

**INSIDE**  
HIGHER ED

# The Transfer Landscape: a Survey of College Officials

A study by *Inside Higher Ed* and Hanover Research  
October 2020

# TABLE OF CONTENTS

Introduction and Methodology .....	4
Respondent Profile .....	4
High-Level Key Findings .....	5
Proportion of Students With 30 Credits Elsewhere .....	5
Proportion of Transfer Credits in 2025 .....	7
Proportion of Students Who Transferred or Will Transfer to a Four-Year Institution.....	8
Effectiveness of Managing the Transfer Student Process - Four-Year Institutions .....	10
Effectiveness of Managing the Transfer Student Process - Two-Year Institutions .....	13
Credit Approval Timeframes .....	15
Perceptions of Institutions' Credit-Transfer Processes .....	16
Performance of Transfer Students .....	17
Concern With Issues Transfer Students Might Encounter .....	18
Policies and Practices In Place Before COVID-19 - Four-Year Institutions .....	21
Policies and Practices In Place Before COVID-19 - Two-Year Institutions .....	22
Likelihood of Implementing Policies After COVID-19 - Four-Year Institutions .....	23
Likelihood of Implementing Policies After COVID-19 - Two-Year Institutions .....	24
About <i>Inside Higher Ed</i> .....	25
About Hanover Research .....	25

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# Enrollment success includes an integrated transfer student strategy.

Develop agile approaches to attracting,  
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# INTRODUCTION AND METHODOLOGY

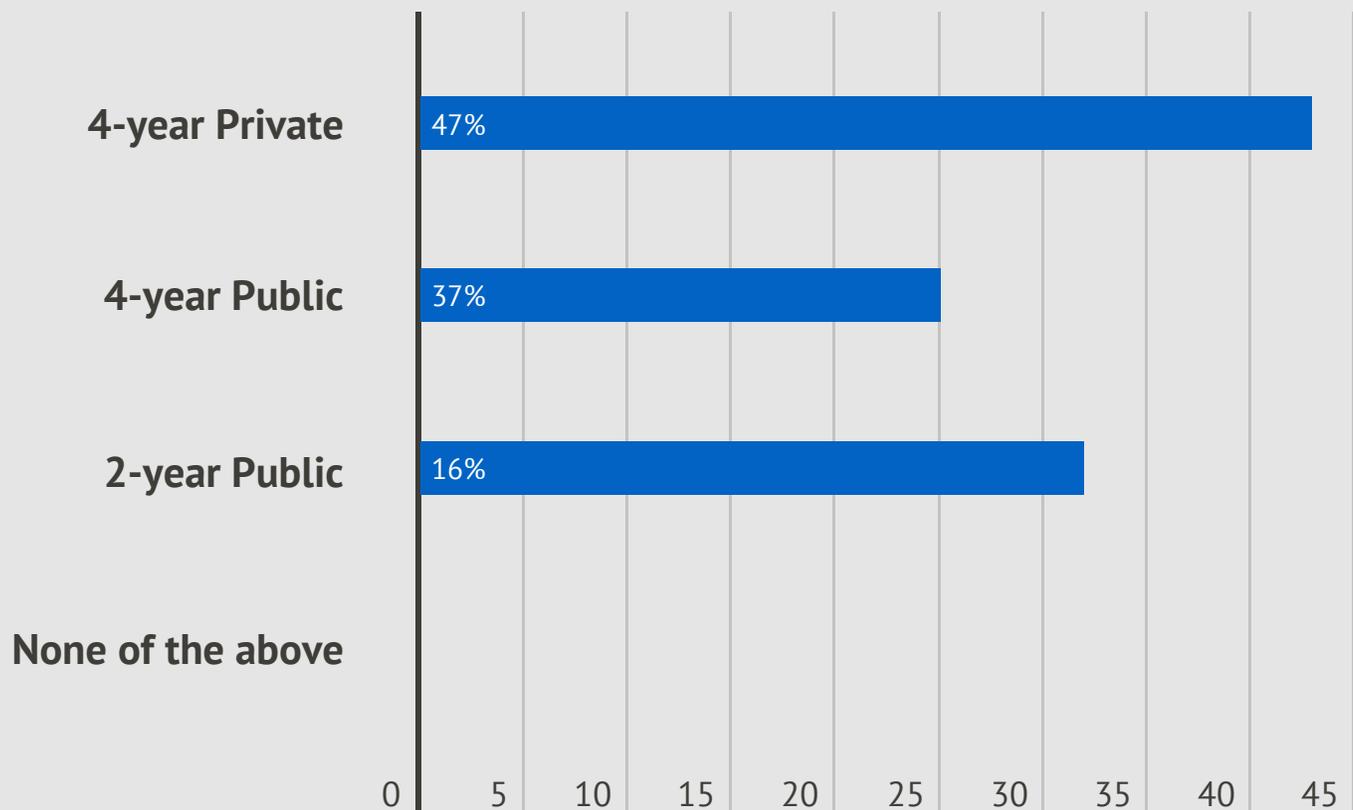
*Inside Higher Ed* partnered with Hanover Research to develop and disseminate a survey about transfer policies and practices to administrators from four-year (private and public) and two-year colleges and universities.

The survey was administered online in September and October 2020. The analysis includes a total of 143 respondents, all administrators at either a four-year public, four-year private, or two-year public institution. All respondents have at least some involvement with transfer policy or practice at their institutions. Statistically significant differences (95% confidence level) between groups are noted with an asterisk (\*).

## RESPONDENT PROFILE

Which of the following best describes your institution?

(n=143)



# HIGH-LEVEL KEY FINDINGS

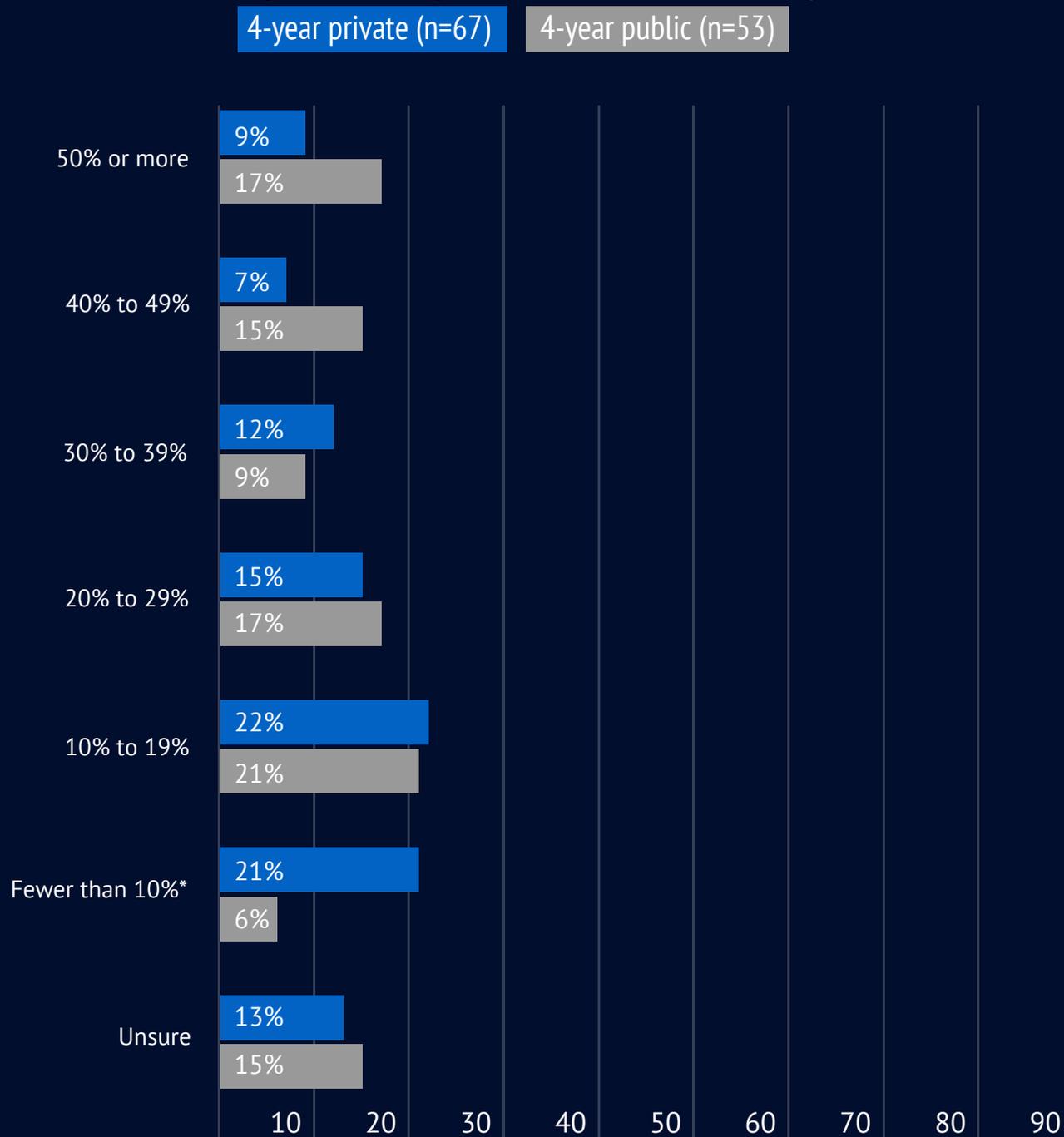
- Four-year public institutions report higher percentages of students with more than 30 credits from another institution, as well as project they will have more transfer students than four-year private institutions expect to have in 2025. Significantly more respondents from public institutions (32 percent) report that they expect 50 percent or more of their students in 2025 to have accumulated more than 30 academic credits elsewhere as compared to private institutions (16 percent).
- Both four-year institutions and two-year institutions have room to improve when it comes to effectively supporting students who seek to transfer from one institution to another. For example, significantly fewer administrators from two-year institutions (13 percent) find that four-year institutions are extremely or very effective when working with transfer students to approve academic credits, while significantly more respondents from four-year private (61 percent) and four-year public institutions (51 percent) believe that their institutions are effective in this area. Additionally, less than half of respondents from any institution type find that two-year institutions are extremely or very effective at managing the transfer student process.
- Respondents agree that having a more centralized approach to credit evaluation works better for transfer student enrollment. In the aggregate, 92 percent of respondents agree that this approach works better for deciding which transfer credits to recognize.
- Four-year institutions indicate that they may embrace more policies and practices regarding transfer students in light of COVID-19. While many four-year institutions report already having partnerships with local two-year institutions (74 percent, in the aggregate), those who do not have them indicate that they are extremely or very likely to undertake this approach in the future (47 percent).

