

July 2021

Texas Transfer Landscape

Setting the context of policies and partnerships
addressing student transfer



**Texas Association of
Community Colleges**



**PHILANTHROPY
ADVOCATES**

a COLLABORATION with EDUCATE TEXAS

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Texas Transfer Landscape

Setting the context of policies and partnerships addressing student transfer

In Fall 2020, the Texas Association of Community Colleges (TACC) was commissioned by Philanthropy Advocates to conduct a multi-part research study to inform improvements to transfer policy and practice, focusing on community college to baccalaureate transfer pathways. As part of the study, TACC collaborated with HCM Strategists to develop this transfer landscape analysis, which includes an overview of the state policies supporting student transfer, a summary of key groups addressing transfer in Texas, and a discussion of strengths and challenges in student transfer.

Executive Summary

- ★ Texas has a large, diverse higher education system that can be leveraged to ensure more Texans have economic opportunities as the state rebounds from the economic crisis stemming from COVID-19. Effective transfer pathways are a key component of providing opportunity through education and addressing Texas' low postsecondary attainment rate as well as attainment gaps by race and ethnicity.
- ★ Prior to the global pandemic, only 13.5% of full-time students who started at a Texas community college completed a bachelor's degree within six years. Significant challenges impede transfer student success, including a highly decentralized system of higher education; the tension between maintaining degree quality and ensuring students complete efficiently; a lack of accountability and incentives for transfer student success; data and technology issues; quality of guidance tools; and complexity of student actions.
- ★ Experts interviewed for this study expressed concern about the effects of the pandemic, as health and financial challenges continue to heavily influence enrollment and transfer decisions particularly among historically underserved populations, resulting in enrollment declines at community colleges.
- ★ Texas has several state policies that aim to streamline lower-division coursework and discipline-specific pathways. Experts noted that the policies facilitate collaboration and provide a framework to define learning outcomes but are not consistently implemented or monitored.
- ★ Research identified seven workgroups focused on improving transfer and pointed to regional partnerships as a promising model.
- ★ Experts provided recommendations to commit to an equity focus, clarify goals, expand partnerships, strengthen policies, streamline pathways, provide flexibility for regional approaches, improve data systems, and augment advising.

Method

This landscape analysis is a result of a literature review and synthesis of expert perspectives from 15 interviews with representatives from two- and four-year institutions and systems, as well as organizations and workgroups addressing transfer (See Appendix). The experts provided their insights related to Texas transfer policies, partnerships, data, and the effects of COVID-19 on transfer, and shared recommendations for improvements in transfer outcomes.

Note: This landscape does not address the role of applied bachelor's degrees offered by community colleges or the transfer of prior learning in the form of assessment or industry-provided training.

Texas Workforce Requires Talent with Bachelor's Degrees, But Attainment Rates Are Low

As Texas recovers from the COVID-19 pandemic and continues to build our future workforce, institutions of higher education will be vital partners in efforts to rebuild the economy, support displaced workers, provide a talent pipeline for employers, and ensure continued progress toward the 60% statewide postsecondary attainment goal. Even prior to the pandemic, not enough Texas students were completing the levels of education necessary to meet the needs of the workforce (THECB, 2020a). But there is good news. According to Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board (THECB) Commissioner Harrison Keller, the crisis has accelerated innovation in higher education to support the economic recovery and provide a more just future for Texas students, families and communities (THECB, 2020b). Ensuring that innovation in Texas includes recognizing and rewarding the learning that students acquire as they transfer across institutions will be critical to driving toward more equitable outcomes by income, region, and race and ethnicity in both education and the workforce.

