoing research to develop a clearer picture of the transfer policies currently in

place in each state to support the deliberations of the initiative's Policy Advisory Board. We sought to understand what policies states have adopted to facilitate student transfer, improve credit applicability and recognize student learning, and how these varied across states.

We identified 16 transfer-specific state or systemwide policy elements that illuminate the current state policy landscape. Using public sources, including research conducted by the Education Commission of the States, we have documented and updated the status of each element, forming the basis for a comprehensive national transfer policy scan.<sup>6</sup> To confirm accuracy, we conducted due diligence in several ways: we sent a critical mass of state profiles to state contacts for their review; requested reviews of the full typology by field experts; and double-checked our research. The scan is periodically updated, with the last update conducted in October 2020 to support the analysis and writing of this publication. Given these updates, as well as our intention to expand the scope of the research over time, this paper is labeled a "Working Paper." Suggestions and updates on relevant state policies are welcomed. Please send any thoughts to: [info@hcmstrategists.com](mailto:info@hcmstrategists.com)

## A Typology of State Transfer Policies and Recognition of Learning Policies

To support the field in monitoring and advancing necessary transfer policy reform, this report establishes a first-of-its kind typology framework to assess state transfer policies in each of four critical policy clusters that research has shown affect student outcomes:

- **Pathways and Credit Applicability;**
- **Student Supports;**
- **Institutional Collaboration and Implementation; and**
- **Accountability.**

Each policy cluster consists of a subset of the 16 policy elements in the national scan. Within each

cluster, state policies are classified at one of two levels depending on their degree of sophistication.

Foundational transfer policies, the most common, are “building blocks” that experts consider useful but insufficient at producing the conditions for change that will result in equitable student outcomes. Intermediate transfer policies are enabled by foundational policies and represent further developmental progress but are not indicative of an advanced approach incorporating the full body of best practices—an approach that has yet to take shape.

Across the field there is not yet sufficient evidence or clear consensus on what the ideal combination of policies would be to accelerate equitable transfer student outcomes. Over the past year and a half, the Tackling Transfer Policy Advisory Board has been interrogating this question, identifying policy areas of interest such as strategic finance, financial aid and data transparency. The Board is expected to release a report with recommendations for next-generation transfer policymaking in the summer of 2021.

This qualitative classification is not a rating or ranking system. Rather, it is a way of gauging states’ progress in adopting and implementing a more student-centered and robust set of interrelated transfer policies. Armed with this information, policymakers, advocates, practitioners and researchers can assess where best to focus their efforts to redesign transfer policies to be more responsive to the diverse needs of today’s students. HCM plans to update the typology annually to account for policy advancements and new data elements informed by available research.

The presence of a policy does not necessarily mean that it has been implemented well and to positive effect. However, a state that has implemented many of the policies tracked here may be one that is intentionally seeking ways to better support transfer students. We also hope this information is useful to state policymakers as they consider what they have in place and how they might learn from peer states.

## Key Findings

Key findings of this analysis include:

- 1. While states have various policies in place to address transfer, and all states have adopted at least one transfer policy, there remain significant barriers to student mobility across learning institutions and platforms. In addition, as noted earlier, transfer student outcomes remain dismal, and highly inequitable by income and race/ethnicity, in all states.**
- 2. Overall, across all 50 states and across the 16 policy elements we tracked, the average number of policies being implemented is just 8.8—just over half of all policy elements.**
- 3. No state is implementing all 16 of the policy elements we tracked. Florida, Hawaii, and Nevada come closest with 12 policies. Five states implement five or fewer policies, with one state implementing just one policy.**
- 4. When analyzing groups of foundational and intermediate policies, states are implementing an average of slightly above 7 of the foundational policies across all clusters, and merely about 1.5 of the intermediate policies.**
  - Foundational policies in the Pathways and Credit Applicability policy cluster are the most commonly implemented policies, followed by the foundational policies in the Institutional Collaboration and Implementation policy cluster.
  - Notably, the least commonly implemented policy is the Intermediate policy in the Student Supports policy cluster, which is Financial Aid Supports Transfer Students.
- 5. The most common state policy activity is focused on developing student transfer pathways. The great majority of state policies are geared toward a linear two-year to four-year transfer progression that does not align with the multi-directional, fluid movement of many of today’s students. This lack of alignment presents obstacles and frustration for students, but also opportunities to rethink and refine these policies.**

## 6. Key findings in each policy cluster include:

- *Pathways and Credit Applicability*
  - Just 13 states are implementing all five Pathways and Credit Applicability policy elements. While the goal of some of these policies is to not only accept credits, but also apply those credits to program completion, the field has a long way to go in achieving applicability of credit.
- *Student Supports*
  - Most states—43 total—are either implementing just one or none of the student support policies we tracked.
  - Just six states have policies that support advising for students with transfer interest.
  - Just three states have financial aid specifically targeted for transfer students.
- *Institutional Collaboration and Implementation*
  - Just one state is implementing all six Institutional Collaboration and Implementation policies. Dual enrollment is the most commonly implemented policy in this cluster, and policies that encourage articulation agreements with private universities is the least commonly implemented policy in this cluster.
- *Accountability*
  - There are very few policy elements that require means of promoting institutional accountability for transfer student success. Just four states have a funding formula that awards for transfer student success for both the community college and four-year sectors.
  - Thirty-nine states have primary transfer policies inclusive of all of the state's two- and four-year public sectors.

## 7. The lack of policy elements currently in use across states in areas such as accountability and finance is significant in itself, confirming the vital need for all states to do a lot more to set expectations, incent behaviors and hold

**themselves and their institutions accountable for serving transfer students well. The forthcoming Tackling Transfer Policy Advisory Board report will make recommendations for how states can address these policy gaps, which we will then begin to track for future typology updates.**

## Conclusion

As states look to the future and consider how to support their students, there is a critical imperative to assess the quality of statewide higher education transfer policies and their impact on students, especially those students from populations that have historically faced the highest barriers to completion. After looking across all 50 states' transfer policies at a moment in time—based on publicly available information as of October 2020—it is apparent that all states have room for improvement. In particular, this analysis suggests states can do far more to support accountability for institutions to improve transfer student outcomes, as well as incentives for institutions to implement interventions designed to support transfer students. Adopting and enhancing policies to provide support services and financial aid for transfer students are also areas that offer strong opportunities for improvement.

Equipped with the information outlined in this Working Paper, states have a clearer picture of gaps that exist in the types of policies that research shows to have a positive impact on student outcomes. Understanding such gaps presents a unique opportunity for lawmakers and advocates to wield this information to institute or augment existing transfer policy and pathways, innovate, and critically examine how transfer students are supported. It is our hope that future iterations of this Working Paper will find and be able to showcase new, innovative policies that are responsive to the needs of transfer students as states and the field continues to grow and adapt. Informed by these findings, the Tackling Transfer Policy Advisory Board's forthcoming report will make recommendations and offer states and systems a roadmap for transfer reform. Future iterations of this Working Paper and typology will monitor state activity in the areas recommended by the Board.



# Introduction

The COVID-19 global pandemic upended college plans and attendance for countless Americans. Enrollment is down, particularly at open-access community colleges,<sup>7</sup> as students contend with resultant health and financial challenges, logistics of campus reopenings and shifts to online learning, and a general veil of uncertainty.

And new research by the National Student Clearinghouse shows a decline in typical student transfer and mobility amidst the pandemic. Particularly for Black and Latinx students bearing the most adverse impacts, this unwelcome development may have lingering effects on affordable degree attainment and career trajectories.<sup>8</sup> Because students from low-income families and communities of color often begin their higher education journey at a community college, transfer is an important vehicle for achieving more equitable bachelor's degree attainment rates.<sup>9</sup>

**“ For many transfer students, these barriers become major speedbumps—if not roadblocks—to the personal and financial rewards of a college degree.**

Yet for transfer students in particular, the pandemic has further complicated an already difficult process. Over 80

percent of students entering community college intend to earn a bachelor's degree at a four-year institution, but only 14 percent of the 2013 cohort of entering community college students do so within six years.<sup>10</sup>

Systemic barriers to completion for Black and Hispanic community college students are higher than for White students, producing a six-year bachelor's degree completion rate that is about half the rate of White students.<sup>11</sup> Similarly, higher-income students are more likely to transfer and complete a bachelor's degree than their lower-income peers.<sup>12</sup>

In far too many instances, transfer students' aspirations are derailed as they confront opaque

and disjointed transfer information, disrupted student aid, lost time and money when credits do not apply toward a degree at their new institution, and other hurdles.

## **Transfer Policy:** Elements by Cluster

### **Pathways and Credit Applicability**

- Maps Academic Pathways across two- and four-year sectors
- Grants students Junior Standing at entry
- Guarantees transfer of a credit core or Associates Degree
- Credits meet general education requirements
- Provides common course numbering

### **Students Supports**

- Provides student-facing information about transfer
- Supports advising for students with transfer interest
- Targets financial aid supports for transfer students

### **Institutional Collaboration and Implementation**

- Includes Dual Enrollment credits
- Includes Reverse Transfer
- Includes Competency-based Education (CBE) or online courses
- Encourages Articulation Agreements with private institutions
- Supports Prior Learning Assessment (PLA)
- Supports two- and four-year faculty to collaborate on transfer

### **Accountability**

- Primary transfer policy includes all two- and four-year public sectors
- Awards transfer success through a funding formula with Explicit Transfer Metrics

The U.S. Government Accountability Office found that students lost an estimated 43 percent of their credits as they switched institutions.<sup>13</sup> For many transfer students, these barriers become major speedbumps—if not roadblocks—to the personal and financial rewards of a college degree.

Research conducted prior to the pandemic shows that a substantial portion of students typically transfer at least once after initially enrolling in college: 38 percent of students who start at a four-year institution and 37 percent of students who start at a two-year community college move to another institution.<sup>14</sup> And among those who transfer, 45 percent do so multiple times and in multiple directions.<sup>15</sup> Their mobility reflects that of today's society, where demand for options and information to be accessible across platforms and in real-time has exploded. Indeed, as today's students juggle college with work, parenting and other commitments, they access learning in a host of ways, from the classroom to the workplace to the military or online.

With so many students on the move, it is essential that states and higher education systems have effective, equitable and modernized policies in place to foster these transitions and recognize the learning that students have gained along sometimes multidirectional pathways. But do they?

## The State of State Transfer Policy: A National Scan

HCM Strategists (HCM) has long tracked state higher education policies and budget developments, collecting detailed metrics to inform policy development, analysis and advocacy on a host of issues. With the launch of Tackling Transfer in late 2018, HCM began aggregating data elements from our ongoing research to develop a clearer picture of the transfer policies currently in place in each state to support the deliberations of the initiative's Policy Advisory Board. We sought to understand what policies states have adopted to facilitate student transfer, improve credit applicability and recognize student learning, and how these varied across states.