## PROPORTION OF STUDENTS WITH 30 CREDITS ELSEWHERE

In general, administrators from public universities report higher numbers of students who accumulated more than 30 academic credits from other postsecondary institutions than did those from private universities. Significantly more four-year private administrators (21 percent) report that fewer than 10 percent of their students accumulated more than 30 credits elsewhere than was true for those from four-year public institutions (6 percent).

# PROPORTION OF STUDENTS WITH 30 CREDITS ELSEWHERE (cont.)

What proportion of undergraduate students at your institution during the 2019-20 academic year had accumulated more than 30 academic credits from other postsecondary institutions before enrolling?



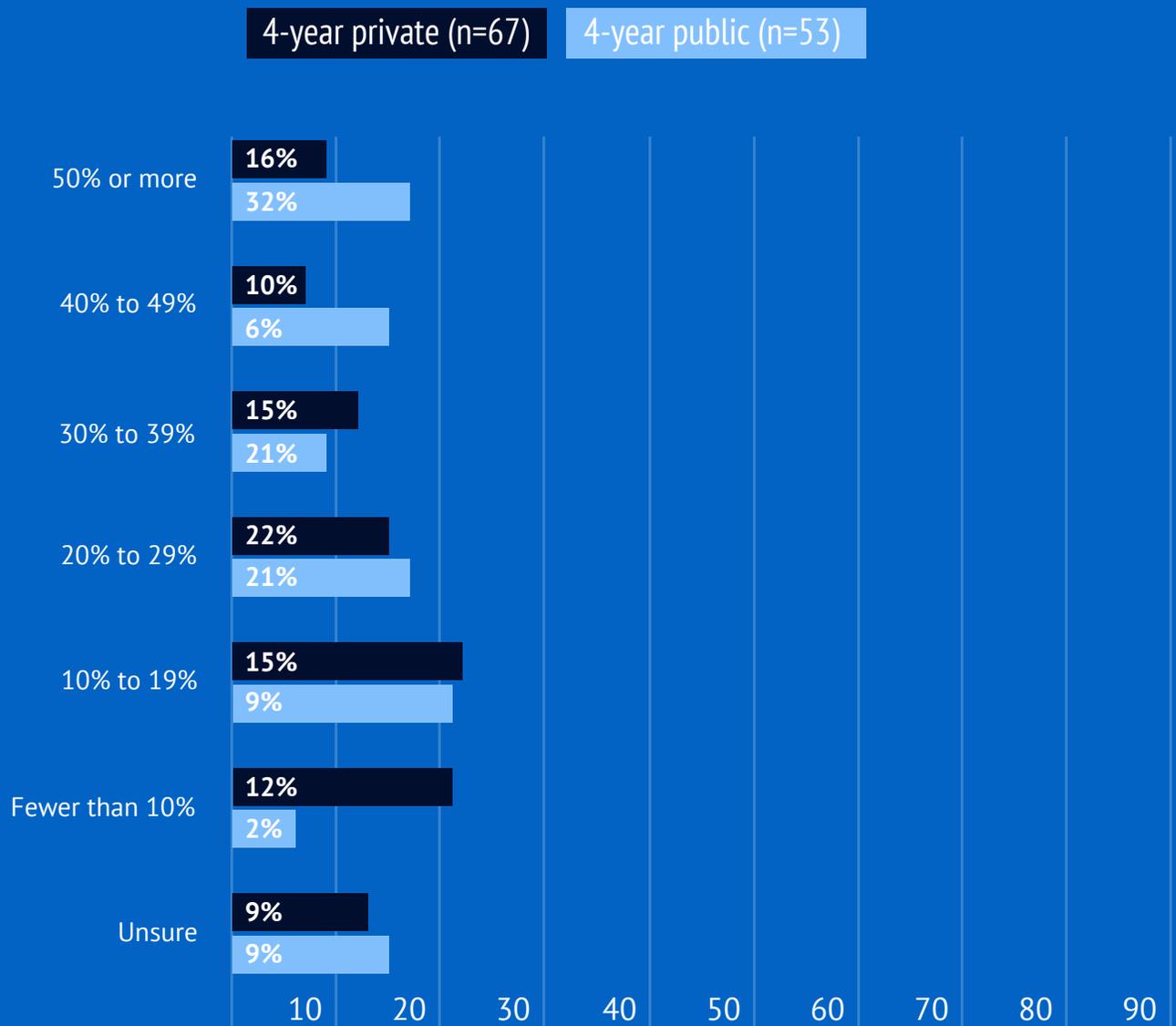
Note: Only four-year private and four-year public respondents were shown this question.

\* Indicates at least one statistically significant difference between groups.

# PROPORTION OF TRANSFER CREDITS IN 2025

Administrators from public institutions expect to have more students with more than 30 transfer credits in 2025 than do those from private institutions. Significantly more respondents from public institutions (32 percent) report that they expect 50 percent or more of their students in 2025 to have accumulated more than 30 academic credits elsewhere than do those from private institutions (16 percent).

**By 2025, what proportion of your undergraduate student body do you expect will have previously accumulated more than 30 academic credits from another institution?**



Note: Only four-year private and four-year public respondents were shown this question.

\* Indicates at least one statistically significant difference between groups.