Higher Education is Critical to the Texas Economic Recovery

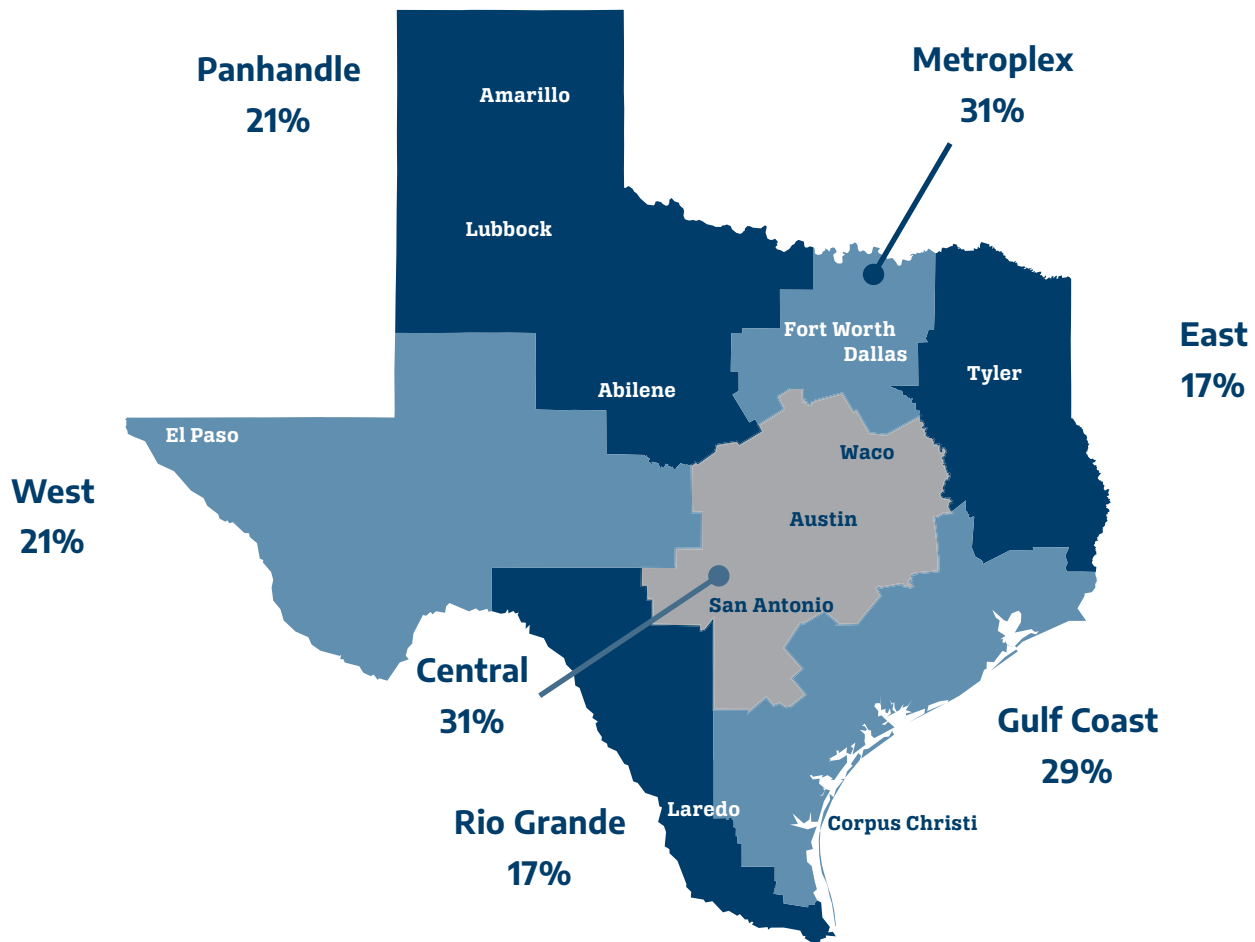
Higher education will be critical to Texas' recovery from the COVID-19 crisis by preparing more Texans for quality jobs in the workforce. Prior to the crisis, job growth in Texas outpaced the nation and Texas experienced low rates of unemployment (OECD, 2020). Texas had experienced increases in the highest-paying jobs, requiring workers to earn higher educational levels, including bachelor's degrees, to increase their value in the labor market (OECD). With a relatively young population and a large and diversified system of higher education, the state is poised to ensure more Texans have economic opportunities as the state rebounds from the fallout of the pandemic.

Opportunities for Educational Success are Inequitable in Texas

Forty-seven percent of Texans have earned a postsecondary credential (certificate and higher), lower than the national average of 51% (Lumina, 2019). As one of the largest states both geographically and demographically, there is large variation by region and by sub-population. Texas has stark differences in attainment by race and ethnicity, of particular concern since COVID-19's effects on health, education and the workforce have disproportionately affected people of color (Mackey et al, 2021). Although Hispanic residents represent about 40% of the state's population, for example, only 20% have an associate degree or higher (Lumina).