We identified 16 transfer-specific state or systemwide policy elements that illuminate the current state policy landscape. Using public sources, including research conducted by the Education Commission of the States, we have documented and updated the status of each element, forming the basis for a comprehensive national transfer policy scan.<sup>16</sup> To confirm accuracy, we conducted due diligence in several ways: we sent a critical mass of state profiles to state contacts for their review; requested reviews of the full typology by field experts; and double-checked our research. The scan is periodically updated, with the last update conducted in October 2020 to support the analysis and writing of this publication. Given the frequent updates to this research, as well as the intention to continue to expand the scope of the research, this paper is labeled a "Working Paper." Suggestions and updates to state policies are welcomed. Please send any thoughts to: [info@hcmstrategists.com](mailto:info@hcmstrategists.com)

Key findings of this analysis include:

- 1. While states have various policies in place to address transfer, and all states have adopted at least one transfer policy, there remain significant barriers to student mobility across learning institutions and platforms. In addition, as noted earlier, transfer student outcomes remain dismal, and highly inequitable by income and race/ethnicity, in all states.**
- 2. Overall, across all 50 states and across the 16 policy elements we tracked, the average number of policies being implemented is just 8.8—just over half of all policy elements.**
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- Notably, the least commonly implemented policy is the Intermediate policy in the Student Supports policy cluster, which is Financial Aid Supports Transfer Students.

**5. The most common state policy activity is focused on developing student transfer pathways. The great majority of state policies are geared toward a linear two-year to four-year transfer progression that does not align with the multi-directional, fluid movement of many of today's students. This lack of alignment presents obstacles and frustration for students, but also opportunities to rethink and refine these policies.**

**6. Key findings in each policy cluster include:**

- *Pathways and Credit Applicability*
  - Just 13 states are implementing all five Pathways and Credit Applicability policy elements. While the goal of some of these policies is to not only accept credits, but also apply those credits to program completion, the field has a long way to go in achieving applicability of credit.
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  - Just three states have financial aid specifically targeted for transfer students.
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  - Just one state is implementing all six Institutional Collaboration and Implementation policies. Dual enrollment is the most commonly implemented policy in this cluster,

and policies that encourage articulation agreements with private universities is the least commonly implemented policy in this cluster.

- *Accountability*
  - There are very few policy elements that require means of promoting institutional accountability for transfer student success. Just four states have a funding formula that awards for transfer student success for both the community college and four-year sectors.
  - Thirty-nine states have primary transfer policies inclusive of all of the state's two- and four-year public sectors.

**7. The lack of policy elements currently in use across states in areas such as accountability and finance is significant in itself, confirming the vital need for all states to do a lot more to set expectations, incent behaviors and hold themselves and their institutions accountable for serving transfer students well. The forthcoming Tackling Transfer Policy Advisory Board report will make recommendations for how states can address these policy gaps, which we will then begin to track for future typology updates.**

## A Transfer Typology

To support the field in monitoring and advancing necessary transfer policy reform, this report establishes a first-of-its kind typology framework to assess state transfer policies in each of four critical policy clusters that research has shown affect student outcomes:

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cluster, state policies are classified at one of two levels depending on their degree of sophistication. Foundational transfer policies, the most common, are “building blocks” that experts consider useful but insufficient at producing the conditions for change that will result in equitable student outcomes. Intermediate transfer policies are enabled by foundational policies and represent further developmental progress but are not indicative of an advanced approach incorporating the full body of best practices.

Across the field there is not yet sufficient evidence or clear consensus on what the ideal combination of policies would be to accelerate equitable transfer student outcomes. Over the past year and a half, the Tackling Transfer Policy Advisory Board has been interrogating this question, identifying policy areas of interest such as strategic finance, financial aid and data transparency. The Board is expected to release a report with recommendations for next-generation transfer policymaking in the summer of 2021.

This qualitative classification is not a rating or ranking system. Rather, it is a way of gauging states’ progress in adopting and implementing a more student-centered and robust set of interrelated transfer policies. Armed with this information, policymakers, advocates, practitioners and researchers can assess where best to focus their efforts to redesign transfer policies to be more responsive to the diverse needs of today’s students. HCM plans to update the typology annually to account for policy advancements and new data elements informed by available research. The following section describes each policy cluster and its underlying policy elements.

# Methodology

After finalizing our most recent round of data collection in October 2020, we looked across this national transfer policy scan to identify top-line trends. From this preliminary analysis, we noted that some elements of transfer policy—such as those aimed at clarifying academic pathways

between two and four-year sectors—are more common, while others—such as financial aid policies that incent transfer—are less common. Table 1 shows the 16 transfer policy elements along with their descriptions.

Table 1. **Transfer Policy Elements**

POLICY ELEMENT	DESCRIPTION
<b>Maps Academic Pathways Across Two- and Four-Year Sectors</b>	A policy that clearly shows the sequential list of courses or credits in the order a student should take them to progress towards a specific major or credential.
<b>Grants Students Junior Standing at Entry</b>	A policy that allows for a student to enter at the junior level upon acceptance of a designated set of courses that satisfy credit core or general education requirements.
<b>Guaranteed Transfer of a Credit Core or an Associate Degree</b>	A policy that allows for a student to transfer a designated set of course credits and apply those credits to satisfy a specified set of requirements (e.g., core curriculum or general education credits).
<b>Credits Meet General Education Requirements</b>	A policy that allows a student to transfer a designated set of course credits and apply those credits to satisfy general education requirements.
<b>Provides Common Course Numbering</b>	A policy that includes a systematic numbering system that facilitates course to course articulation and transfer.
<b>Provides Student-Facing Information About Transfer</b>	A policy that ensures that clear and understandable information is made easily accessible to students so they can learn about transfer pathways available.
<b>Supports Advising for Students with Transfer Interest</b>	A policy that mandates or facilitates explicit advising programs or interventions designed for current or prospective transfer students.
<b>Targets Financial Aid Supports for Transfer Students</b>	A policy that creates a targeted financial aid program that delivers state aid resources specifically to transfer students.
<b>Includes Dual Enrollment Credits</b>	A policy that allows for the transfer of college-level credits earned in high school through dual enrollment programs.
<b>Includes Reverse Transfer</b>	A policy that allows for the awarding of an associate degree to a student who satisfied requirements for that credential but who transferred to a baccalaureate degree-granting institution prior to the awarding of the associate degree.
<b>Includes Competency Based Education (CBE) or Online Courses</b>	A policy that allows for students to transfer credits earned through Competency Based Education (CBE) or online course credit.
<b>Encourages Articulation Agreements with Private Institutions</b>	A policy that includes memoranda of understanding between public two-year and four-year institutions and private institutions that articulate the acceptance of transfer courses.

POLICY ELEMENT	DESCRIPTION
<b>Supports Prior Learning Assessment</b>	A policy that allows the granting of college-level credits for learning acquired outside the traditional academic environment (such as through military training, or work-based learning).
<b>Supports Two- and Four-Year Faculty to Collaborate on Transfer</b>	A policy that mandates or facilitates collaboration between community college and university faculty on the articulation and acceptance of transfer credits across institutions.
<b>Primary Transfer Policy Includes All Public Two- and Four-Year Sectors</b>	A policy that explicitly includes all public community colleges and universities in the state. This does not capture private institutions.
<b>Awards Transfer Student Success Through a Funding Formula with Explicit Transfer Metrics</b>	A postsecondary funding formula that includes explicit transfer metrics that award institutions for accepting and credentialing transfer students.

## Transfer Policy Clusters

These 16 transfer policy elements can be categorized into four policy clusters based on their shared policy objectives. These clusters are: Pathways and Credit Applicability; Student Supports; Institutional Collaboration and Implementation; and Accountability. We identified the available research behind each policy cluster to understand the potential efficacy of the policies in each grouping in promoting student persistence and completion, as well as in closing equity gaps in attainment for students of historically underrepresented and underserved backgrounds.


This report elevates the definition of equity developed by the Tackling Transfer Policy Advisory Board.<sup>17</sup>

**“Equity in postsecondary outcomes will be achieved if the identities assigned to oppressed groups, such as different race, ethnicity, sex, sexual identity, sexual orientation, socioeconomic status, age, disability, and religion, no longer act as a powerful predictor of how one fares, with the root causes of inequities, not just their manifestations, eliminated.”<sup>18</sup>**

**In the case of postsecondary outcomes, at the national level, there is ample evidence that higher education institutions create particularly burdensome barriers to success for Black, Latinx, and Indigenous students and for students from low-income backgrounds.<sup>19</sup> In addition, states, systems and institutions need to understand and address equity gaps in the populations they serve, paying attention to the full range of students who are not well supported through to completion. Local data might, for example, point to equity gaps for Asian Pacific Islander Desi American students, or lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and queer (or questioning) and others (LGBTQ+) that must be similarly addressed.**

## Pathways and Credit Applicability Cluster

The types of transfer policies most commonly implemented across states are under the Pathways and Credit Applicability cluster. This cluster includes all policies identified for this analysis related to the application of course credits and student learning as students enter the postsecondary pipeline, move across institutions, and progress to graduation.

 **The RP Group asked students their advice for changing transfer policies and practices.<sup>20</sup> Example pieces of advice include:**

- **Integrate career growth and opportunity information into educational and transfer planning, and ensure students know the type of employment they can secure with a bachelor's degree in their area of study**
- **Help students see clear map from entry to transfer, including all courses and requirements for different types of transfer destinations**

Of the 16 policy elements, five can be grouped into this policy cluster. Notably, the research for three of these five pathways areas draws on the “50-State Comparison: Transfer and Articulation Policies” conducted by the Education Commission of the States.<sup>21</sup> The five policy elements are:

- **Maps Academic Pathways Across Two- and Four-Year Sectors;**
- **Grants Students Junior Standing at Entry;**
- **Guaranteed Transfer of a Credit Core or Associates Degree;**
- **Credits Meet General Education Requirements; and**
- **Provides Common Course Numbering.**

### What the Research Says

The transfer process can be exceedingly complicated for students to navigate. Clear academic pathways that map courses that a student can take across institutions to reach a specific degree or credential remove some of the

stress and uncertainty from the transfer process. “Guided pathways” reforms are increasingly being adopted to help prevent students from meandering through a disconnected assortment of courses, programs and support services, as they do in the “cafeteria model” present at most community colleges.<sup>22</sup> These pathways present courses “in the context of highly structured, educationally coherent program maps that align with students’ goals for careers and further education.”<sup>23</sup>

Too many students lose credit when they transfer, which translates to wasted effort and resources by both students and institutions—not to mention taxpayers. Students can lose credits outright when their receiving institution does not accept coursework from their previous institution, forcing them to repeat courses. They experience degree program credit loss when their transfer credits are applied as electives rather than academic credits toward a particular major, leaving them with excess credits beyond those needed to meet degree requirements.<sup>24</sup> Both types of credit loss result in costly delays to degree completion and entry into the workforce.<sup>25</sup>

Policies that increase credit applicability to degrees can ease students’ transitions from two-year to four-year institutions and boost degree attainment, as students are more likely to complete a credential when they can transfer more of their credits.<sup>26</sup> Such policies facilitate credit transfer and help students to know that their credits will be accepted at their new institution. For instance, in states with a transferable core of lower-division courses, all public postsecondary institutions agree upon a set of general education courses whose credits will transfer in full among those institutions.<sup>27</sup> Common course numbering policies help eliminate confusion by applying the same titles, identification numbers and descriptions to such courses within state institutions.<sup>28</sup>