# PROPORTION OF STUDENTS WHO TRANSFERRED OR WILL TRANSFER TO A FOUR-YEAR INSTITUTION

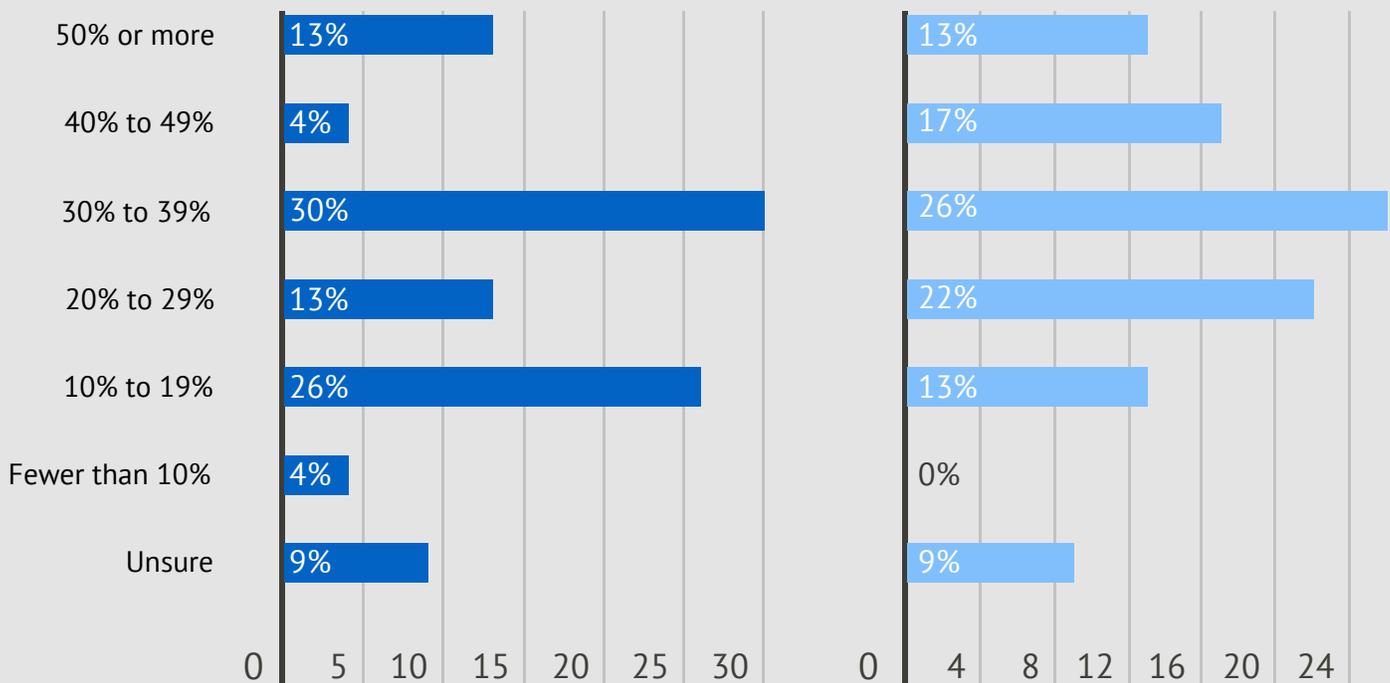
- Over all, administrators from community colleges report that less than 50 percent of their student body transferred to a four-year institution in the past two academic years. Only 13 percent report that more than half of their student body transferred to a four-year institution between the 2018-19 and 2019-20 academic years.
- Respondents project that there will be higher rates of transfer from community colleges to four-year institutions in 2025. As compared to the past two academic years (48 percent), a higher percentage of administrators indicate that between 20 percent and 49 percent of their student body will transfer in 2025 (65 percent). Still, the percentage of administrators who indicate that more than half of their student body will transfer in 2025 remains the same as reported in the past two academic years (13 percent).

**Between the 2018-19 and 2019-20 academic years what proportion of your student body transferred to a four-year institution?**

(n=23)

**By 2025, what proportion of your student body do you expect will transfer to a four-year institution each year?**

(n=23)



*Note: Only two-year public respondents were shown these questions.*

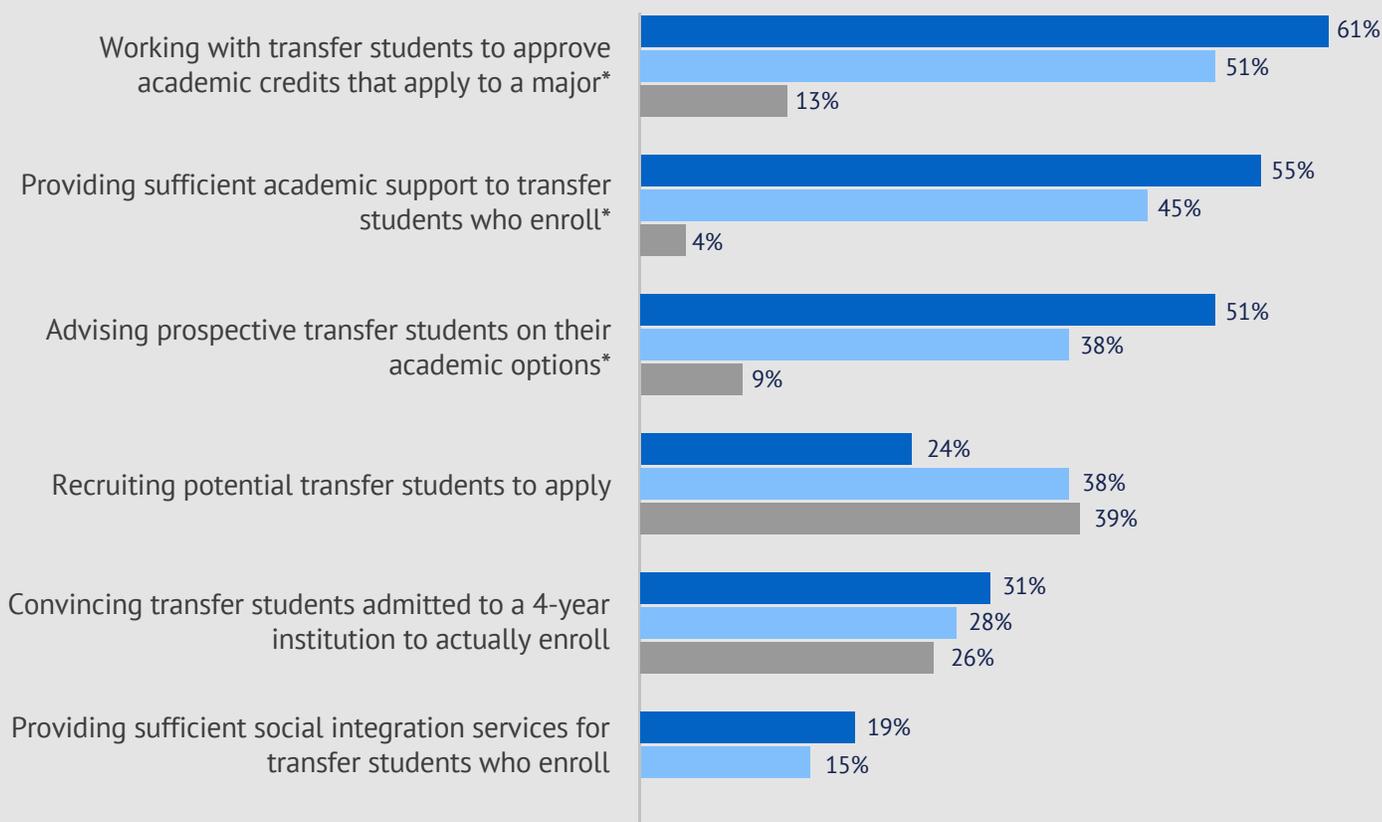
# EFFECTIVENESS OF MANAGING THE TRANSFER STUDENT PROCESS – FOUR-YEAR INSTITUTIONS

- Two-year public college administrators do not believe that four-year institutions effectively support transfer students. Only 13 percent of respondents from two-year institutions say that four-year institutions are extremely or very effective when working with transfer students to approve academic credits, while significantly more respondents from four-year private (61 percent) and four-year public institutions (51 percent) believe their institutions are effective. Similar disparities exist when it comes to perceptions on academic support and advising for transfer students.
- Less than a quarter of respondents from any type of institution find that four-year institutions are extremely or very effective when it comes to providing sufficient social integration services for transfer students who enroll.

**Please rate the degree to which [your institution is/four-year institutions are] effective at managing the following aspects of the student transfer process:**

% Extremely Effective + % Very Effective

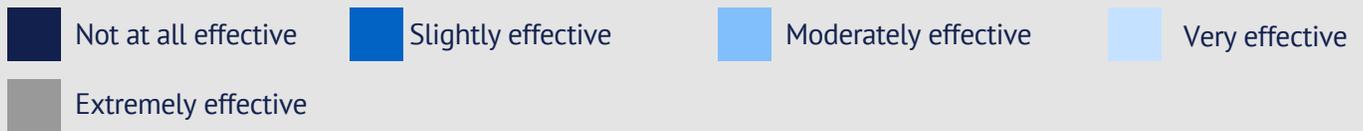
**4-year private (n=67)    4-year public (n=53)    2-year public (n=23)**



\* Indicates at least one statistically significant difference between groups.

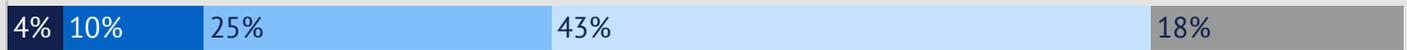
# EFFECTIVENESS OF MANAGING THE TRANSFER STUDENT PROCESS – FOUR-YEAR INSTITUTIONS (cont.)