In Central Texas, home to the state's two flagship universities, 31% of working-age adults have at least a bachelor's degree, while bachelor's degree attainment in East Texas, the Rio Grande Valley and other areas is about half that rate (Trellis, 2020). To eliminate these gaps and make progress toward increased bachelor's degree attainment in Texas, students need accessible and affordable pathways. However, the pandemic has disrupted the higher education pipeline, with 45% of Texas community college students indicating they are likely to delay graduation (TACC, 2020b).

Population Age 25 and Older with a Bachelor's Degree or Higher (2016)



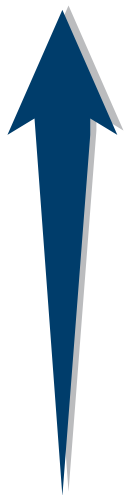
Source: Retrieved from Trellis Company, State of Student Aid in Texas 2020. www.trelliscompany.org.

Transfer Promises an Affordable and Efficient Route to a Bachelor's Degree, But Too Few Students Complete This Pathway Successfully

Available throughout the state, community colleges present a convenient and affordable pathway to a bachelor's degree in Texas. In fact, most higher education students in Texas begin at a community college; as a result, they represent the majority of transfer students (Shapiro et al., 2017). Nonetheless, transfer rates were low prior to the pandemic, as these students, especially low-income students and students of color already faced hurdles related to credit applicability, time to degree and completion. Early signs indicate the crisis has further affected them.

Vertical Transfer

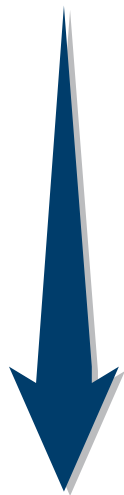
4-Year



2-Year

Reverse Transfer

4-Year



2-Year

Lateral Transfer

4-Year



4-Year

2-Year



2-Year

Transfer Rates Were Poor Prior to the Crisis, and Have Worsened Since

Prior to the pandemic, about 25% of all first-time students at Texas community colleges transferred within six years, compared to 38% nationally (THECB, 2021; Shapiro et al, 2018). The pandemic likely worsened transfer rates, as first-time transfer student enrollment dropped 5% at Texas public universities and 8% nationally, with the largest impacts for Black and Hispanic students (THECB, 2021; Causey et al, 2020). Nationally, only 24% of low-income students transferred, which was half the rate of their higher income peers (Ibid).

Vertical Transfer is a Key Route to a Bachelor's Degree

Student mobility results in a variety of patterns, including the community college to four-year institution “vertical” transfer, “reverse” transfer from four- to two-year institutions, and “lateral” transfer within the same sector. The large majority of transfer students nationally were community college students, and just over half of these moved into four-year institutions (Shapiro, Dundar, Huie, Wakhungu, Bhimdiwala, Nathan, et al., 2018). However, Black and Hispanic community college students were less likely to transfer. Among White community college students, 47.7% transferred, compared to 37.2% of Hispanic students and 28.4% of Black students (Shapiro, Dundar, Huie, Wakhungu, Bhimdiwala, Nathan, et al., 2018).

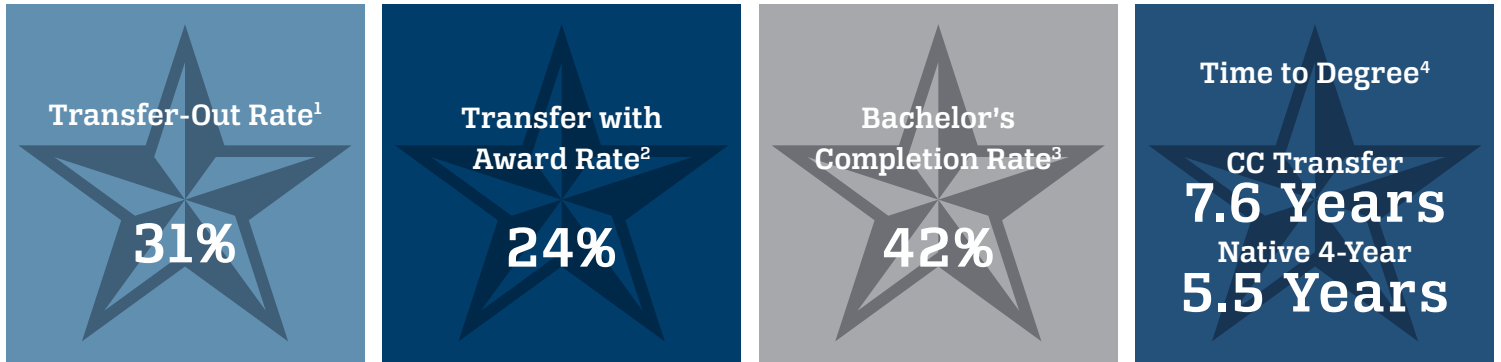
Community Colleges are a Common Destination in Texas