**Equity Impact:** Policies to create clearer transfer pathways and improve credit applicability stand to enhance equity by expanding on-ramps to and roadmaps through college to a degree, which is particularly beneficial for first-generation college

students and those from minoritized communities who often face higher barriers to completion and may not have been exposed to, and supported to navigate, the complexities of the postsecondary education system.<sup>29</sup>

## Student Supports Cluster

The Student Supports cluster includes all transfer policies identified for this analysis related to non-curricular efforts to keep students on track, including how students receive information, advice and financial assistance as they navigate transfer. Of the 16 policy elements we tracked, three fall under the Student Supports cluster, including:

- **Provides Student-Facing Information About Transfer;**
- **Supports Advising for Students with Transfer Interest; and**
- **Targets Financial Aid Supports for Transfer Students.**

 **Existing policies do not address the common reasons students lose credit: student uncertainty and resource-constrained advising.<sup>30</sup>**

### What the Research Says

Lack of clear information about transfer and sufficient guidance through the process is a significant barrier for transfer students. Federal law requires institutions to publicly disclose their credit transfer policies on their website and make available a list of colleges with which they have articulation agreements on that website or through other means.<sup>31</sup> But the U.S. Government Accountability Office found that a considerable number of institutions did not list their partner institutions on their websites, and that the U.S. Department of Education provided only limited transfer information, making it more difficult for students to understand their transfer options.<sup>32</sup> A study of community college websites in Texas found wide variability in the ease of access and usefulness of online transfer information—a particular disadvantage for students who do not receive advising.<sup>33</sup>

One study examining credit mobility in ten states found that “community college students had to be largely self-directed in finding their path and taking the right courses to avoid credit loss”—a heavy burden to place on students.<sup>34</sup> Study authors noted that personalized, one-on-one advising can aid students who enter community college unsure of their major or intended career path in pursuing coursework as efficiently as possible—yet high student-counselor ratios, the wide variation in students’ individualized circumstances and the sheer volume of articulation agreements that may exist hinder colleges’ ability to provide this level of support.<sup>35</sup>

Community colleges should help students determine as early as possible their intended major and transfer destination, monitor their progress and help them access needed financial resources to keep them on track.<sup>36</sup> Four-year institutions should dedicate advising resources to transfer students, seek to create a welcoming, transfer-receptive culture, and clearly convey key information to prospective transfer students at partner institutions rather than waiting for them to officially register.<sup>37</sup> Such focused, strategic advising can help students develop “know-how” and self-efficacy that will serve them in navigating future challenges and may help them persist to degree completion.<sup>38</sup>

Financial aid policies that specifically support transfer students are also important. Transfer students do not automatically qualify for the same financial aid at their new institution; aid packages will reflect the new school’s cost, aid programs offered, time of year and other factors.<sup>39</sup> Providing transfer students with greater access to state and institutional aid—rather than largely prioritizing incoming freshmen—will help promote their overall success. Reserves for transfer students could be held across several forms of both state and institutional aid: state grants, need-based tuition discounts, dedicated scholarships for particular student groups and others.<sup>40</sup> Access to financial aid—and to clear information about college costs—helps keep students on track to graduation.<sup>41</sup>



**Equity Impact:** Information constraints, bureaucratic hurdles and lack of financial aid can disproportionately impact students with fewer resources, whether financial or social, as they attempt to navigate college.<sup>42</sup> Clearer information, stronger guidance and targeted aid therefore could help improve outcomes for equity populations.

## Institutional Collaboration and Implementation Cluster

The Institutional Collaboration and Implementation cluster includes those policies related to how transfer sending and receiving educational institutions work together to ease student transitions by further reducing administrative barriers to credit transfer. A unique characteristic of this policy cluster is the collaborative nature of the policies, where both two- and four-year institutions and, in some cases, high schools must cooperate and agree to the terms of how certain credits will transfer. Of the 16 policy elements we tracked, six fall under this policy cluster, including:

- **Includes Dual Enrollment Credits;**
- **Includes Reverse Transfer;**
- **Includes Competency-based Education (CBE) or Online Courses;**
- **Encourages Articulation Agreements with Private Institutions;**
- **Supports Prior Learning Assessment (PLA); and**
- **Supports Two-year and Four-year Faculty to Collaborate on Transfer.**

## What the Research Says

Partnerships between transfer sending and receiving institutions can strengthen transfer practice, yield improved student outcomes and narrow equity gaps.<sup>44</sup> In *The Transfer Playbook: Essential Practices for Two- and Four-Year Colleges*, researchers from The Aspen Institute’s College Excellence Program and the Community College Research Center identify three key strategies at work in successful partnerships: transfer student success is made a distinct priority; there are clear programmatic pathways aligned with strong instruction; and transfer students receive targeted advising. These strategies are addressed within several policy clusters in our typology. The authors recommend steps institutional partners can take to build their relationship in support of transfer student success, such as: establishing regular joint meetings among senior leadership around transfer goals and data; regular discussion among faculty and administrators regarding challenges and opportunities; and developing a plan for improvement with concrete outcomes.<sup>45</sup> Faculty and administrator relationships can spur “formal and informal efforts to align curricula, strengthen instruction” and provide other benefits.<sup>46</sup> Such consistent communication at multiple levels is a hallmark of strong transfer partnerships.<sup>47</sup> Indeed, greater collaboration and alignment is necessary to implement cross-institutional policies that ease the burden on transfer students and enable them to receive credit for learning gained in a variety of settings, such as dual enrollment, competency-based education and reverse transfer.

Popular dual enrollment programs allow high school students to get a head start on college through courses that count for both high school and college credit—if such credit continues to be recognized by a new institution following a student’s decision to transfer. Little research exists to document how much dual enrollment credit colleges accept.<sup>48</sup> To ensure that credit earned is treated equitably, the Education Commission of the States recommends that institutions accept and apply dual enrollment credit as standard transfer credit, as an increasing number of states require.<sup>49</sup>

**“ While [Florida’s] statewide 2+2 articulation policies set the foundation for statewide transfer, it is the strong partnerships between specific institutions that ensure its continued success. Over time, many of these partnerships, such as DirectConnect to [University of Central Florida], FUSE at the University of South Florida, and Connect4Success at Florida International University have evolved to provide clear program pathways, campus supports and other resources that extend beyond the scope of the 2+2 agreements.”<sup>43</sup>**

Source: Florida College Access Network

Competency-based education (CBE) measures student success through demonstration of defined competencies rather than earning credit hours for completing courses. CBE can help colleges become more “efficient, effective and fair” by focusing on “what a student has learned rather than how that learning was acquired.”<sup>50</sup> Federal and state policymakers should act to address the growing need for such programs “due to the proliferation of online programs, the expansion of open source learning opportunities and labor market projections that point to the need for more adults to obtain formal postsecondary credentials,” according to the Council for Adult and Experiential Learning.<sup>51</sup> Yet, the Council cautions that CBE programs must be designed so as to permit students to transfer their credits to other institutions—in part by using competency frameworks to develop clear transfer and articulation policies within state systems.<sup>52</sup>

Prior learning assessment (PLA) policies that gauge credit application for the knowledge and experience students acquired in settings outside higher education—such as the military, workplace or informal learning—are another tool to lessen the cost and time to degree.<sup>53</sup> Credit granted through PLA is especially helpful for the high proportion of returning adult learners who wish to complete a credential expeditiously.<sup>54</sup> Research shows that adult students who received PLA credits were 22 percentage points more likely to complete a credential.<sup>55</sup> Yet, institutional use of PLA is inconsistent; one study found that Black students, Pell Grant recipients and students from lower-income communities were least likely to earn credits this way.<sup>56</sup>

Reverse transfer policies are an innovative and rapidly growing—though sometimes logistically challenging—degree completion and attainment strategy requiring close coordination among sending and receiving institutions.<sup>57</sup> Through reverse transfer, community college students who transfer to a four-year institution prior to completing an associate degree can be retroactively awarded that degree after they have earned sufficient credits and met requirements while working toward a bachelor’s degree.<sup>58</sup>

**Equity Impact:** Effective partnerships among sending and receiving institutions that are intentional about supporting students can go a long way toward closing equity gaps.<sup>59</sup> For example, the University Partnership at Ohio’s Lorain County Community College yielded significant increases in bachelor’s degree completion rates for African American students and non-traditional students.<sup>60</sup> Policies that promote increased transfer credit acceptance for learning acquired in various settings can help overcome barriers to completion for all students, including those from groups who might benefit from additional support.

## Accountability

The Accountability cluster includes those policies that aim to establish expectations for which students are served and hold the institutions that serve them accountable for the success of those students. Of the policies we collected, the fewest fell under accountability, with just two policy elements in this cluster, including:

- **Primary Transfer Policy Includes All Two- and Four-Year Public Sectors; and**
- **Awards Transfer Success Through a Funding Formula.**

 **To fully realize a shared responsibility, four-year institutions need to step up and carry more of the weight that community colleges have historically shouldered. That starts with elevating community colleges as equal partners and contributors and compelling four-year institutions to re-examine their perceptions.**<sup>61</sup>

### What the Research Says

Ensuring that transfer policies include all two- and four-year public sectors is an important way that policymakers can expand ownership over transfer student success. We have already established the importance of collaboration between two- and four-year institutions (see Institutional Collaboration and Implementation Cluster). But equally important is that all sectors feel responsible for their role in supporting student movement across institutions. The community college interest in transfer is clear:

most of their students intend to earn a bachelor's degree. But four-year institutions have an equally pressing interest, and in some states, the flagship institutions and the most selective four-year public institutions are not included in the policy.<sup>62</sup> The Aspen Institute College Excellence Program and the Community College Research Center note: "As cost pressures drive recent high school graduates to community colleges rather than directly to four-year colleges, four-year colleges increasingly rely on transfer as a means to enroll students from their traditional, college-age markets and meet their diversity goals."<sup>63</sup> Transfer policies—and student success funding policies that seek to reward improved transfer student outcomes—should include all public institutions in the state in order to increase "skin in the game."