Please rate the degree to which [your institution is/four-year institutions are] effective at managing the following aspects of the student transfer process:



## Working with transfer students to approve academic credits that apply to a major\*

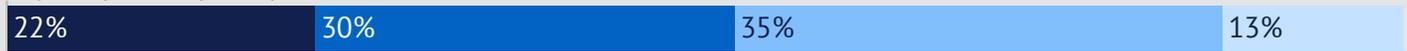
4-year private (n=67)



4-year public (n=53)

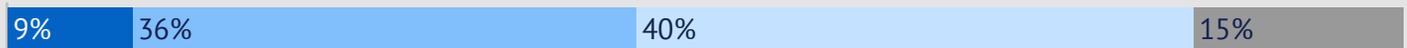


2-year public (n=23)



## Providing sufficient academic support to transfer students who enroll\*

4-year private (n=67)



4-year public (n=53)

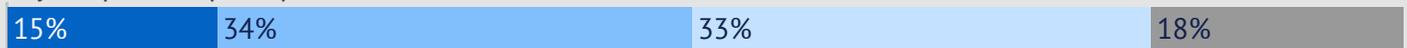


2-year public (n=23)



## Advising prospective transfer students on their academic options\*

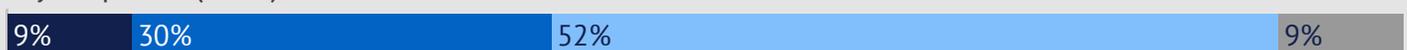
4-year private (n=67)



4-year public (n=53)

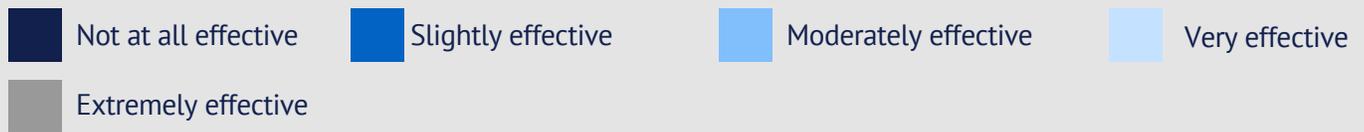


2-year public (n=23)



\* Indicates at least one statistically significant difference between groups.

# EFFECTIVENESS OF MANAGING THE TRANSFER STUDENT PROCESS – FOUR-YEAR INSTITUTIONS (cont.)

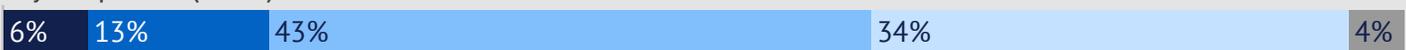


## Recruiting potential transfer students to apply

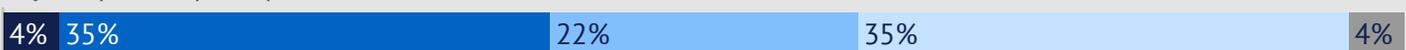
4-year private (n=67)



4-year public (n=53)

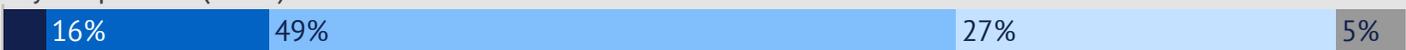


2-year public (n=23)

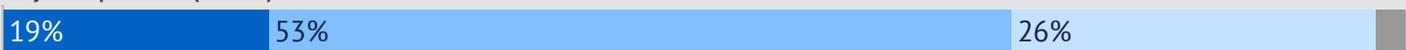


## Convincing transfer students admitted to a 4-year institution to actually enroll

4-year private (n=67)



4-year public (n=53)

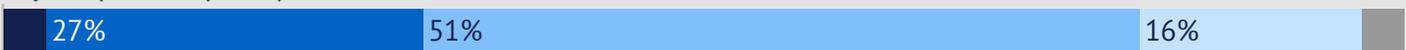


2-year public (n=23)



## Providing sufficient social integration services for transfer students who enroll

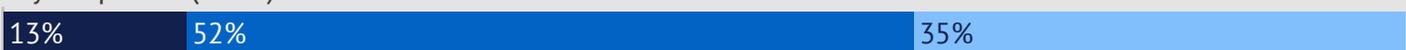
4-year private (n=67)



4-year public (n=53)



2-year public (n=23)



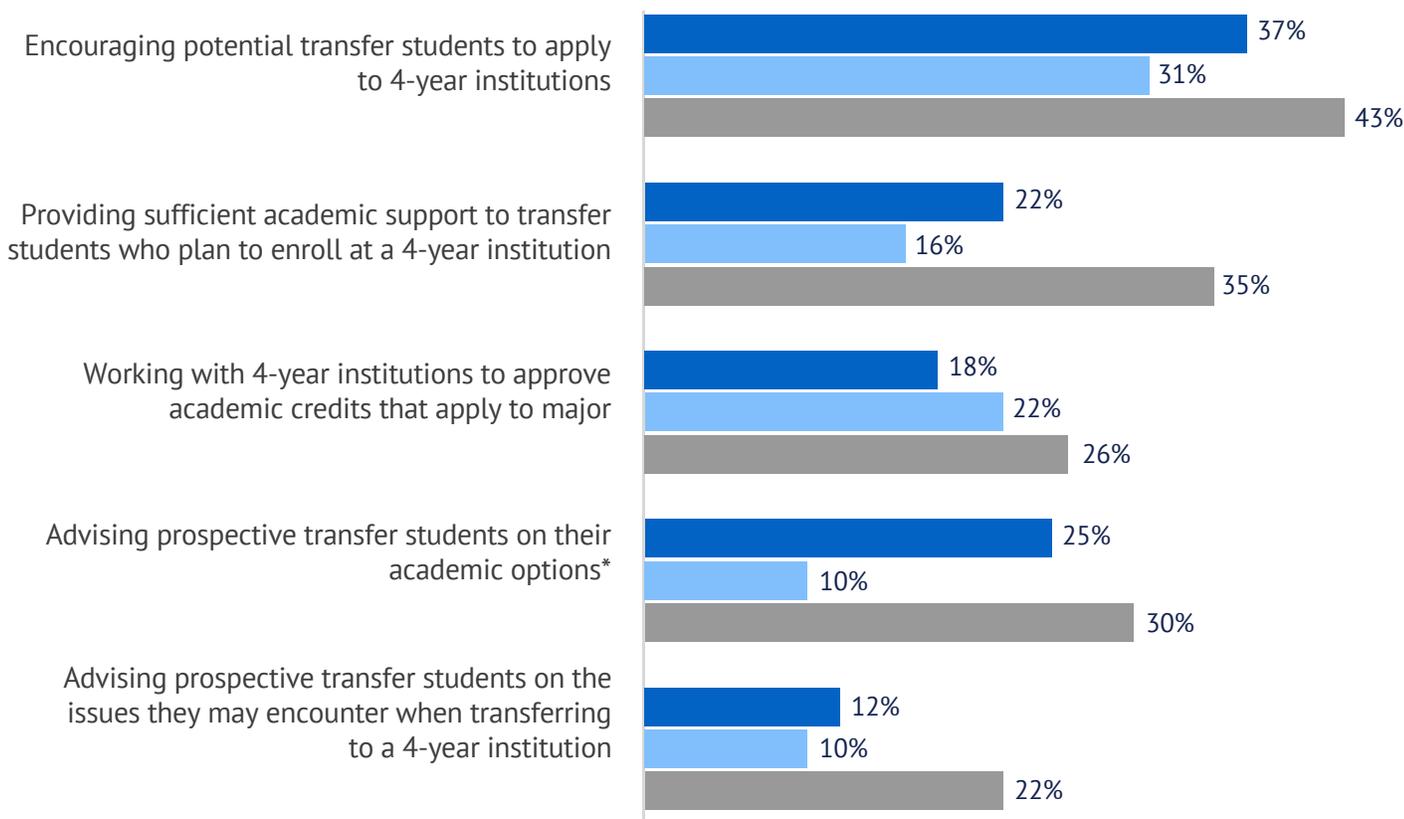
# EFFECTIVENESS OF MANAGING THE TRANSFER STUDENT PROCESS – TWO-YEAR INSTITUTIONS

- Over all, less than half of respondents from any institution find that two-year institutions are extremely or very effective at managing the transfer student process. In the aggregate, small percentages of respondents find two-year institutions to be extremely or very effective when encouraging potential transfer students to apply to four-year institutions (36 percent) or when providing sufficient academic support to transfer students who plan to enroll at a four-year institution (22 percent).
- Very few note that two-year institutions are extremely or very effective when it comes to advising prospective transfer students on the issues they may encounter when transferring to a four-year institution (13 percent).

**Please rate the degree to which [your institution is/two-year institutions are] effective at managing the following aspects of the student transfer process:**

% Extremely Effective + % Very Effective

**4-year private (n=65) 4-year public (n=49) 2-year public (n=23)**



\* Indicates at least one statistically significant difference between groups.

