



Pathways to Four-Year Degrees

A bachelor's degree is a key goal for many students and is necessary for certain careers. Yet the process of transferring from a community college to a four-year university is often riddled with impediments. The U.S. Government Accountability Office estimates that community college students [lose an average of 40 percent of their credits](#) when they transfer to four-year institutions.

JFF recommends that states define a common set of general education courses that articulate as credit toward bachelor's degrees. In addition, states should encourage community colleges and universities to create and publicize “transfer pathways” that stipulate the courses that should be completed in the first two years of specific fields of study so that community college students know what classes they should take to be on track for bachelor's degrees. And when educators establish transfer pathways, they should reach a consensus on which mathematics classes are most appropriate for given disciplines—and specifically determine whether the default algebra-to-calculus track is necessary (as we noted in policy recommendation number eight on college readiness). Finally, states should require universities to treat transfer students the same as non-transfer students when it comes to registering for courses and qualifying for scholarships and financial aid. States should also track and report transfer metrics for which both universities and community college are accountable, such as transfer rates and degree completion rates.

Findings from 15-State Study



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



Signs of progress: All of the states have adopted a general education core curriculum. More than three-quarters of them have facilitated the development of transfer pathways from two- to four-year schools.

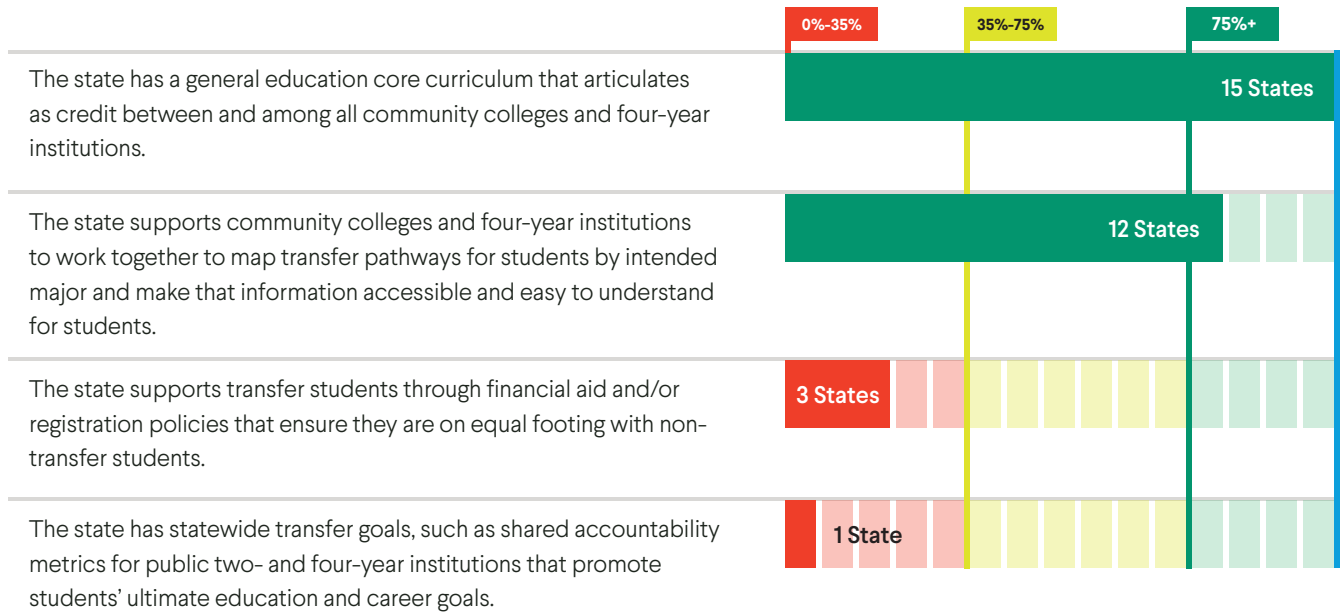


Critical gaps: Very few states have adopted safeguards to ensure equal treatment of transfer students or established shared accountability among two- and four-year institutions.



Ahead of the curve: Hawaii and Connecticut.

The state supports efficient pathways to a four-year degree from community colleges.



State Spotlights: **Connecticut and Michigan**

To smooth community college students' pathways to four-year degrees, Connecticut and Michigan are both developing statewide articulation agreements that go beyond general education and span entire degree programs.

The Connecticut State Colleges and Universities system has created 26 pathways, or "[Transfer Tickets](#)," that allow community college students to transfer upon completion of an associate's degree to four-year state universities without losing credits, and enter as juniors in their desired majors. An online tool called the Transfer Navigator provides program maps that align student coursework with the requirements of four-year degrees in programs ranging from biology to criminology.

Building off of its Michigan Transfer Agreement, which allows community college students to transfer 30 credit hours of general education credits, Michigan has launched a program called [MiTransfer Pathways](#) to fully articulate pathways by major from two- to four-year degrees. Michigan does not have a state higher education system, so membership associations for community colleges and four-year institutions (public and private) are leading the process. To aid their efforts, the state government approved a one-time appropriation to create an online portal that helps transfer students navigate between institutions.