State funding for postsecondary education is primarily based on student enrollment. But over time, many policymakers have shifted their focus from increasing access to increasing the success of students in higher education, with a particular focus on remediating the ways that the system and institutions have created deeply inequitable outcomes.<sup>64</sup> As a result, states have increasingly adopted student success funding models (SSF),<sup>65</sup> which allocate some portion of state postsecondary funding to institutions based upon performance across key metrics. These models are intended to promote stronger accountability for student outcomes and greater alignment of resources with state policy objectives.<sup>66</sup> This trend is encouraging, as public finance research has shown the importance of incentives and aligning funding to objectives.<sup>67</sup> SSF is a useful tool to help address the nation's urgent need for talent possessing quality credentials to fill the jobs requisite to sustain and grow our economy.<sup>68</sup>

States with a longer history of tying funding to performance are showing promising gains for students. Tennessee, for example, weights metrics for students from low-income backgrounds and has seen increases in credit accumulation and degree completion for Pell Grant-recipients who are enrolled full-time.<sup>69</sup> Researchers found "evidence of

significant and accumulating impact" of the state's funding policy as institutional implementation deepens. Tennessee's funding formula does not include metrics for transfer for the four-year institutions, however.<sup>70</sup>

HCM Strategists (HCM) has long studied SSF development and worked with states to refine their approaches in both the two-year and four-year sectors. In 2015, HCM released a typology and principles to classify state SSF models based on their sophistication and adherence to promising practices.<sup>71</sup> That report also described the types of metrics commonly used to measure progress, such as those that: set priorities for student categories and/or degree types that will be awarded; specify student progression and momentum milestones; set targets for completion of certificates, degrees or successful transfer; and promote productivity and institutional mission, such as research.<sup>72</sup>

According to HCM's updated SSF typology for Fiscal Year 2020, the most advanced models include: "significant and stable funding, reflect institutional missions, prioritize degree/credential completion, include continuous incentives for improvement, and promote the success of underrepresented students."<sup>73</sup>

When it comes to transfer, states are still calibrating the funding strategies that will best promote students' ability to switch institutions and stay on a path to bachelor's degree completion.<sup>74</sup> HCM's Fiscal Year 2020 SSF typology showed that some states include specific metrics for transfers both in and out of institutions, a finding that we expand on in this report.<sup>75</sup> State formulas that have been rigorously studied, such as Indiana and Tennessee, do not include metrics for transfer student success in both the two- and four-year sectors. Further study of a formula in a state such as Arkansas, which links transfer across two- and four-year institutions, would be helpful for the field. Arkansas provides a promising example as the state rewards two-year institutions for the average number of undergraduate students who successfully transfer out, and also rewards

four-year institutions for the average number of undergraduate students who transferred from a two-year institution and earned a Bachelor's degree.

**Equity Impact:** Well-designed SSF models create incentives and rewards for focusing effort and resources on students that historically have not been the recipients of equitable investments and targeted support. In this way, they can promote stronger student outcomes, particularly for those students who the national evidence shows face burdensome barriers to success, including Black, Latinx, and Indigenous students and for students from low-income backgrounds. Further expanding state efforts to incorporate transfer metrics into their SSF systems will reinforce these incentives for all students, regardless of institution.

# Typology Scoring

The purpose of this Working Paper is to assess how comprehensive each state's set of transfer policies are as of our most recent data collection in October 2020. That is, how many of the 16 policy elements we identified are being implemented in each state? The presence of a policy does not necessarily mean that it has been implemented well and to positive effect. A state that has implemented many of the policies tracked here may, however, be one that is intentionally seeking ways of better supporting transfer students.

Notably, although we may assert that a state is not implementing a certain policy, this does not necessarily mean that a policy of this type is not being implemented at the institutional or programmatic level in the state. Our intent is to capture the policies that are being implemented statewide to provide a foundation for our analysis.

We hope this information is useful to state policymakers as they consider what they have in place and how they might learn from other states. Ultimately, as new transfer policies are developed and existing policies are better evaluated, our goal is to expand on the policies that are included in this collection and analysis. This typology uses the terms “foundational” and “intermediate” to classify policy elements into two levels within each policy cluster depending on their degree of sophistication. Under each cluster, foundational policies are those that are long-standing, commonly implemented “building blocks” of transfer policy. Intermediate policies are enabled by foundational policies and represent progress in policy development. In future versions of this report, it is our hope that a third category— “advanced”—will emerge to account for bold and far-reaching policies that have the potential to dramatically improve equity in transfer, recognition of learning and student outcomes, in alignment with key recommendations of the Tackling Transfer Policy Advisory Board. The Board's recommendations, to be released in summer 2021, will, for example, call for states

to set, measure and publicly report progress in achieving data-driven goals for transfer student success disaggregated by at least race/ethnicity, Pell recipient status and program of study, and encourage states and systems to create financial incentives that can support institutions that are trying to innovate and do the hard work of supporting transfer students well. In addition, we anticipate that future analysis will allow us to further refine the criteria and capture additional state action to: expand their policy set (e.g., more states designating financial aid funds for transfer students); enhance innovation (e.g., states building sophisticated credentialing systems); and improve existing policies (e.g., states expanding current data use to include public-facing dashboards on transfer student outcomes).

The following section details the findings of our analysis by policy cluster.

# Analysis

## Analysis by Cluster

### Pathways and Credit Applicability

STATE SPOTLIGHT: **Colorado**

CLUSTER: **Pathways and Credit Applicability**

Colorado is a strong model for implementing policies around transfer pathways and credit applicability, with all five policy elements in place under this cluster. The state has strong transfer pathways and has policies designed to minimize loss of credits, time and money. The state offers [Institutional Transfer Guides](#) that allow students to see what courses they should take at the community college for their associate degree that will transfer and apply to their baccalaureate degree at specific institutions. The state also has the [Bridge to Bachelor's](#) program through the community college sector which “ensures new, first-time students attending any CCCS College are guaranteed admission to a participating four-year college or university upon completion of an Associate degree.” Colorado policy dictates that if a student earns lower division credits for courses included in the common course numbering system, those credits must automatically transfer as a core to all public institutions.

Table 2 shows how many states satisfy each policy element within the Pathways and Credit Applicability cluster by Foundational and Intermediate classification.

Table 2. **Pathways and Credit Applicability Cluster**

CLASSIFICATION	POLICY ELEMENT	NUMBER OF STATES WITH THIS POLICY
<b>Foundational</b>	Maps Academic Pathways Across Two- and Four-Years	40
	Grants Students Junior Standing at Entry	42
	Guaranteed Transfer of a Credit Core or Associates Degree	43
	Credits Meet General Education Requirements	44
<b>Intermediate</b>	Provides Common Course Numbering	19

Only 13 states implemented all five policy elements. Examples of policies that states are implementing under this cluster are:

- **The Louisiana Transfer (LT)** Associate Degree is designed to allow students in Louisiana community colleges to transfer to a public four-

year institution in the state with up to enough credits to allow them to enter as a junior. Under the LT Associate degree, students can begin earning credits for their baccalaureate degree while at a community college—up to 60 semester credit hours.<sup>76</sup>

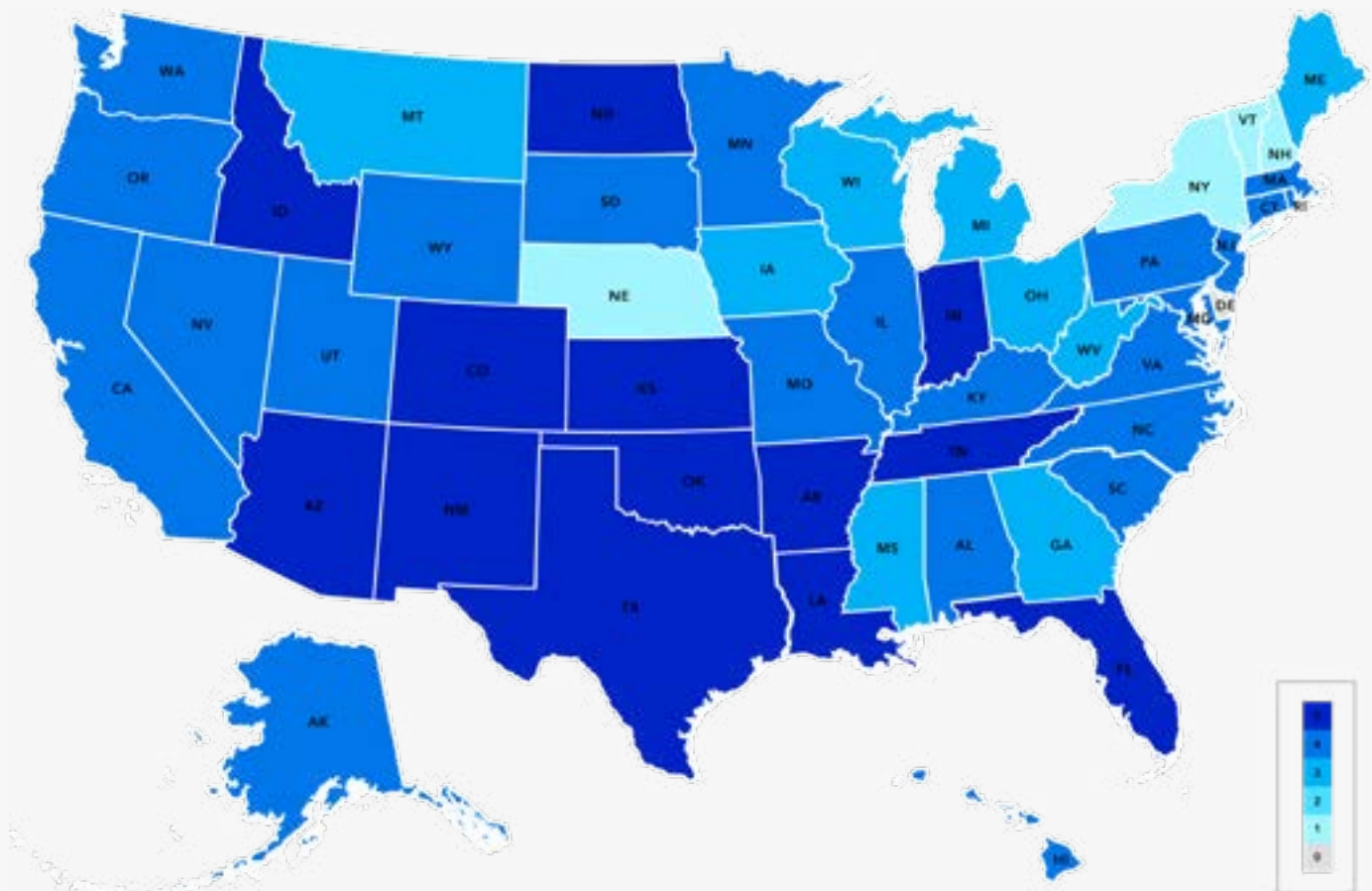


- **Hawaii's** transfer guarantee policy states that completing an associate of arts from a University of Hawaii Community College fulfills admission and lower division general education core requirements at all University of Hawaii baccalaureate degree-granting institutions.<sup>77</sup>
- **Texas** passed sweeping legislation in 2019 (Senate Bill 25) that requires annual reports from four-year institutions on the lower division courses that were not accepted, requiring institutions to develop course sequences for each certificate or degree program offered, and allowing two- and four-year institutions to enter into articulation agreements that use the fields of study established by the Coordinating Board.<sup>78</sup>
- **Minnesota** has robust pathways mapped across institutions. The Transfer Pathways program in the state allows students to earn up to 60 semester credit hours for their associate degree at a Minnesota State community college to transfer to any Minnesota State university program.<sup>79</sup>

Ensuring that credits transferred meet general education requirements helps transfer students more smoothly transition to their baccalaureate program by mitigating credit loss. Some states have successfully encouraged their institutions to map out discipline-aligned pathways, which should help students to feel confident they are taking courses that apply to program completion. There remain significant issues, however. For one thing, the proliferation of discipline-aligned pathways creates an overwhelming amount of pathways choices for students. Time-to-degree and cost of unarticulated credit hours are key considerations for transfer students and are major barriers to graduation. Improving the policies that can drive credit applicability will ease much of the burden and confusion that students face when transferring institutions, thus reducing both time-to-degree and cost and reducing attainment gaps.