# EFFECTIVENESS OF MANAGING THE TRANSFER STUDENT PROCESS – TWO-YEAR INSTITUTIONS (cont.)

Please rate the degree to which [your institution is/two-year institutions are] effective at managing the following aspects of the student transfer process:



## Advising prospective transfer students on the issues they may encounter when transferring to a 4-year institution

4-year private (n=65)



4-year public (n=49)



2-year public (n=23)



## Providing sufficient academic support to transfer students who plan to enroll at a 4-year institution

4-year private (n=65)



4-year public (n=49)



2-year public (n=23)



## Working with 4-year institutions to approve academic credits that apply to a major

4-year private (n=65)



4-year public (n=49)



2-year public (n=23)



# EFFECTIVENESS OF MANAGING THE TRANSFER STUDENT PROCESS – TWO-YEAR INSTITUTIONS (cont.)

Please rate the degree to which [your institution is/two-year institutions are] effective at managing the following aspects of the student transfer process:



## Advising prospective transfer students on their academic options\*

4-year private (n=65)



4-year public (n=49)



2-year public (n=23)



## Convincing admitted transfer students to enroll in a 4-year institution

4-year private (n=65)



4-year public (n=49)



2-year public (n=23)



## Encouraging potential transfer students to apply to 4-year institutions

4-year private (n=65)



4-year public (n=49)



2-year public (n=23)



\* Indicates at least one statistically significant difference between groups.

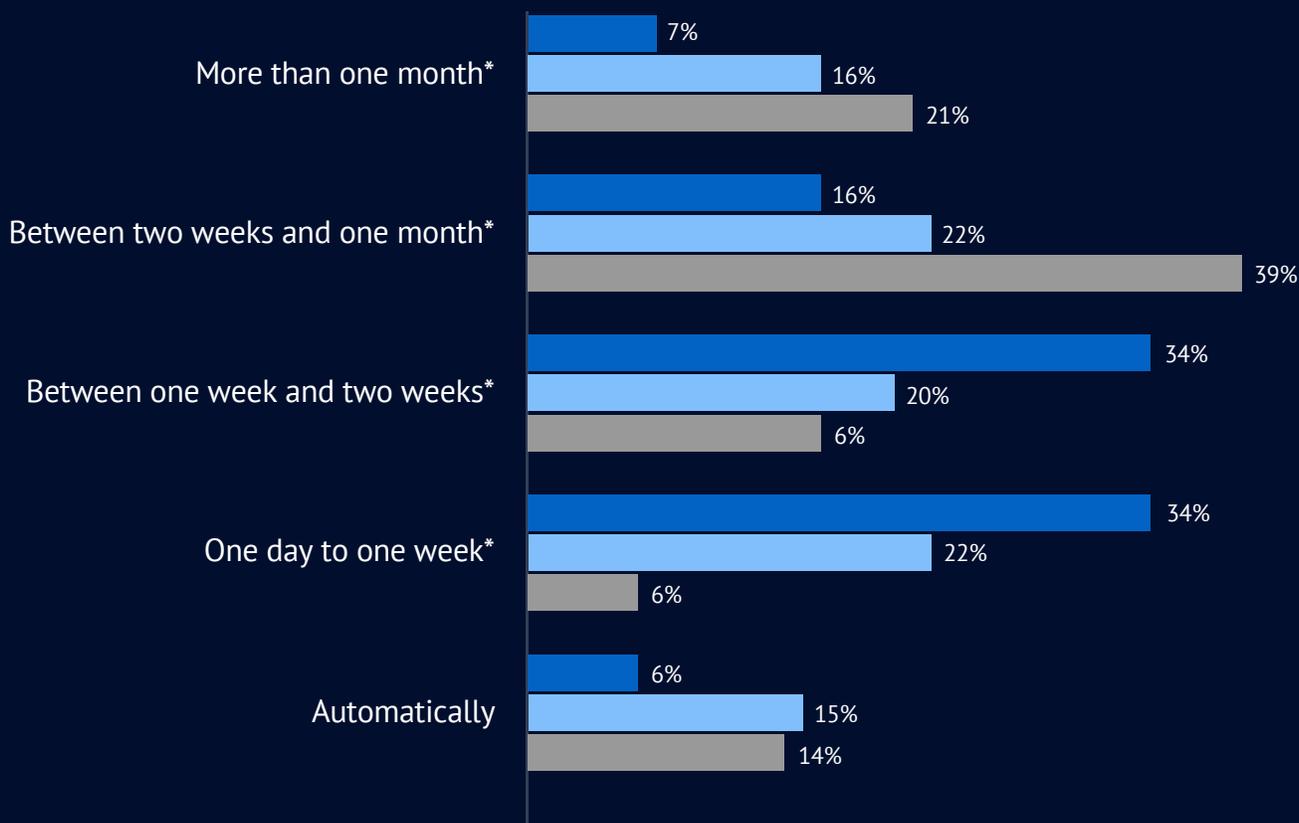
# CREDIT APPROVAL TIMEFRAMES

Perceptions regarding the length of time credit approval takes differs between four-year and two-year institutions. In general, administrators at four-year institutions indicate that transfer students' credits are approved faster than what two-year institutions perceive. For example, four-year private (34 percent) and public (22 percent) institutions report significantly higher average percentages of transfer students who receive credit approval within one day to one week as compared to what two-year institutions report (6 percent). Additionally, two-year institutions report a significantly higher proportion of transfer students whose credits take more than one month to receive approval (21 percent) as compared to what four-year private institutions report (7 percent).

## Approximately what proportion of transfer students [to/from] your institution receive credit approval within the following time frames?

Means

4-year private (n=64) 4-year public (n=44) 2-year public (n=20)



Note: Respondents were to assign percentages to each of the groups above, adding to 100%. This question shows the average percent that respondents input for each group. Because of this, values do not sum to exactly 100 percent.

\* Indicates at least one statistically significant difference between groups.

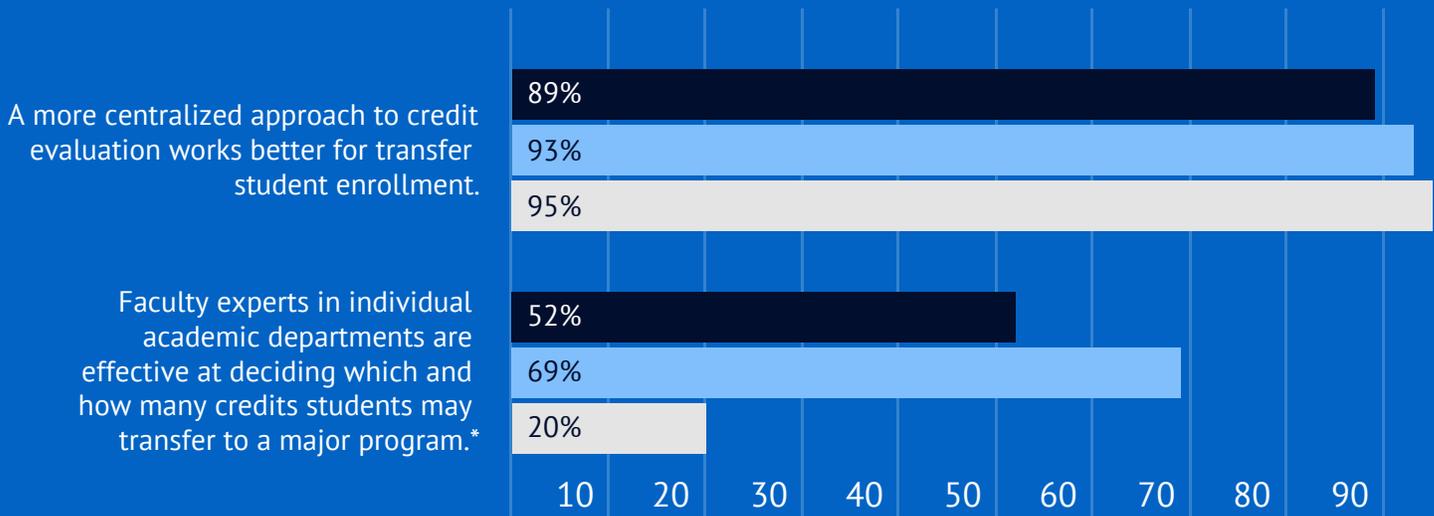
# PERCEPTIONS OF INSTITUTIONS' CREDIT-TRANSFER PROCESSES

- Respondents agree that a more centralized approach to credit evaluation works better for transfer student enrollment.
- Two-year public institutions in particular do not find it to be effective to have faculty experts decide which credits can be transferred. Significantly more respondents from four-year private (52 percent) and public (69 percent) institutions find faculty credit decisions to be effective than do those from two-year institutions (20 percent).