The Texas higher education system is large and complex, enrolling over 1.6 million students across 170 institutions (THECB, 2020c). The vast majority (88%) are enrolled in public institutions, and 54% attend community colleges (THECB). With 111 community college campus locations in 50 districts (TACC, 2020a) and the third-lowest two-year college tuition in the nation (THECB), starting at a two-year college provides a viable transfer option across the state.

Texas Vertical Transfer and Bachelor's Completion Rates are Low

Since most undergraduate students attend community colleges in Texas, the transition to four-year institutions is important. About 31% of community college students in the state transfer within six years, which represents over 82,000 students (Shapiro et al., 2017). Almost 42% of those who transferred from a community college in the state earned a bachelor's degree in six years, compared to 47% nationally (Shapiro et al., 2017). Of community college students who are juniors at a four-year institution, 66% complete within four years, compared to 84% of native students (THECB, 2018).

Transfer in Texas: Key Metrics



1. Transfer-Out Rate: The number of transfer students who started at the community college divided by the number of students in the community college's fall 2010 cohort. (Shapiro et al., 2017)

2. Transfer with Award Rate: The number of transfer students who started at the community college and earned a certificate or associate degree from that college prior to their earliest enrollment at a four-year institution, divided by the number of transfer students in the community college's fall 2010 cohort. (Shapiro et al., 2017)

3. Bachelor's Completion Rate: The number of transfer students who started at the community college and earned a bachelor's degree from any four-year institution within six years of community college entry, divided by the number of transfer students in the community college's fall 2010 cohort. (Shapiro et al., 2017).

4. (THECB, 2018)

Texas Has Strong Transfer Policies and Partnerships, But Key Challenges Stifle Progress

Fewer Texas Transfer Students Earn an Associate Degree Prior to Transfer

Completion of an associate degree prior to transfer has been linked to improved outcomes (Crosta & Kopko, 2014); however, more recent research noted the connection is unclear in many states, including in Texas (Jenkins & Fink, 2016; Bailey, Cullinane, Fink, Jenkins & Schudde, 2017). Only 24% of Texas students transferred with a community college credential, 10 percentage points lower than the national average (Shapiro et al., 2017).

Transfer Students Face Barriers

Nationally, the existing transfer system produces deeply inequitable student outcomes by income, race and ethnicity. For example, just 10% of all Black students and 13% of all Hispanic students nationally who begin at a two-year public institution go on to graduate from a four-year institution within six years, compared to 21% of White students and 26% of Asian students (Shapiro, Dundar, Huie, Wakhungu, Bhimdiwala, & Wilson, 2018). In Texas, low-income community college students graduate with a bachelor's degree at half the rate of their higher-income counterparts (Shapiro et al., 2017).

Even when students successfully transfer, they face barriers with the applicability of credits and completion. Many students lose credits when they transfer, requiring resources to take additional coursework. In a national study, about 40% of community college students were unable to transfer most of their credits to a four-year institution (Monaghan & Attewell, 2015). Students who lost more credits were less likely to complete a bachelor's degree. Students who transferred almost all of their credits had a 2.5 times greater chance of graduating, even when controlling for other factors (Monaghan & Attewell). Affordability implications extend beyond the wasted resources for classes not applied. Students who attend and do not complete are three times as likely to default on student loans than those who earned a credential (USED, 2015).

Still, in light of these disappointing transfer outcomes, 75% of bachelor's degree holders in Texas have credits from a community college (Greater Texas Foundation, 2017). However, many of these bachelor's degree completers are taking more credits than required, and transfer students face penalties in terms of graduation, credit hours and time to degree (Cullinane, 2014). Transfer students have a longer "time to degree," taking 7.6 years to complete a bachelor's degree, over two years longer than native university students (THECB, 2018). Thus, four-year institution representatives noted excess credits are a key barrier to successful transfer (THECB).