Map 1 shows how many policies in the Pathways and Credit Applicability cluster are being implemented across all 50 states (see Appendix).

Map 1. Pathways and Credit Applicability Cluster



# Student Supports

**STATE SPOTLIGHT: Maryland**  
**CLUSTER: Student Supports**

Maryland is implementing all three policy elements that fall under the student supports cluster, indicating a prioritization of transfer student advising, targeted financial aid, and providing students with clear and accessible information on transfer. Maryland uses an online tool for transfer students, ARTSYS, which was developed and maintained by the University System of Maryland. ARTSYS is a database of course equivalencies that allows students and advisors to confirm if certain credits will be accepted for transfer at specific institutions. In terms of advising, each Maryland public institution of higher education has a designated Transfer Coordinator that utilizes ARTSYS to advise students, faculty and administrators on transfer articulation. Finally, Maryland is one of only three states to offer targeted financial aid for transfer students. The state’s 2+2 Transfer Scholarship is designed to assist and encourage transfer students from Maryland community colleges to attend a four-year institution within the state.

Three policies fall under the Student Supports cluster, with two characterized as foundational and one as intermediate. Of the foundational policies, a policy requiring institutions to provide student-facing information about transfer was much more likely to be applied in a state than supporting advising for students with transfer interest. Forty one states provide statewide student-facing information about transfer, and 17 states host a statewide portal with student-facing information about transfer. The least common policy to satisfy in this policy cluster is targeted financial aid for transfer students. Just three states offer targeted financial aid support for transfer students:<sup>80</sup> California, Maryland, and Virginia. The financial aid programs in these three states are intentional about ensuring that a student transferring from a two-year institution to a public four-year institution will have access to financial

aid, and some prioritize awards to students entering high-demand fields.

The remaining policy element in this policy cluster is almost as rare as targeted financial aid for transfer students, with just four states supporting advising for students with transfer interest. Far fewer states are implementing the intermediate policy in this cluster compared to the foundational policies. While advising at colleges and universities is not rare, state policies that support targeted advising specifically focusing on transfer students are. Transfer students face unique challenges that require intentional advising and support.

Table 3 shows how many states satisfy each policy element within the Student Supports cluster by Foundational and Intermediate classification.

Table 3. **Student Supports Cluster**

CLASSIFICATION	POLICY ELEMENT	NUMBER OF STATES WITH THIS POLICY
<b>Foundational</b>	Provides Student-Facing Information About Transfer	41
	Supports Advising for Students with Transfer Interest	6
<b>Intermediate</b>	Targets Financial Aid Supports for Transfer Students	3

Examples of policies that states are implementing under this cluster are:

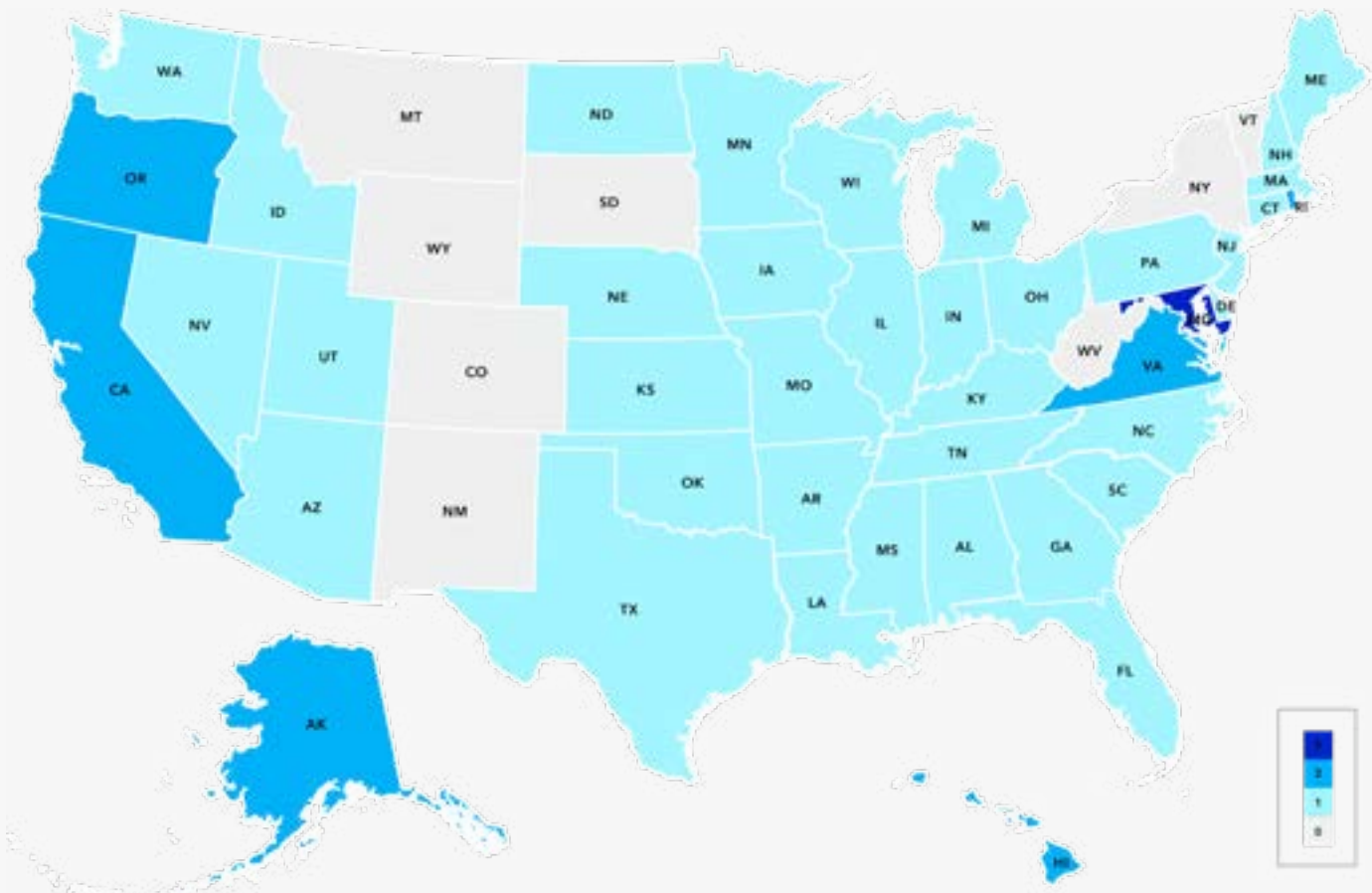
- **Arizona's** AZTransfer tool provides high quality student-facing information made easily accessible for students whether in high school, community college or a university.<sup>81</sup>
- **Alabama** has the Statewide Transfer and Articulation Reporting System (STARS) which supports prospective and current transfer students through advising and resource delivery, providing specific resources to students, advisors, and counselors.<sup>82</sup>
- **Ohio** has a wide range of transfer policies and initiatives collectively referred to as the Ohio Transfer to Degree Guarantee (T2DG). The state aims to promote the T2DG by providing free materials made available to students, faculty and staff at all postsecondary institutions.<sup>83</sup>
- **Virginia** developed the Two-Year College Transfer Grant Program (CTG) to help ease

the financial burden to students pursuing baccalaureate degrees. The CTG program incentivizes students to earn an associate degree at a community college before pursuing their bachelors at a university in the state.<sup>84</sup>

Transfer students have unique backgrounds and face unique challenges which require targeted student support services and resources. Most states—43 total—are either implementing just one or none of the student support policies. There is a lot of room for improvement in this area nationally, and most states can begin with ensuring that clear and understandable information is made easily accessible to students so they can learn about transfer pathways available.

Map 2 shows how many policies in the Student Supports cluster are being implemented across all 50 states.

Map 2. Student Supports Cluster



# Institutional Collaboration and Implementation

STATE SPOTLIGHT: **Florida**  
 CLUSTER: **Institutional Collaboration and Implementation**

Florida has a long history of creating and nurturing strong institutional partnerships in the state. The state has all four foundational policies in place under the Institutional Collaboration and Implementation policy cluster. The State Board of Education and the Board of Governors must enter into a statewide articulation agreement. The state’s 2+2 program allows for seamless transfer of credits from a state college to a Florida public university. In addition to these partnerships the University of South Florida System hosts the Florida College Access Network (FCAN). FCAN works towards a goal of leveraging institutional partnerships to increase educational attainment for Floridians.

Institutional Collaboration and Implementation consists of six policy elements—the most out of all of the policy clusters—four of which are foundational, and two of which are intermediate.

Table 4 shows how many states satisfy each policy element within the Institutional Collaboration and Implementation cluster by Foundational and Intermediate classification.

Table 4. **Institutional Collaboration and Implementation Cluster**

CLASSIFICATION	POLICY ELEMENT	NUMBER OF STATES WITH THIS POLICY
<b>Foundational</b>	Includes Dual Enrollment Credits	32
	Includes Reverse Transfer	29
	Includes Competency Based Education (CBE) or Online Courses	18
	Supports Prior Learning Assessment (PLA)	38 (in at least one sector)
<b>Intermediate</b>	Encourages Articulation Agreements with Private Universities	14
	Supports Two- and Four-year Faculty to Collaborate on Transfer	28

Examples of policies that states are implementing under this cluster are:

- **Kentucky** has a robust dual credit policy that requires all of its public universities accept dual credits for transfer. The types of courses that must be accepted are those that can be articulated to a similar course offered at the institution accepting the credit for transfer. Further, those courses that are accepted for

transfer at the receiving institution must count toward a degree or certificate program within a certain major or program of study.<sup>85</sup>

- In **Georgia**, the Georgia Independent College Association (GICA) and Technical College System of Georgia (TCSG) agreement outlines core courses that will transfer from Georgia public colleges and universities to private institutions in the state.<sup>86</sup>