Please rate how much you agree or disagree regarding the following statements about [your institution's process/four-year institutions' processes] for deciding which transfer credits to recognize:

% Strongly Agree + % Agree

4-year private (n=46)    4-year public (n=29)    2-year public (n=20)

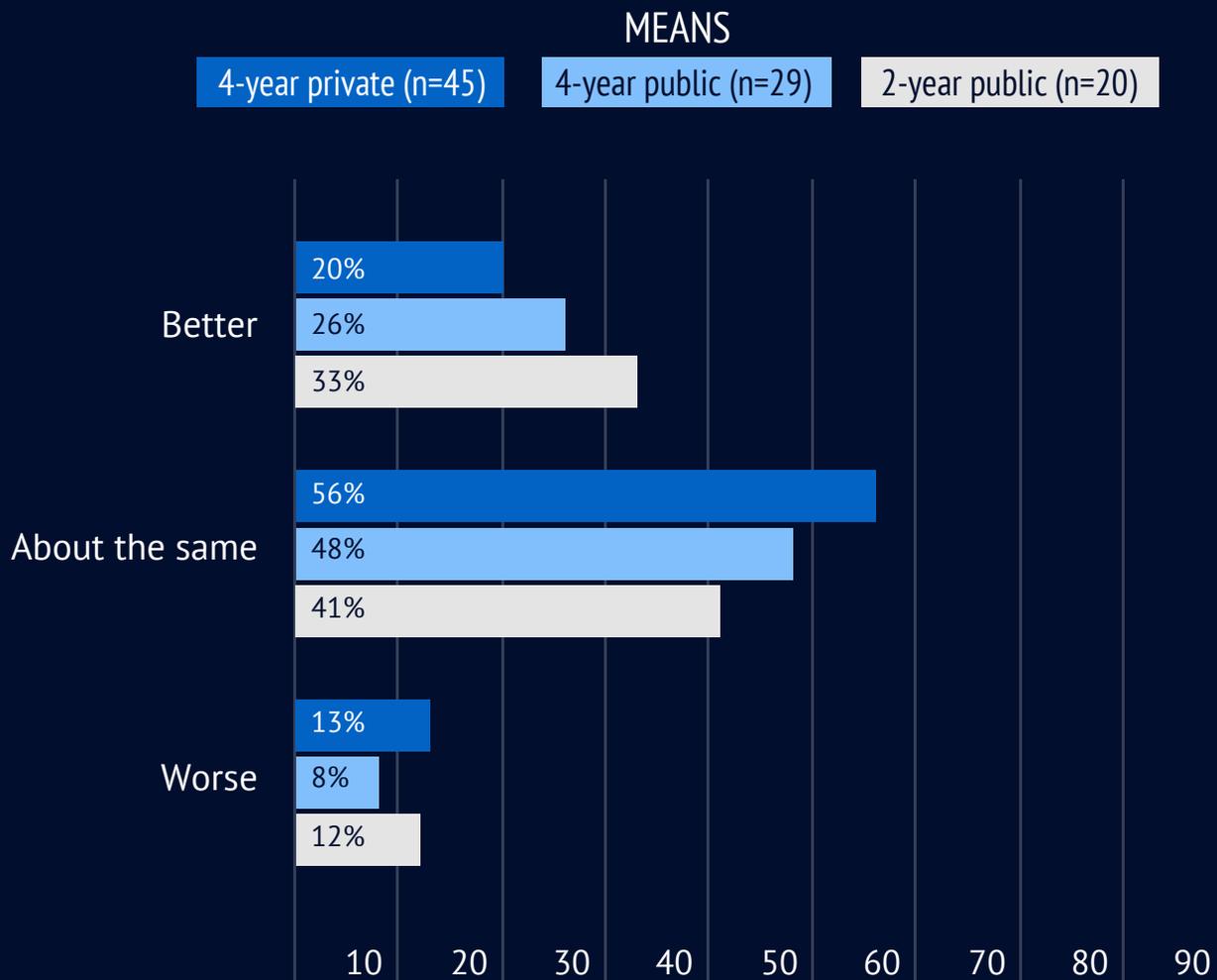


\* Indicates a statistically significant difference between survey iterations.

# PERFORMANCE OF TRANSFER STUDENTS

Most agree that a majority of transfer students perform about the same or better than do students who began their academic careers at the transfer institution. No significant differences exist between the average percentages of each group. Respondents across institutions find that 25 percent of transfer students are better than students who began at the transfer institution, and 50 percent are about the same as those who started at the institution.

**Approximately what proportion of transfer students [to/from] your institution perform worse, the same, or better than students who began their academic careers [there/at the transfer institution]?**



*Note: Respondents were to assign percentages to each of the groups above, adding to 100%. This question shows the average percent that respondents input for each group. Because of this, values do not sum to exactly 100 percent.*

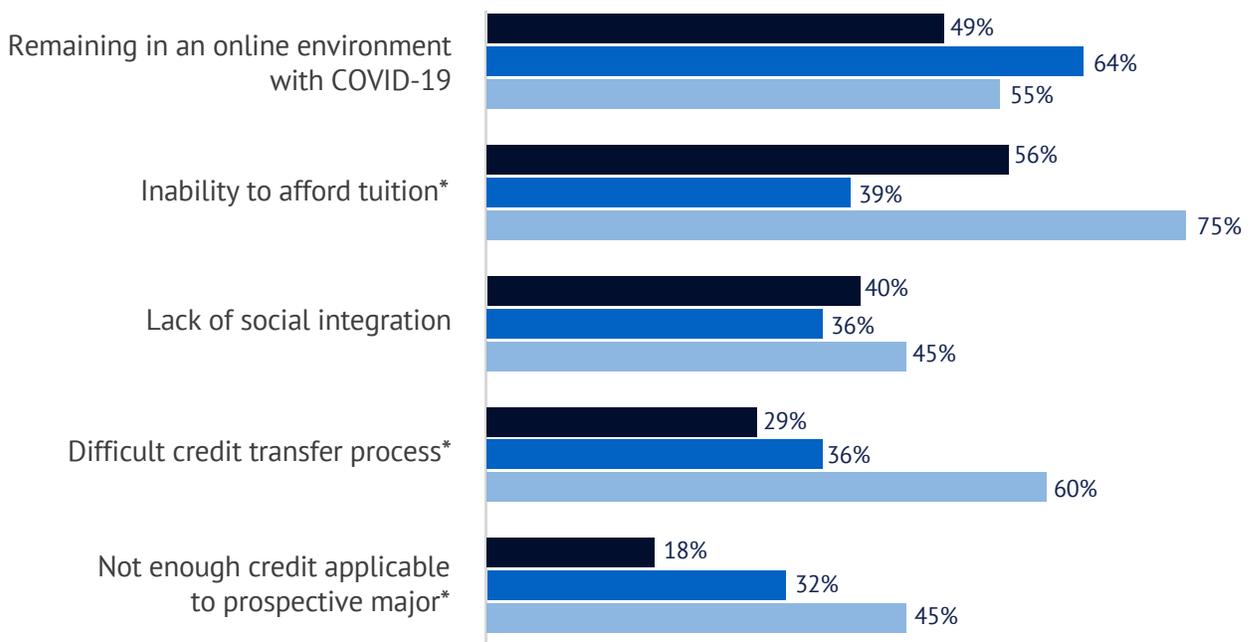
# CONCERN WITH ISSUES TRANSFER STUDENTS MIGHT ENCOUNTER

- All institutions are concerned about transfer students remaining engaged in an online environment with COVID-19.
- Administrators from two-year institutions are significantly more concerned about issues transfer students might face than are those from four-year institutions. Significantly more respondents from community colleges (75 percent) are extremely or very concerned about transfer students' ability to afford tuition as compared to those from four-year public institutions (39 percent). Additionally, significantly more respondents from two-year institutions are extremely or very worried about a difficult credit transfer process (60 percent), not enough credits for transfer students' prospective majors (45 percent), inability to enroll in necessary classes (45 percent), and trouble finding support services (45 percent).

**Please rate your level of concern with the following issues [transfer students might encounter at your institution/students at your institution might encounter when transferring to a four-year institution]:**

% Extremely Concerned + % Very Concerned

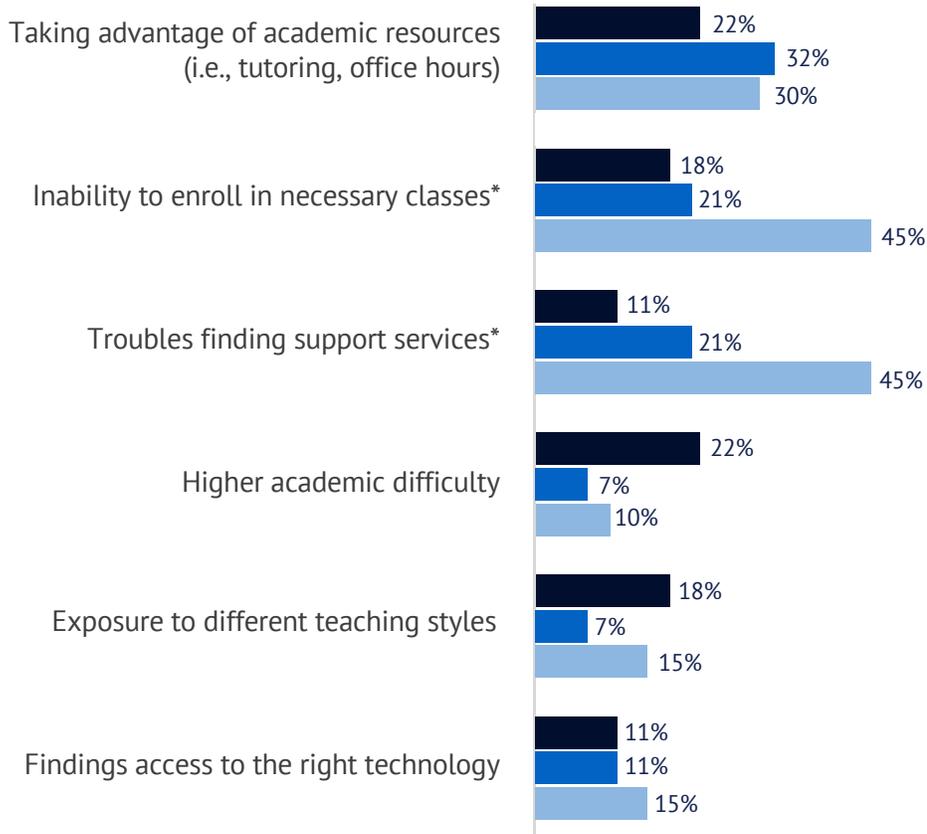
**4-year private (n=45)**   **4-year public (n=28)**   **2-year public (n=20)**



\* Indicates at least one statistically significant difference between groups.