In order to address the challenges that students face in efficiently transferring and completing a bachelor's degree, Texas has created myriad transfer policies at the state level. From streamlining lower-division coursework to creating discipline-specific pathways, the state has policies in place designed to facilitate transfer. Experts interviewed for this study noted the policies support collaboration, provide a framework for learning outcomes, and serve to ease communication to students. Texas also has numerous statewide workgroups, inter-institutional committees and regional networks focused on transfer student success. Interviewees noted these groups provide leadership and coordinate efforts and have gained momentum to solve transfer issues. Several comprehensive approaches are demonstrating success through regional partnerships.

Despite the broad array of policies and partnerships, several critical challenges are impeding transfer outcomes. Challenges include the decentralized nature of the Texas higher education system, the tension between maintaining degree quality while ensuring students complete efficiently, a lack of accountability for transfer student outcomes, data and technology issues, quality of guidance tools, and complexity of student actions.

Texas Has Key Building Blocks in State Policies to Address Transfer Issues

Texas has developed several transfer-related policies to increase efficiency for community college students seeking a bachelor's degree (see Table 1). The Common Course Numbering System and Academic Course Guide Manual provide standardization for lower-division coursework to ease transcript review and transferability. The "Core 42 Curriculum" is designed to provide streamlined acceptance of general education requirements, and Field of Study curricula provide discipline-specific pathways to ensure students are prepared to enter their major upon transfer. Of the total transfer students in 2016, only 45% had completed an associate degree, 41% completed the Core, and just 3% completed Field of Study curricula (THECB, 2018).

Voluntary compacts have been developed to outline regionally based, program-specific transfer requirements. As the name suggests, the agreements are not required but outline a pathway describing how coursework from the origin college applies toward a degree at the destination institution. Reverse transfer provides a process to award associate degrees after transfer upon completion of sufficient credits after transfer to a four-year institution. Universities are required to coordinate the award after students transfer with 30 semester credit hours from a community college and earn another 30 hours at the university. Texas also has strong support for dual credit, allowing high school students to engage in college coursework, which helps amplify the need for improved transferability of coursework. The most recent legislation authorized in 2019, Senate Bill 25, addressed transfer challenges requiring institutions to report information about non-transferable credits, expanding course sequencing, and evaluating incorporation of meta-majors in the Texas Core Curriculum.