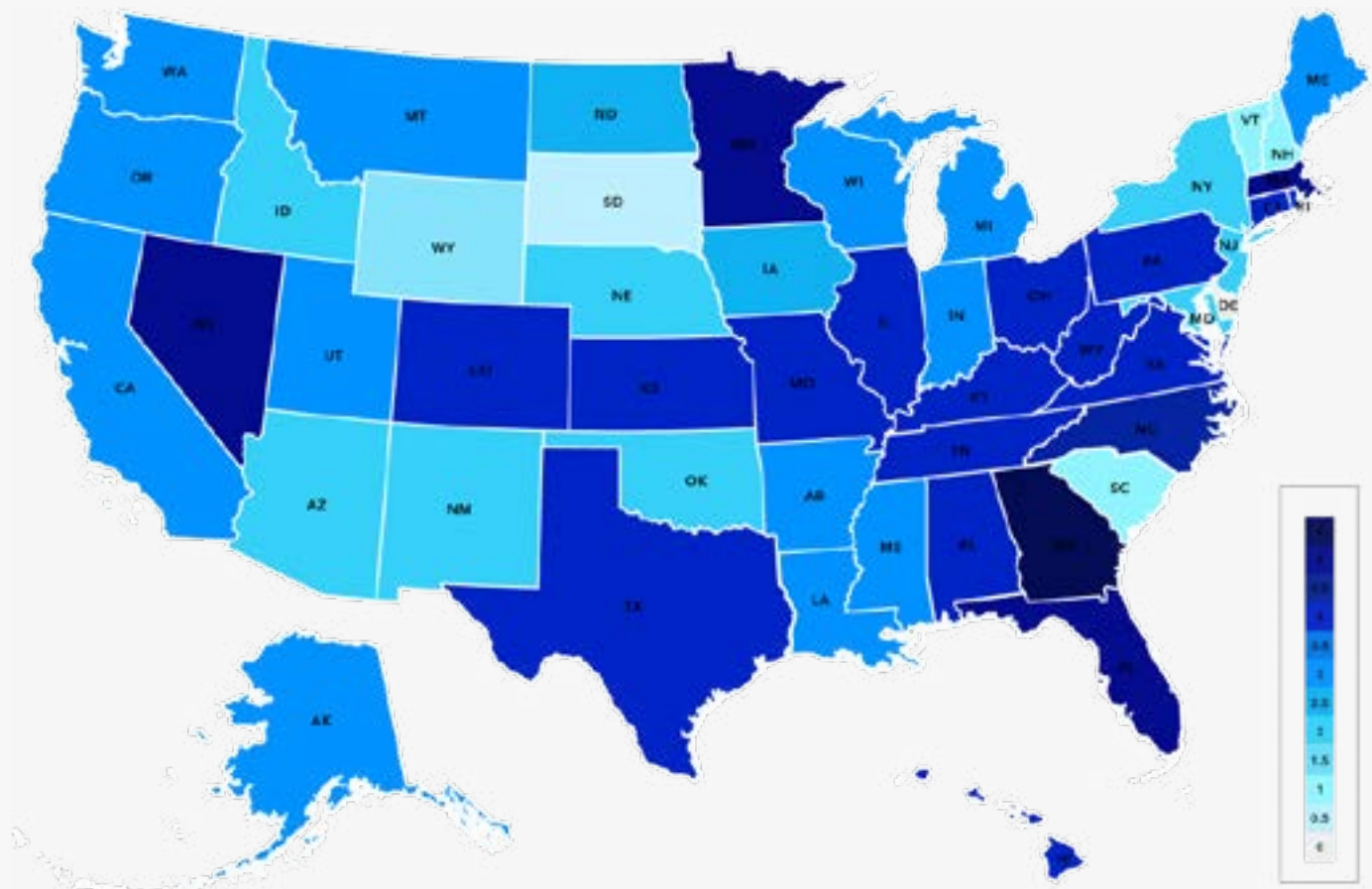
- Through **Minnesota Transfer**, faculty at both sending and receiving colleges and universities are tasked with collaborating to align courses to optimize the possibilities to establish equivalencies. The state also has a robust statewide PLA policy in place.<sup>87</sup>
- **Nevada's** reverse transfer policy is designed to ensure that students who start at a two-year institution and transfer to a four-year institution before receiving their associate's degree are still awarded a degree. Credits that students earn at the four-year institution are transferred back to the student's two-year institution to satisfy the requirements of their associate degree.<sup>88</sup>
- In **Washington**, each state university and community college must coordinate to develop a policy around reverse transfer. The policy must allow students to transfer baccalaureate

credits earned back to a community college. Further, the plan must also include policies for informing students of their opportunities and eligibility for reverse transfer.<sup>89</sup>

Institutional collaboration on transfer policy helps to ensure that states are more intentional about creating effective partnerships between sending and receiving institutions, so that students are the beneficiaries. This policy cluster is the only one in which no state satisfies all of the policy elements within the cluster. It's clear that this is an area where states have significant room for growth to increase innovation and collaboration between their colleges and universities.

Map 3 shows how many policies in the Institutional Collaboration and Implementation cluster are being implemented across all 50 states.

Map 3. Institutional Collaboration and Implementation Cluster



## Accountability

### STATE SPOTLIGHT: **Oregon**

#### CLUSTER: **Accountability**

Oregon is a strong example of a state that accounts for transfer students in their Student Success Funding (SSF) model metrics. Oregon funds its public postsecondary institutions through their Student Success and Completion Model (SSCM) which focuses on student success, with an emphasis on underrepresented populations.

Oregon’s Student Success Funding Formula includes additional weights to measure degree completions and certificate completions by native Oregonian students. There are additional weights included in the formula for underrepresented students, which Oregon defines as “underrepresented minority, low-income, rural, and veteran status” students. Further, Oregon’s SSF model includes additional weights to reward degree completion in certain programs related to in-demand fields, including STEM, health-related degree programs, and Bilingual Education.

Currently, under the Outcomes-Based category, the formula uses data that accounts for completions of transfer students with additional weighting awarded for BA/BS degrees earned by underrepresented students, degrees in high-demand and high-reward areas, and different weights for transfer completions vs. non-transfer completions. The formula incentivizes institutional accountability by encouraging transfer student acceptance and completion. The institutions that serve higher percentages of transfer students are positively impacted by the formula.

Table 5. **Accountability Cluster**

CLASSIFICATION	POLICY ELEMENT	NUMBER OF STATES WITH THIS POLICY
<b>Foundational</b>	Primary Transfer Policy Includes all Two- and Four-Year Public Sectors	39
<b>Intermediate</b>	Awards Transfer Success through a Funding Formula	4 states have a formula that awards institutions for transfer in both two-year and four-year sectors, and 14 states have a formula in either the two-year or four-year sector

Examples of policies that states are implementing under this cluster are:

- **Arkansas’s** SSF formula supports student transfer in both the two-year and four-year sectors. There are a number of measures adopted in the productivity-based funding model guided by priorities including collaboration rewarded by encouraging successful transfer of students and reducing barriers to student success.<sup>90</sup>
- **Louisiana** is implementing a Student Success Funding Formula system in both their 2-year and 4-year sectors. Importantly, each of the formulas include a specific metric that adds an additional weight to award institutions for serving transfer students. There are incentive weights in the formula that account for “transfer time to completion” in the 4-year formula.<sup>91</sup> This means that institutions receive more funding when students graduate in less time.

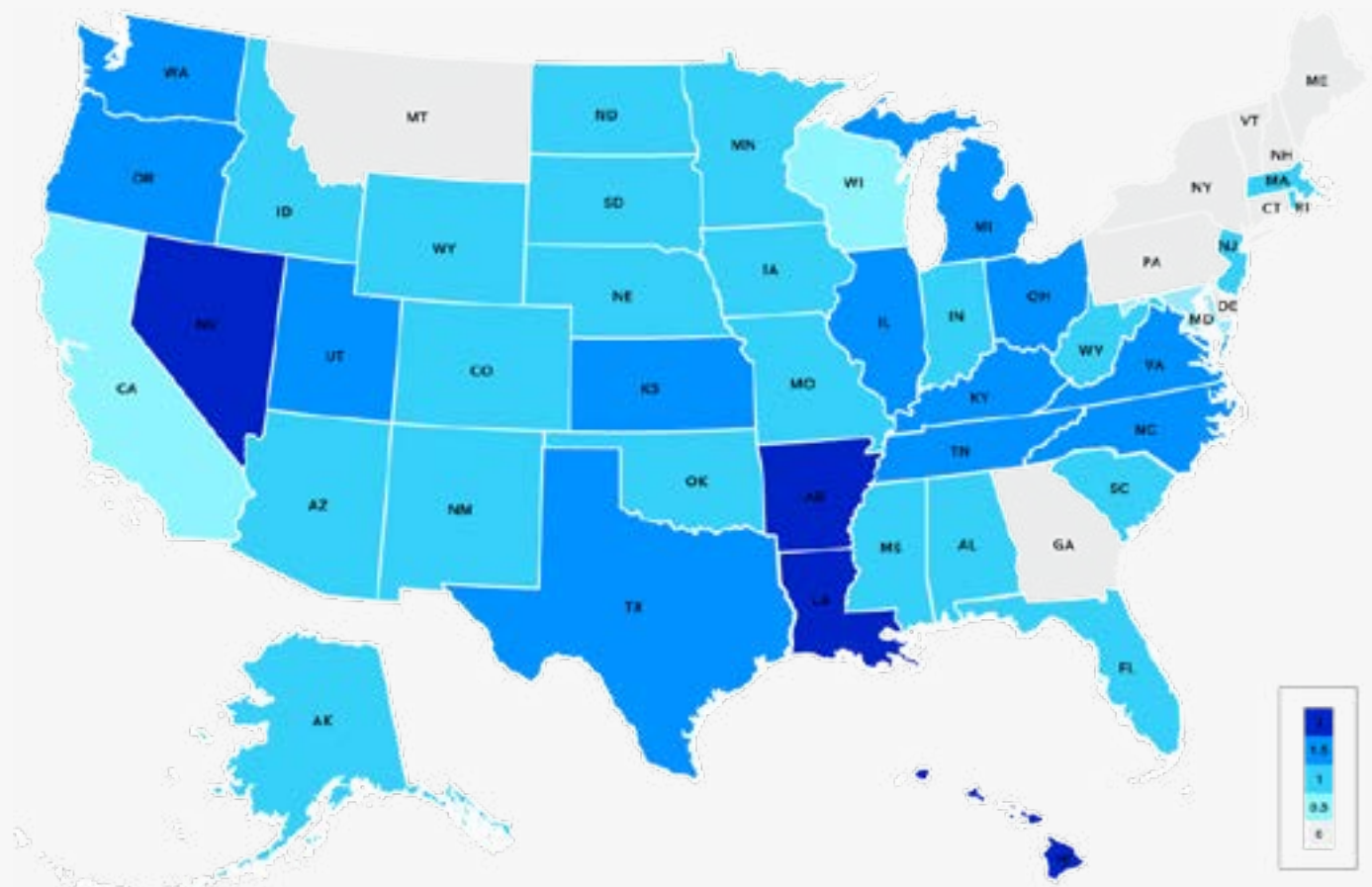


- **Massachusetts'** primary transfer policy includes public institutions in both the two- and four-year sectors as well as the flagship institutions in the state. Further, the state has several options for transfer including A2B Maps, Gen Ed Foundation and A2B Pathways across both sectors.

Just four states have a funding formula that awards institutions for transfer in both the two-year and four-year sectors—Arkansas, Hawaii, Louisiana, and Nevada. Taking Arkansas as an example, the transfer metric in their formula includes the average of the number of undergraduate students over the most recent three academic years who transfer successfully from a 2-year to a 4-year institution with an Associate degree or with at least 30 earned hours of Arkansas Course Transfer System (ACTS) courses in an effort to encourage student success and institutional collaboration. Students who have received an Associate degree will be assigned additional weighting. The metric in the four-year sector funding model includes the average of the number of undergraduate students over the most recent three academic years who earn a Bachelor's degree that transferred from

a 2-year to a 4-year institution in an effort to encourage student success and institutional collaboration.<sup>92</sup> Not all funding models are necessarily equally strong. For example, some two-year funding models are primarily focused on rewarding the two-year sector for having students that transfer to a four-year institution. Some of the metrics in these types of models require a minimum credit threshold or incent institutions for helping students transfer with an associate degree. However, in some cases there is no equal incentive on the four-year side for accepting, supporting and accelerating transfer students to completion. The lack of identifiable policy elements focused on transfer accountability currently in use across states is significant in itself, confirming the need for all states to do a lot more to set expectations and hold themselves and their institutions accountable to serving transfer students well. The forthcoming Tackling Transfer Policy Advisory Board report will make recommendations for how states can increase transfer accountability in areas such as data transparency and strategic finance, which will inform future typology updates. Map 4 shows how many policies in the Accountability cluster are being implemented across all 50 states.