# CONCERN WITH ISSUES TRANSFER STUDENTS MIGHT ENCOUNTER (cont.)

4-year private (n=45)    4-year public (n=28)    2-year public (n=20)



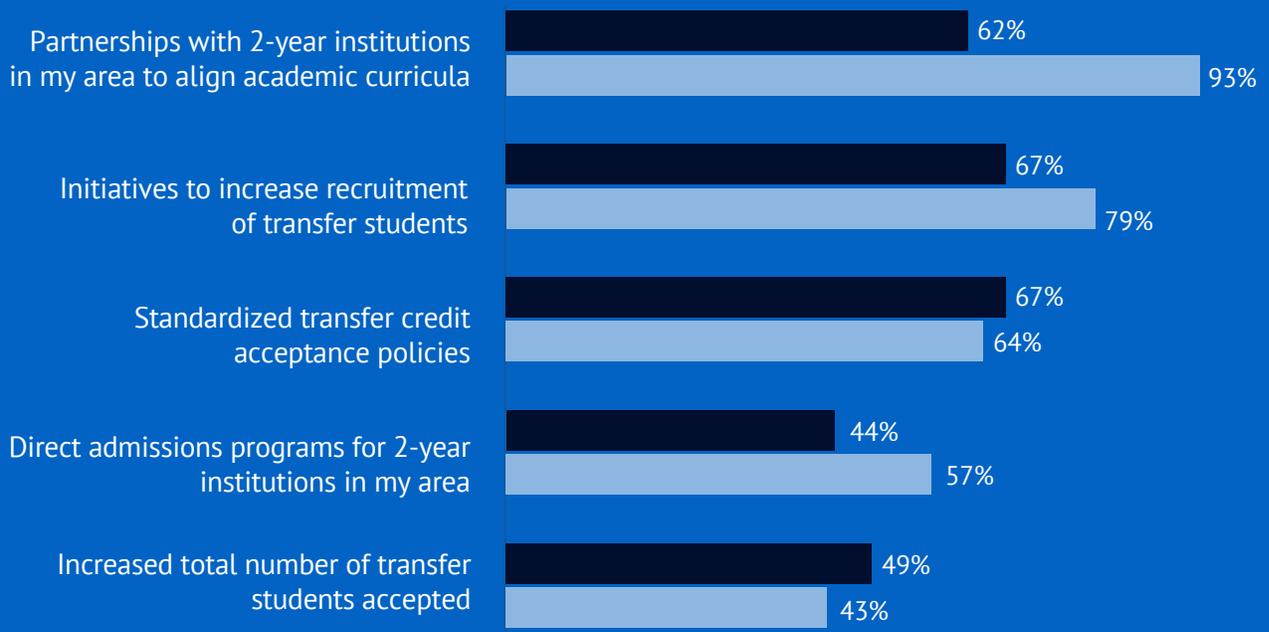
\* Indicates a statistically significant difference between survey groups.

# POLICIES AND PRACTICES IN PLACE BEFORE COVID-19 – FOUR-YEAR INSTITUTIONS

- Administrators from both private and public four-year institutions indicate that, prior to COVID-19, they used a variety of policies and practices to help transfer students. In particular, respondents from both types of institutions indicate having partnerships with two-year institutions in the area to align academic curricula (74 percent) as well as initiatives to increase recruitment of transfer students (71 percent). Significantly more respondents from private institutions (49 percent) indicate that their schools had expanded academic advising faculty for transfer students as compared to public institutions (25 percent).
- Least common among respondents’ institutions are “catch-up” programs for transfer students whose credits did not completely transfer over (11 percent).

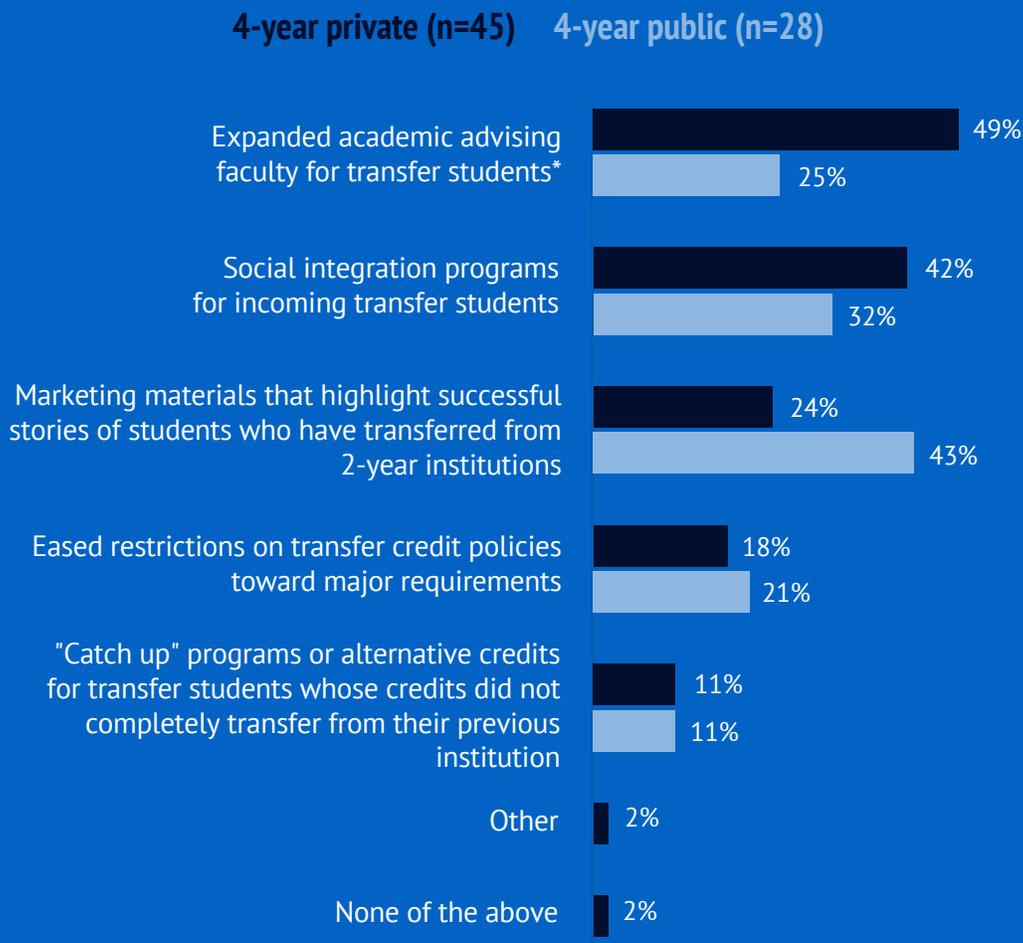
**Which of the following policies did your institution have in place for transfer students prior to the COVID-19 pandemic? Please select all that apply.**

**4-year private (n=45)    4-year public (n=28)**



\* Indicates at least one statistically significant difference between groups.