Texas Transfer Policy Building Blocks

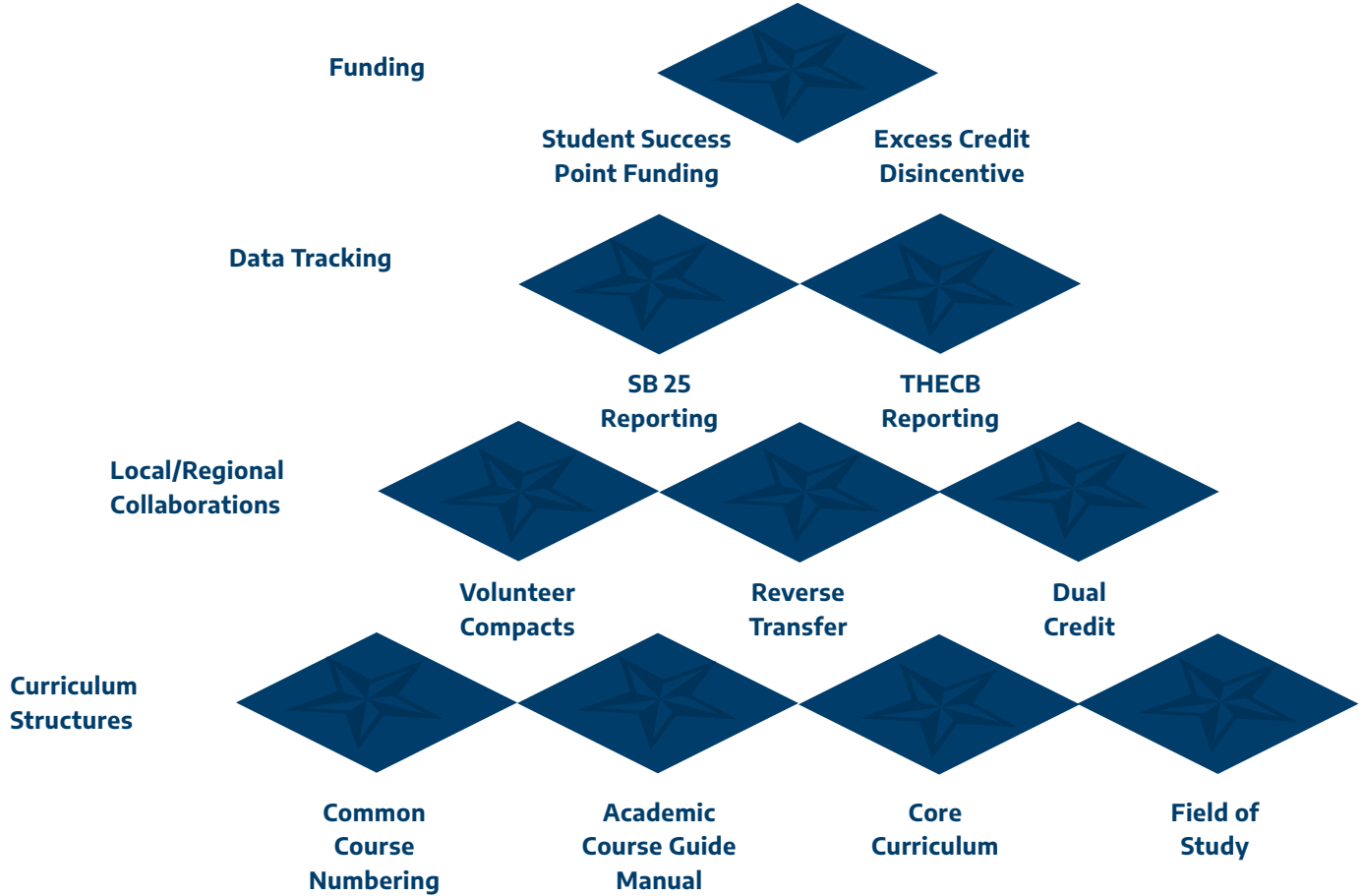


Table 1 (below) provides more detail on Texas transfer policies. Texas transfer experts noted that the state has most of the policies in place in other states. The policies serve as building blocks and facilitate collaboration, provide a framework for learning outcomes, and ease communication to students.

Policy Comments

Expert participants interviewed to understand Texas transfer policy provided these comments:

- “The multiple transfer workgroups are leveraging these foundational building blocks. We are ‘stepping into a flowing river’ to get to where we want to be.”
- “Common course numbering equivalencies allow ease of communication of lower-division requirements.”
- “The Academic Course Guide Manual provides a framework to establish learning outcomes and specify coursework.”
- “Core requires transferability toward lower-division general education either in whole or in part.”
- “Field of Study allows institutions to collaborate to develop course sequences for students to take in a minimal amount of time.”
- “Dual credit is a mechanism for access and success that shines the light on transfer outcomes.”
- “Community colleges receive financial incentive in the performance-based funding formula for success in transfer.”

Table 1: Texas Transfer-Related State-Level Policies

Transfer-Related Policy	Description
Dual Credit Texas Education Code § 28.009	Each school district is required to offer a program allowing students to earn at least 12 semester credit hours of college credit while in high school. Almost all partner with community colleges.
Common Course Numbering System Texas Education Code § 61.832	Provides a standard four-digit course numbering system to standardize course content across colleges in the state. Most universities use a crosswalk to list equivalents rather than using the CCNS
Academic Course Guide Manual 19 TAC 4.28	Community colleges are required to offer and list courses to meet equivalencies for the Core curriculum. Universities offer lower-division courses not listed in the ACGM.
Texas Core Curriculum 19 TAC 4.28-4.31	Requires institutions to transfer up to 42 lower-division semester hours as a guaranteed block of credits in communication, math, humanities, natural sciences, government and political science, visual and performing arts, speech and college success. Courses correspond to the Academic Course Guide Manual.
Field of Study 19 TAC 4.32	Provides lower-division course sequences for certain fields to permit transfer students to move immediately into upper-division coursework. Intended to transfer as a block of courses, and individual courses will transfer.
Voluntary Transfer Compacts 29 Voluntary Transfer 19 TAC 9.1, 9.185	Articulation agreements to outline the transferability of courses applicable to certain bachelor's degrees. Includes the award of a certificate to community college students with 50% of the curriculum completed.
Texas Tuning Project Grant-funded (2013)	Faculty defined learning competencies for certain disciplines to improve quality and relevance of degrees.
Senate Bill 25 (2019) 86th Texas Legislature	Comprehensive legislation that requires reporting of non-transferable coursework and rationale, earlier degree plans, expanded published course sequencing, and a study on meta-majors and Core.
Reverse Transfer HB 3025 (2011), SB 498 (amended 2013)	Requires a university to send the transcript to the community college upon completion of 66 hours (with 30+ from the CC) to review for requirements to award an associate degree.
Performance-Based Funding Incentive (Student Success Points Model) Texas Education Code § 61.0593	Community college performance-based funding assigns weights to early and intermediate progress metrics; four-year transfer receives three points
Funding Disincentive Texas Education Code § 61.0595 Texas Education Code § 54.014	Institutions do not receive a state subsidy for students who attempt more than 30 credits above degree requirements; institutions are permitted to charge non-resident tuition for remaining credits attempted (will drop to 30 credits starting in fall 2023).
Tuition Incentives Texas Education Code § 54.0065 HB 2999 (2011)	Provides a rebate of up to \$1,000 for students who graduate with no more than three semester hours in excess of requirements, including transfer credits. Permits institutions to offer a fixed tuition rate for transfer students.