Map 4. **Accountability Cluster**



## Intermediate Policies and Innovation in States

To estimate how innovative a state is, we tallied how many intermediate policies each state is implementing within each cluster. Because the intermediate policies are generally more sophisticated than foundational policies and require more institutional and political will and collaboration to implement, we posit that intermediate policies are, to an extent, more innovative policies.

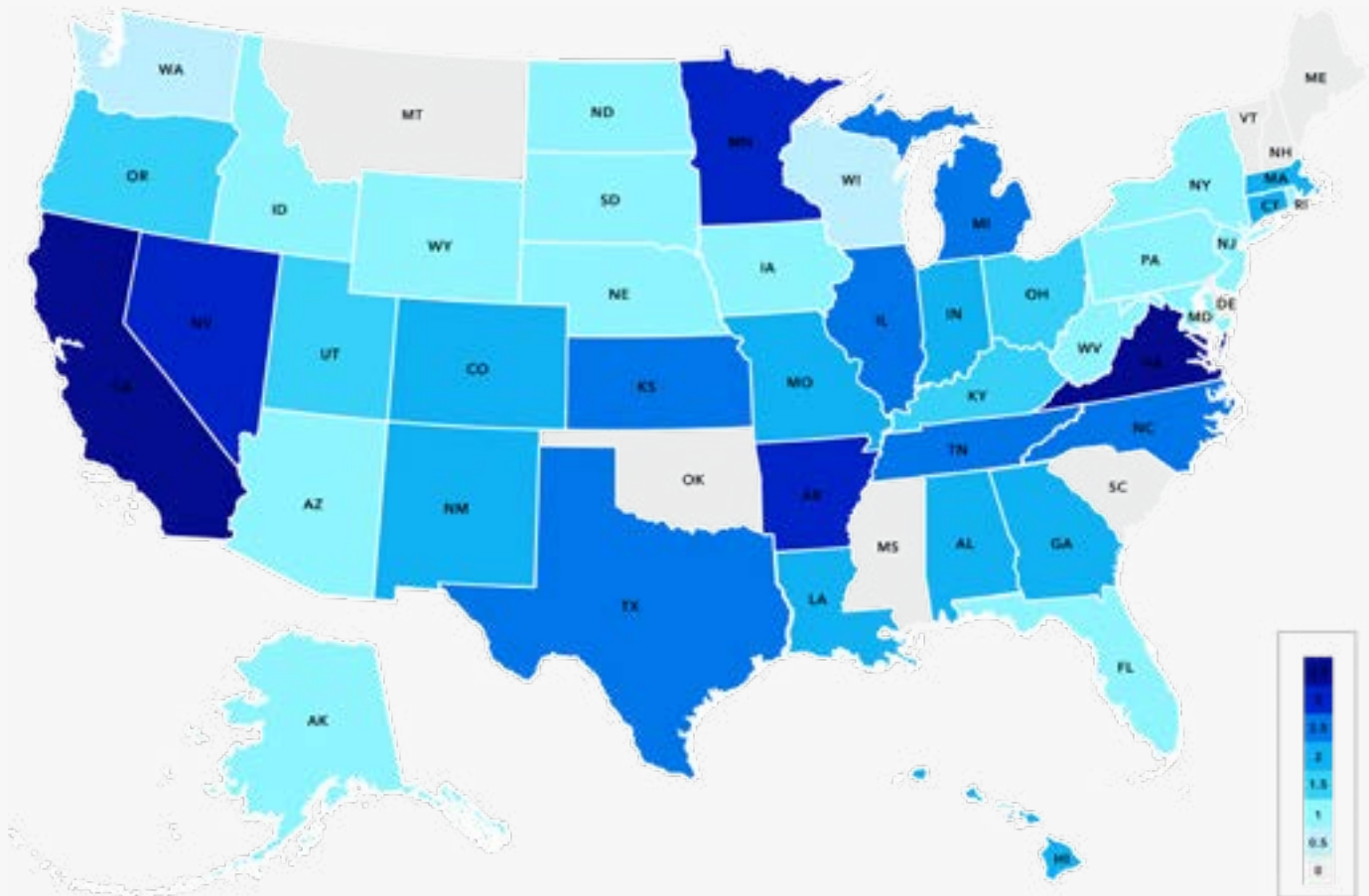
Five policy elements are characterized as intermediate across the policy clusters. Interestingly, no state implements all five. The states that implement the most intermediate policies across policy clusters are California and Virginia at 3.5, followed by Arkansas, Minnesota,

and Nevada at 3. Conversely, there are eight states that are not implementing any of the policy elements that we consider intermediate: Delaware, Maine, Mississippi, Montana, New Hampshire, Oklahoma, South Carolina, Vermont. For two policy elements in our analysis, a state can receive a half credit—PLA and awarding transfer success through a funding formula. When a state implements one of these policies in only the 2-year sector or only the 4-year sector, they receive half a point.

Map 5 shows how many Intermediate-level policies are being implemented across all 50 states.

[Table 6](#) (Appendix) shows which policies are being implemented in each of the 50 states.

Map 5. Intermediate-level Policies Cluster



# Conclusion

As states look to the future and consider how to support their students, there is a critical imperative to assess the quality of statewide higher education transfer policies and their impact on students, especially those students from populations that have historically faced the highest barriers to completion. After looking across all 50 states' transfer policies at a moment in time—based on publicly available information as of October 2020—it is apparent that all states have room for improvement. In particular, this analysis suggests states can do far more to support accountability for institutions to improve transfer student outcomes, as well as incentives for institutions to implement interventions designed to support transfer students. Adopting and enhancing policies to provide support services and financial aid for transfer students are also areas that offer strong opportunities for improvement.

Equipped with the information outlined in this Working Paper, states have a clearer picture of gaps that exist in the types of policies that research shows to have a positive impact on student outcomes. Understanding such gaps presents a unique opportunity for lawmakers and advocates to wield this information to institute or augment existing transfer policy and pathways, innovate, and critically examine how transfer students are supported. It is our hope that future iterations of this Working Paper will find and be able to showcase new, innovative policies that are responsive to the needs of transfer students as states and the field continue to grow and adapt.

Informed by these findings, the Tackling Transfer Policy Advisory Board's forthcoming report will make recommendations and offer states and systems a roadmap for transfer reform. Future iterations of this Working Paper and typology will monitor state activity in the areas recommended by the Board.

# Endnotes

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# Appendix

## Policy Element Scoring Across States by Policy Cluster

Table 1. **Pathways and Credit Applicability Cluster**

State	Maps Academic Pathways Across 2- and 4-Years	Grants Students Junior Standing at Entry	Guaranteed Transfer of a Credit Core or Associates Degree	Credits Meet General Education Requirements	Provides Common Course Numbering	Total
Alabama	•	•	•	•		4
Alaska	•	•	•	•		4
Arizona	•	•	•	•	•	5
Arkansas	•	•	•	•	•	5
California	•	•	•	•		4
Colorado	•	•	•	•	•	5
Connecticut	•	•	•	•		4
Delaware						0
Florida	•	•	•	•	•	5
Georgia		•	•	•		3
Hawaii	•	•	•	•		4
Idaho	•	•	•	•	•	5
Illinois	•	•	•	•		4
Indiana	•	•	•	•	•	5
Iowa	•		•	•		3
Kansas	•	•	•	•	•	5
Kentucky	•	•	•	•		4
Louisiana	•	•	•	•	•	5
Maine	•	•	•			3
Maryland	•	•	•	•		4
Massachusetts	•	•	•	•		4
Michigan	•		•	•		3
Minnesota	•	•		•	•	4

LEGEND: • YES — TWO-YEAR SECTOR ONLY \* FOUR-YEAR SECTOR ONLY

State	Maps Academic Pathways Across 2- and 4-Years	Grants Students Junior Standing at Entry	Guaranteed Transfer of a Credit Core or Associates Degree	Credits Meet General Education Requirements	Provides Common Course Numbering	Total
Mississippi		•	•	•		3
Missouri		•	•	•	•	4
Montana	•	•		•		3
Nebraska	•					1
Nevada		•	•	•	•	4
New Hampshire	•					1
New Jersey	•	•	•	•		4
New Mexico	•	•	•	•	•	5
New York	•					1
North Carolina	•	•	•	•		4
North Dakota	•	•	•	•	•	5
Ohio	•		•	•		3
Oklahoma	•	•	•	•	•	5
Oregon	•	•	•	•		4
Pennsylvania	•	•	•	•		4
Rhode Island	•	•	•	•		4
South Carolina	•	•	•	•		4
South Dakota		•	•	•	•	4
Tennessee	•	•	•	•	•	5
Texas	•	•	•	•	•	5
Utah		•	•	•	•	4
Vermont	•					1
Virginia	•	•	•	•		4
Washington	•	•	•	•		4
West Virginia		•	•	•		3
Wisconsin		•	•	•		3
Wyoming		•	•	•	•	4

LEGEND: • YES — TWO-YEAR SECTOR ONLY \* FOUR-YEAR SECTOR ONLY

Table 2. Student Supports Cluster

State	Provides Student-Facing Information About Transfer	Supports Advising for Students with Transfer Interest	Targets Financial Aid Supports for Transfer Students	Total
Alabama	•			1
Alaska	•	•		2
Arizona	•			1
Arkansas		•		1
California	•		•	2
Colorado				0
Connecticut	•			1
Delaware	•			1
Florida	•			1
Georgia	•			1
Hawaii	•	•		2
Idaho	•			1
Illinois	•			1
Indiana	•			1
Iowa	•			1
Kansas	•			1
Kentucky	•			1
Louisiana	•			1
Maine	•			1
Maryland	•	•	•	3
Massachusetts	•			1
Michigan	•			1
Minnesota	•			1
Mississippi	•			1
Missouri	•			1
Montana				0
Nebraska	•			1
Nevada	•			1
New Hampshire	•			1
New Jersey	•			1
New Mexico				0
New York				0

LEGEND: • YES — TWO-YEAR SECTOR ONLY \* FOUR-YEAR SECTOR ONLY

State	Provides Student-Facing Information About Transfer	Supports Advising for Students with Transfer Interest	Targets Financial Aid Supports for Transfer Students	Total
North Carolina	•			1
North Dakota	•			1
Ohio	•			1
Oklahoma	•			1
Oregon	•	•		2
Pennsylvania	•			1
Rhode Island	•	•		2
South Carolina	•			1
South Dakota				0
Tennessee	•			1
Texas	•			1
Utah	•			1
Vermont				0
Virginia	•		•	2
Washington	•			1
West Virginia				0
Wisconsin	•			1
Wyoming				0

