



## Pathways to Two-Year Degrees

Far too many students rack up extraneous credits, wasting precious time and money and weakening their likelihood of completing college and advancing in their careers. A [growing body of evidence](#) reveals effective ways to restructure community college to make the pathway to degree completion more efficient, affordable, and seamless. States should adopt policies that support and encourage implementation of these pathway reforms.

We call on states to flex their oversight muscle by tracking and publicly reporting the time it takes to earn a degree. That will raise awareness and create a sense of urgency around the issue of students earning excess credits and spending more time and other resources on their educations than necessary. Additionally, states should support community colleges' efforts to implement proven approaches to reducing time to completion. For example, states should develop structures or guidelines for authenticating the prior learning experiences of incoming students and award them academic credits for those experiences. Moreover, states should ensure that community colleges clearly map out degree requirements so that students and their advisers know which courses they should take to earn desirable credentials and stay on track for on-time completion. Finally, states should ensure that colleges more routinely embed short-term certificates into their programs of study. That will give students incentives to earn certificates with immediate value in the labor market while also pursuing longer-term educational goals.

### Findings from 15-State Study



**On average,** half of the four recommended two-year pathways policies have been adopted per state.



**Critical gaps:** Less than half of the states have policy guidelines for awarding credit for prior learning.

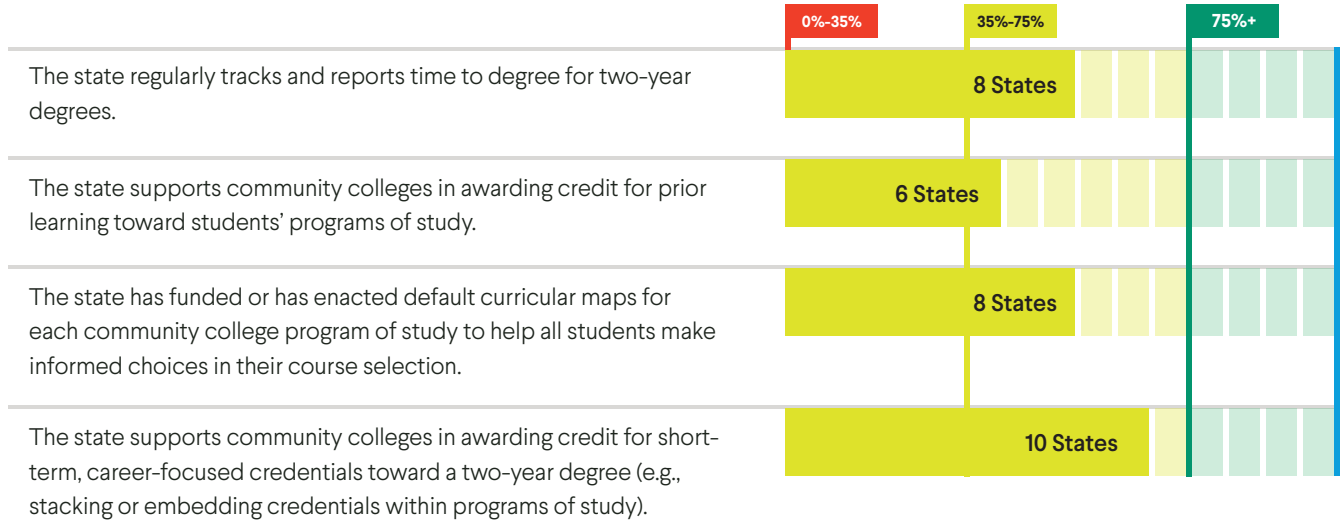


**Signs of progress:** Two-thirds of the states have taken policy action to support the articulation of short-term credentials as credit toward degree programs. More than half of them report the time it takes to earn a degree and support community colleges' efforts to develop default curricular maps.



**Ahead of the curve:** California, Hawaii, Oregon, Texas, Virginia, and Wisconsin.

## The state supports efficient pathways toward the attainment of a two-year degree.



### State Spotlight: **Hawaii**

As is the case in most other states, too few community college students in Hawaii earn a postsecondary credential in a timely fashion. To address the problem, state officials are taking a systemic approach to helping students efficiently complete two-year degrees. For example, the state’s innovative STAR GPS system provides all students with recommendations for the courses they should take each semester for a timely graduation. It’s an online advising and registration tool that can be used by all students at public two- and four-year schools. Moreover, an initiative called the [College-Credit Equivalency Program](#) enables students to receive credit for courses they completed before enrolling in college—whether they took those classes in high school, an adult education program, a technical school, or the military. Meanwhile, Hawaii requires short-term “concentrations” to be embedded within two-year degrees, and the state tracks and reports how long it takes students to earn their two-year degrees—and even breaks down those statistics by subgroups.