Numerous Partner Groups Focus on Transfer in Texas

Seven primary groups are addressing transfer issues in Texas. The tables below summarize the areas of focus (Table 2) and describe the scope of work (Table 3) for the groups. Some high-level observations about the primary groups include:

- ★ Workgroups include representatives from a variety of organizations, including foundations, presidents and chancellors from two-and four-year institutions and systems, including advisors, institutional research, instructional and student services leadership, presidents and chancellors serve on these workgroups.
- ★ Of the seven groups profiled below, two focus primarily at the state level (the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board’s [THECB] Improving Transfer Workgroup and the Texas Student Success Council, convened by Educate Texas); two work primarily at the regional level (Houston Guided Pathways to Success and the North Texas Community College Consortium’s Transfer Collaborative); and three work at both the state and regional levels (Texas Success Center, Texas Transfer Alliance and Texas Postsecondary Innovation Network).
- ★ The groups seek to improve transfer through particular focus areas:
 - Leadership and relationship-building: Improving Transfer Workgroup, Texas Student Success Council, Texas Success Center and Texas Transfer Alliance.
 - Institutional practice improvements and innovation: Houston Guided Pathways to Success, North Texas Community College Consortium’s Transfer Collaborative, Texas Success Center, Texas Transfer Alliance, and Texas Postsecondary Innovation Network.
 - Policy: Improving Transfer Workgroup and Texas Student Success Council.
 - Data and metrics: Texas Student Success Council, Texas Success Center and Texas Transfer Alliance.
- ★ The North Texas Community College Consortium’s Transfer Collaborative has built a portal to facilitate student, advisor and faculty access to mapped transfer pathways, and the Postsecondary Innovation Network is supporting an effort to build a portal called MapMyPath. Beyond those efforts, technology solutions that seek to improve the quality of information about transfer remain a gap.
- ★ Interviewees suggest that the workgroups are generally complementary, though the state would benefit from efforts to find synergies and build collaborations.

Additional committees and workgroups operate within sectors or regions. For example, transfer is often a featured topic at meetings of groups such as the Texas Association of Community Colleges’ Texas Association of Chief Academic Officers and the Texas Council of Chief Academic Officers (universities). In addition, the University of Texas System has conducted deep research studies on student outcomes in dual credit and transfer.

Types of Transfer Policy Partners in Texas



Advocates

- ★Regional, state, national funders
- ★Research and Advocacy groups
- ★Business leaders



State

- ★Policymakers
- ★Agencies
- ★Associations



Community Colleges

- ★Campus and district leaders
- ★Faculty
- ★Advisors, student services
- ★Institutional researchers



Universities

- ★System leaders
- ★Campus leaders
- ★Faculty
- ★Advisors, student services
- ★Institutional researchers

Table 2: Summary of Primary Texas Transfer-Focused Groups

Group	Area	Transfer Focus	Lead
Improving Transfer Workgroup	State	State-level policy and discipline-specific pathways	Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board
Texas Success Center	State and Regional	Guided pathways and student success strategies	Texas Association of Community Colleges
Texas Transfer Alliance	State and Regional	State-level transfer goals and data analysis, cross-system and cross-institution collaboration and leadership, and institutional practice	UT-Austin Charles A. Dana Center
Texas Student Success Council	State	Policy development and advocacy	Educate Texas
Guided Pathways to Success	Regional	Meta-majors and degree maps with corequisites; data analysis; advising	U of Houston
Transfer Collaborative	Regional	Professional development and resources	North Texas Community College Consortium
Texas Postsecondary Innovation Network	Regional	Technology-enabled course sequence tool; streamlined reverse transfer	U of Texas

