

# The Student Transfer Problem and How States Can Help Solve It

BLOG POST

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Nearly one third of students transfer institutions at some point in their college career, losing credits along the way. A recent study found that 15 percent of community college transfer students lost nearly all of their credits during the transfer process. Another third lost a significant amount—anywhere from 10 to 89 percent—of their credits. By losing credits or not having their credits count towards a degree, students waste precious time and money. For years now, both states and colleges have implemented policies to help improve the pathway for transfer students. So why haven't these policies fixed the problem? There needs to be stronger alignment of state policy and institutional partnerships to create clearer pathways for students.

The best way to ensure transfer goes smoothly is to create a common understanding of the competencies gained through college classes. But since most states and institutions are far from agreeing on common competencies, they have focused on improving 2+2 transfer between community colleges and 4-year universities. This makes transfer more predictable and easier for students to navigate. There are a well-known set of state policies aimed at smoothing this connection. These policies include:

- *General education core curriculum.* A set of lower division courses that are guaranteed to fulfill the general education requirements at all public four-year institutions within a state.
- *Guaranteed transfer of associate* Guarantees that students who have earned an associate degree will be admitted to a public four-year college with junior standing.
- *Common course numbering system.* Ensures that classes which are delivering equivalent learning outcomes have the same numbers across state systems so students know what the courses will count for at the receiving college.

So how do these state policies reinforce and align with institutional transfer partnerships?

Two state examples are illustrative. Florida has one of the strongest transfer systems in the country while Illinois' system is not as robust. Florida has a guarantee that once a student has completed the general education classes at any university or state college (formerly community colleges) they will not be required to take another general education class

To be sure, we need better data and more research to understand how the state policy context affects the success of these partnerships. But as Illinois and Florida illustrate, the state policy context could create better incentives for more effective partnerships among institutions. In this case, Florida's comprehensive state policies may help ensure students who want to transfer have a smoother path. As more states follow Florida's lead, they should consider how to deliberately create incentives for strong institutional partnerships. Well aligned, these partnerships can reinforce implementation of the state policy on the ground.