# POLICIES AND PRACTICES IN PLACE BEFORE COVID-19 – FOUR-YEAR INSTITUTIONS (cont.)



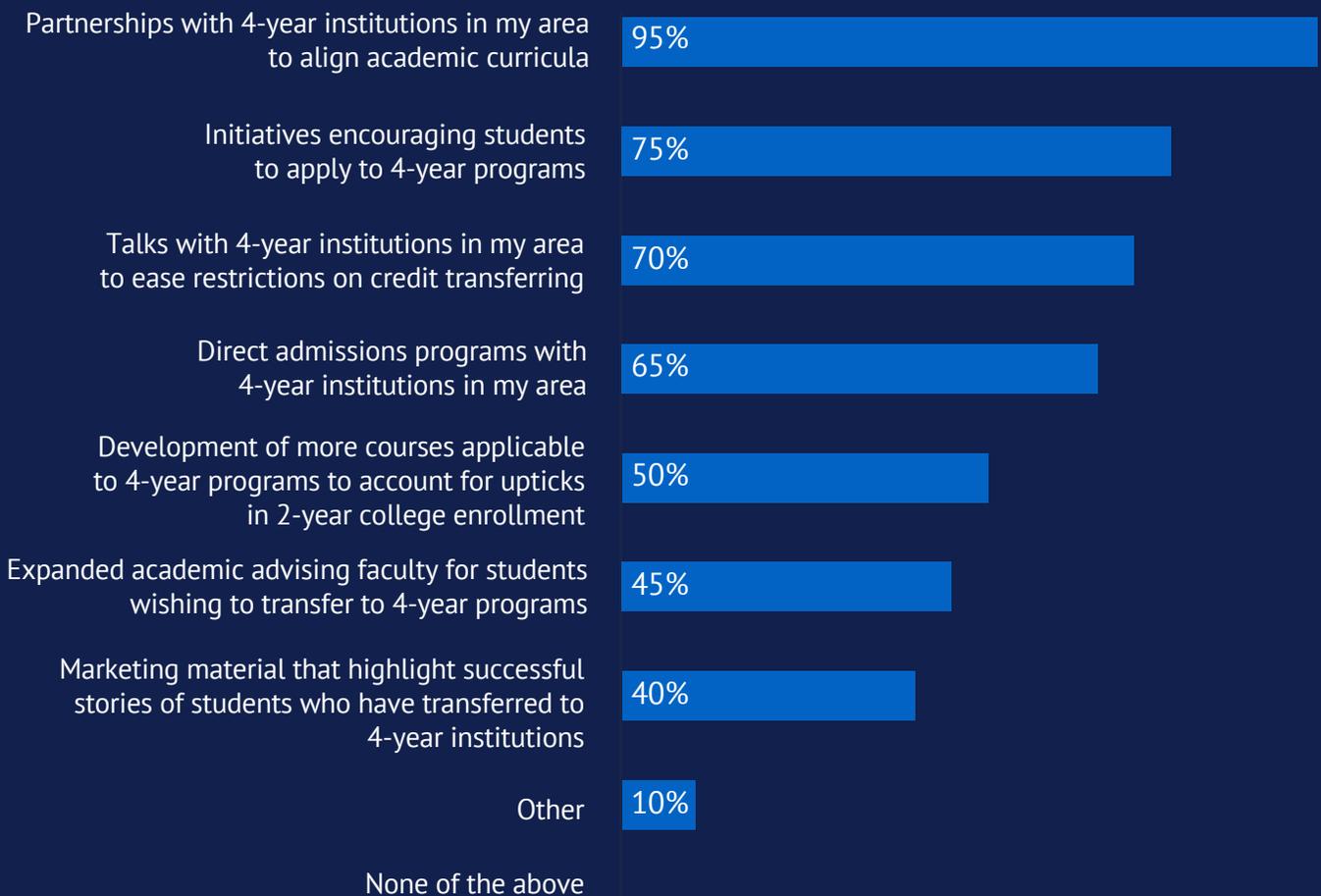
\* Indicates at least one statistically significant difference between groups.

# POLICIES AND PRACTICES IN PLACE BEFORE COVID-19 – TWO-YEAR INSTITUTIONS

- Most administrators from two-year colleges report that they had some policies in place before COVID-19 in place for students planning to transfer. Ninety-five percent report having partnerships with four-year institutions in their area to align with their academic curricula, and 75 percent report having initiatives encouraging students to apply to four-year programs.
- Least common are marketing materials that highlight successful stories of students who have transferred to four-year institutions (40 percent).

**Which of the following policies did your institution have in place for students planning to transfer to four-year institutions prior to the COVID-19 pandemic? Please select all that apply.**

(n=20)



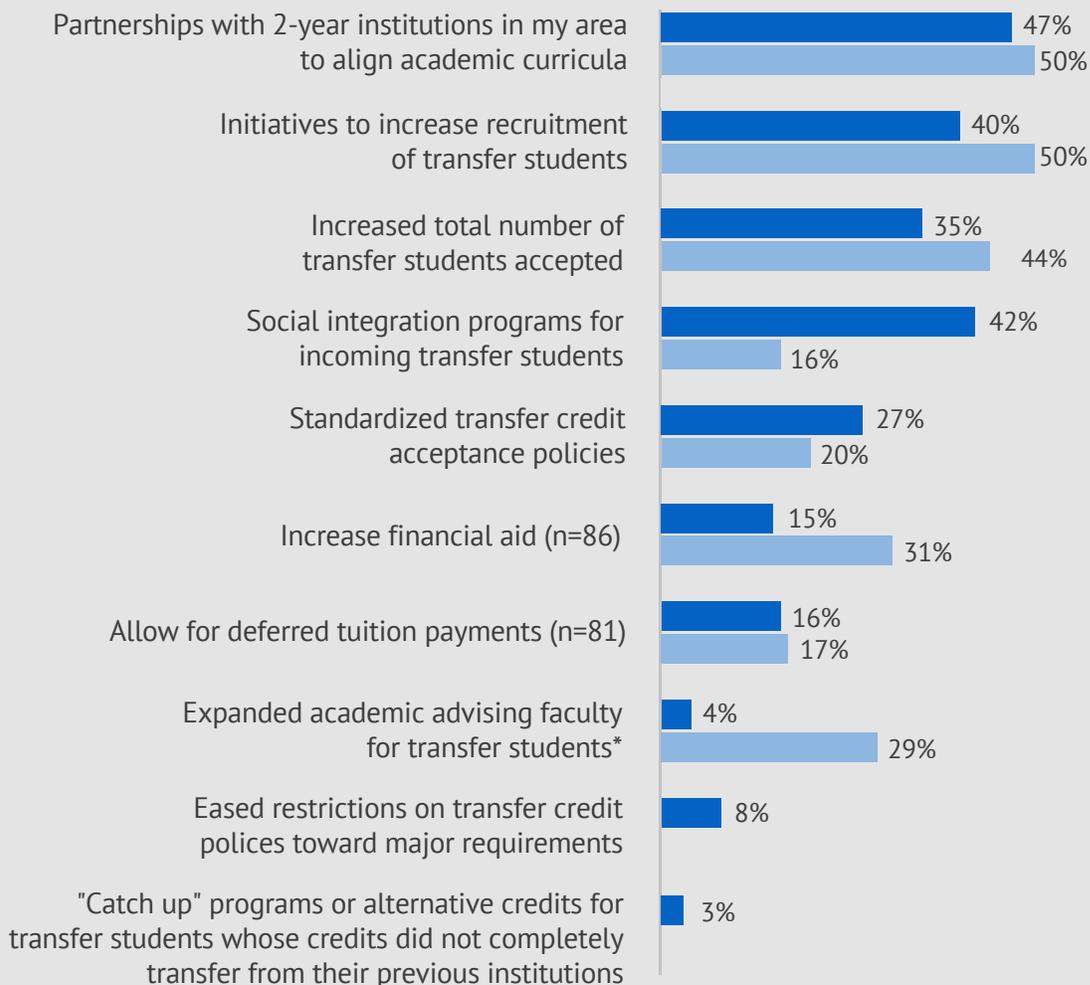
# LIKELIHOOD OF IMPLEMENTING POLICIES AFTER COVID-19 – FOUR-YEAR INSTITUTIONS

In terms of adopting policies and practices before COVID-19, four-year institutions are extremely or very likely to enact policies that have to do with partnerships and initiatives to increase recruitment of transfer students. Over all, across public and private institutions, respondents indicate that their institutions are very or extremely likely to implement partnerships with two-year institutions in their area (47 percent) and invest in initiatives to increase recruitment of transfer students (43 percent).

## In light of the COVID-19 pandemic, how likely is your institution to undertake the following policies regarding prospective transfer students?

% Extremely Likely + % Very Likely

4-year private (n=15-40) 4-year public (n=2-25)



Note: This question asked only of administrators who previously answered that they did not have these policies or practices in place.

# LIKELIHOOD OF IMPLEMENTING POLICIES AFTER COVID-19 – TWO-YEAR INSTITUTIONS

Over all, less than half of administrators at two-year institutions indicate that their institution will adopt policies that they did not have before COVID-19. The policy that respondents indicate their institution is extremely or very likely to adopt (that they did not have before) is marketing material that highlights successful stories of transfer students (33 percent).

## In light of the COVID-19 pandemic, how likely is your institution to undertake the following policies regarding prospective transfer students?

% Extremely Likely + % Very Likely



*Note: This question asked only of administrators who previously answered that they did not have these policies or practices in place.*

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