LEGEND: • YES — TWO-YEAR SECTOR ONLY \* FOUR-YEAR SECTOR ONLY



Table 3: Institutional Collaboration and Implementation Cluster

State	Includes Dual Enrollment Credits	Includes Reverse Transfer	Includes Competency-based Education (CBE) or Online Courses	Supports Prior Learning Assessment (PLA)	Encourages Articulation Agreements with Private Institutions	Supports Two-year and Four-year Faculty to Collaborate on Transfer	Total
Alabama		•		•	•	•	4
Alaska			•	•		•	3
Arizona	•			•			2
Arkansas	•			•	•		3
California	•				•	•	3
Colorado	•	•		•		•	4
Connecticut		•		•	•	•	4
Delaware							0
Florida	•	•	•	•	•		5
Georgia	•	•	•	•	•	•	6
Hawaii	•	•		•		•	4
Idaho	•			•			2
Illinois	•			•	•	•	4
Indiana	•			•		•	3
Iowa		•		—		•	2.5
Kansas	•	•	•	•		•	4
Kentucky	•		•	•		•	4
Louisiana	•	•		•			3
Maine	•	•		•			3
Maryland		•		•			2
Massachusetts	•	•	•	—	•	•	5.5
Michigan		•			•	•	3
Minnesota	•	•		•	•	•	5
Mississippi	•	•	•				3
Missouri	•	•	•			•	4
Montana	•		•	•			3
Nebraska			•		•		2
Nevada	•	•	•	•		•	5
New Hampshire		•					1
New Jersey		•				•	2

LEGEND: • YES — TWO-YEAR SECTOR ONLY \* FOUR-YEAR SECTOR ONLY

State	Includes Dual Enrollment Credits	Includes Reverse Transfer	Includes Competency-based Education (CBE) or Online Courses	Supports Prior Learning Assessment (PLA)	Encourages Articulation Agreements with Private Institutions	Supports Two-year and Four-year Faculty to Collaborate on Transfer	Total
New Mexico	•					•	2
New York		•				•	2
North Carolina	•		•	—	•	•	4.5
North Dakota	•		•	*			2.5
Ohio	•	•		•		•	4
Oklahoma	•			•			2
Oregon		•		•		•	3
Pennsylvania		•	•	•		•	4
Rhode Island		•	•	•		•	4
South Carolina	•						1
South Dakota				—			0.5
Tennessee	•	•		•		•	4
Texas	•	•	•			•	4
Utah	•		•	•			3
Vermont				•			1
Virginia	•			•	•	•	4
Washington		•	•	•			3
West Virginia	•	•		•	•		4
Wisconsin		•	•	•			3
Wyoming	•			*			1.5

LEGEND: • YES — TWO-YEAR SECTOR ONLY \* FOUR-YEAR SECTOR ONLY

Table 4. **Accountability**

State	Primary Transfer Policy Includes All Public Two- and Four-Year Sectors	Awards Transfer Student Success Through a Funding Formula with Explicit Transfer Metrics	Total
Alabama	•		1
Alaska	•		1
Arizona	•		1
Arkansas	•	•	2
California		—	0.5
Colorado	•		1
Connecticut			0
Delaware			0
Florida	•		1
Georgia			0
Hawaii	•	•	2
Idaho	•		1
Illinois	•	—	1.5
Indiana	•		1
Iowa	•		1
Kansas	•	—	1.5
Kentucky	•	—	1.5
Louisiana	•	•	2
Maine			0
Maryland	•		1
Massachusetts	•		1
Michigan	•	—	1.5
Minnesota	•		1
Mississippi	•		1
Missouri	•		1
Montana			0
Nebraska	•		1
Nevada	•	•	2
New Hampshire			0
New Jersey	•		1
New Mexico	•		1

LEGEND: • YES — TWO-YEAR SECTOR ONLY \* FOUR-YEAR SECTOR ONLY

State	Primary Transfer Policy Includes All Public Two- and Four-Year Sectors	Awards Transfer Student Success Through a Funding Formula with Explicit Transfer Metrics	Total
New York			0
North Carolina	•	—	1.5
North Dakota	•		1
Ohio	•	—	1.5
Oklahoma	•		1
Oregon	•	*	1.5
Pennsylvania			0
Rhode Island	•		1
South Carolina	•		1
South Dakota	•		1
Tennessee	•	—	1.5
Texas	•	—	1.5
Utah	•	—	1.5
Vermont			0
Virginia	•	—	1.5
Washington	•	—	1.5
West Virginia	•		1
Wisconsin		*	0.5
Wyoming	•		1

LEGEND: • YES — TWO-YEAR SECTOR ONLY \* FOUR-YEAR SECTOR ONLY

Table 5. Intermediate Policies and Innovation in States Cluster

State	Provides Common Course Numbering	Targets Financial Aid Supports for Transfer Students	Encourages Articulation Agreements with Private Institutions	Supports Two-year and Four-year Faculty to Collaborate on Transfer	Awards Transfer Student Success Through a Funding Formula with Explicit Transfer Metrics	Total
Alabama			•	•		2
Alaska				•		1
Arizona	•					1
Arkansas	•		•		•	3
California		•	•	•	—	3.5
Colorado	•			•		2
Connecticut			•	•		2
Delaware						0
Florida	•		•			2
Georgia			•	•		2
Hawaii				•	•	2
Idaho	•					1
Illinois			•	•	—	2.5
Indiana	•			•		2
Iowa				•		1
Kansas	•			•	—	2.5
Kentucky				•	—	1.5
Louisiana	•				•	2
Maine						0
Maryland		•				1
Massachusetts			•	•		2
Michigan			•	•		2
Minnesota	•		•	•		3
Mississippi						0
Missouri	•			•		2
Montana						0
Nebraska			•			1
Nevada	•			•	•	3

LEGEND: • YES — TWO-YEAR SECTOR ONLY \* FOUR-YEAR SECTOR ONLY

State	Provides Common Course Numbering	Targets Financial Aid Supports for Transfer Students	Encourages Articulation Agreements with Private Institutions	Supports Two-year and Four-year Faculty to Collaborate on Transfer	Awards Transfer Student Success Through a Funding Formula with Explicit Transfer Metrics	Total
New Hampshire						0
New Jersey				•		1
New Mexico	•			•		2
New York				•		1
North Carolina			•	•	—	2.5
North Dakota	•					1
Ohio				•	—	1.5
Oklahoma	•					1
Oregon				•	*	1.5
Pennsylvania				•		1
Rhode Island				•		1
South Carolina						0
South Dakota	•					1
Tennessee	•			•	—	2.5
Texas	•			•	—	2.5
Utah	•				—	1.5
Vermont						0
Virginia		•	•	•	—	3.5
Washington					—	0.5
West Virginia			•			1
Wisconsin					*	0.5
Wyoming	•					1

LEGEND: • YES — TWO-YEAR SECTOR ONLY \* FOUR-YEAR SECTOR ONLY



Table 6. State Implementation of all Policy Elements by Policy Cluster

	Pathways and Credit Applicability Cluster					Student Support			Institutional Collaboration and Implementation						Accountability		Total
	Maps Academic Pathways Across 2- and 4-Years	Grants Students Junior Standing at Entry	Guaranteed Transfer of a Credit Core or Associates Degree	Credits Meet General Education Requirements	Provides Common Course Numbering	Provides Student-Facing Information About Transfer	Supports Advising for Students with Transfer Interest	Targets Financial Aid Supports for Transfer Students	Includes Dual Enrollment Credits	Includes Reverse Transfer	Includes Competency-based-Education (CBE) or Online Courses	Supports Prior Learning Assessment (PLA)	Encourages Articulation Agreements with Private Institutions	Supports Two-year and Four-year Faculty to Collaborate on Transfer	Primary Transfer Policy Includes All Public Two- and Four-Year Sectors	Awards Transfer Student Success Through a Funding Formula with Explicit Transfer Metrics	
Alabama	•	•	•	•		•				•	•	•	•	•	•		10
Alaska	•	•	•	•		•	•				•	•	•	•	•	•	10
Arizona	•	•	•	•	•	•			•			•			•		9
Arkansas	•	•	•	•	•		•		•			•	•		•	•	11
California	•	•	•	•		•		•				•	•			–	9.5
Colorado	•	•	•	•	•				•	•		•			•		10
Connecticut	•	•	•	•		•				•		•	•		•		9
Delaware						•											1
Florida	•	•	•	•	•	•			•	•	•	•	•		•		12
Georgia		•	•	•		•			•	•	•	•	•		•		10
Hawaii	•	•	•	•		•	•		•	•					•	•	12
Idaho	•	•	•	•	•	•			•			•			•		9
Illinois	•	•	•	•		•			•			•	•		•	–	10.5
Indiana	•	•	•	•	•	•			•			•			•		10
Iowa	•		•	•		•				•		–			•		7.5
Kansas	•	•	•	•	•	•			•	•	•	•			•	–	11.5
Kentucky	•	•	•	•		•			•		•	•			•	–	10.5
Louisiana	•	•	•	•	•	•			•	•		•			•	•	11
Maine	•	•	•			•			•	•		•					7
Maryland	•	•	•	•		•	•	•		•		•			•		10
Massachusetts	•	•	•	•		•			•	•	•	–	•		•		11.5
Michigan	•		•	•		•				•			•		•	–	8.5
Minnesota	•	•		•	•	•			•	•		•	•		•		11
Mississippi		•	•	•		•			•	•	•				•		8
Missouri		•	•	•	•	•			•	•					•		10
Montana	•	•		•					•		•	•					6
Nebraska	•					•					•		•		•		5
Nevada		•	•	•	•	•			•	•	•	•			•	•	12
New Hampshire	•					•				•							3
New Jersey	•	•	•	•		•				•					•		8
New Mexico	•	•	•	•	•				•						•		8
New York	•									•					•		3
North Carolina	•	•	•	•		•			•		•	–	•		•	–	11
North Dakota	•	•	•	•	•	•			•		•	*			•		9.5
Ohio	•		•	•		•			•	•		•			•	–	9.5
Oklahoma	•	•	•	•	•	•			•			•			•		9
Oregon	•	•	•	•		•	•			•		•			•	*	10.5
Pennsylvania	•	•	•	•		•			•	•	•	•			•		9
Rhode Island	•	•	•	•		•	•		•	•	•	•			•		12
South Carolina	•	•	•	•		•			•						•		7
South Dakota		•	•	•	•							–			•		5.5
Tennessee	•	•	•	•	•	•			•	•		•			•	–	11.5
Texas	•	•	•	•	•	•			•	•	•				•	–	11.5
Utah		•	•	•	•	•			•		•	•			•	–	9.5
Vermont	•										•						2
Virginia	•	•	•	•		•	•		•		•	•			•	–	11.5
Washington	•	•	•	•		•				•	•	•			•	–	9.5
West Virginia		•	•	•					•	•	•	•			•		8
Wisconsin		•	•	•		•				•	•	•				*	7.5
Wyoming		•	•	•	•				•			*			•		6.5

LEGEND: • YES – TWO-YEAR SECTOR ONLY \* FOUR-YEAR SECTOR ONLY

The presence of a state policy does not necessarily mean that it has been implemented well and to positive effect. In addition, this typology looks at state policies and does not capture institutional or programmatic practice in the state.