The feedback from experts' interviews regarding the array of Texas transfer partnerships reflected the importance of leadership, regional commitment to transfer, intention to work collaboratively and transparently within and among groups, and interest in recent state-level work. Several experts noted that regional approaches have shown strong progress in transfer outcomes. There was also a sense of optimism about the new Commissioner of Higher Education and his interest in addressing transfer in collaboration with two- and four-year institutions. There is broad agreement that the various workgroups are coordinated and have different areas of focus.

Partnership Feedback

Leadership

- “We have a robust set of institutions of higher education and within them true champions of efficacy of transfer and institutional practice.”
- “There is a greater realization that transfer has economic impact for students and the entire state.”

Regional Collaborations Deliver Success

- “Statewide impact is delivered at the local level among department faculty.”
- “A regional approach includes hands-on practice to make it work.”

Complementary and Collaborative

- “The work is complementary across the different strands, tackling issues from different vantage points for the benefit of students; it’s the most coherent that I’ve seen.”
- “A recent groundswell in multisector approaches to address efficacy and efficiency in transfer with different sub-groups that have organized, voluntarily or through legislation or political influence.”

Interest in Statewide Efforts

- “The THECB working group’s framework sets us up for success once implemented.”
- “The pathways work is most effective as it involves all of the community college districts and is comprehensive.”

Momentum

- “Just within the last two years, starting to shift and recognize that this warrants some accountability on both levels of institutions, and we are having more open dialogue.”
- “The fact there are so many groups might reflect the strong needs.”

Table 3: Descriptions of Primary Texas Transfer-Focused Groups

Background	Scope of Work	Membership
Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board (THECB) – Improving Transfer Workgroup		
The Commissioner of THECB requested the 2020 workgroup convene to develop recommendations to 1) substantially improve vertical transfer, 2) substantially improve the applicability of credit to a major, and 3) reduce the number of excess semester credit hours.	Following the design principles of shared responsibility, student-centered pathways, coursework optimization, transparent process and full-scale implementation, a proposed framework would ensure that students transfer with junior standing in the major. Discipline foundation courses (12 hours) and directed electives (6) would combine with core curriculum (42) as part of a transferable associate degree. The intent is that all 60 hours will apply to program completion.	The workgroup consisted of 10 community college and 10 university leaders, along with agency members. A permanent advisory committee with discipline-specific workgroups will include 24 faculty and administrators equally from two- and four-year public institutions, as well as ex officio student and advisor representation.
Texas Association of Community Colleges (TACC) Texas Success Center – Texas Pathways		
The Texas Success Center provides structured supports for colleges in the implementation, scaling, and continuous improvement of guided pathways, as well as trustee education and knowledge development.	Through an integrated statewide approach, colleges build capacity to help more students earn meaningful credentials, transfer with no loss of credit, and gain employment.	All 50 community college districts have committed to implementing guided pathways at scale. Colleges are in groups based on readiness to plan, implement and scale guided pathways reforms, including transfer improvements.
Dana Center – Texas Transfer Alliance (TTA)		
Managed by the Charles A. Dana Center at UT-Austin, the TTA was formed in 2018 through grant funding.	Through convening focused on data and practice, goal-setting, action plans and continuous improvement, TTA's goals are to increase gateway course completion, the six-year transfer out rate and BA completion rate for CC transfers; decrease attempted credits and time to degree; and eliminate all gaps by race, ethnicity and Pell status.	A collaborative of community colleges and universities including Texas A&M Univ System, TACC, Texas State Univ System, Univ North Texas System, and Univ Texas System. The TTA receives advisory supports from Educate Texas and the national Tackling Transfer initiative.
Educate Texas – Texas Student Success Council (TSSC)		
Created in 2012, the TSSC aims to improve student success through policy improvements and advocacy.	The TSSC develops policy recommendations based on research, evidence and best practices to address barriers; educates and informs policymakers about key issues; and builds momentum through collective action. TSSC is focused on efforts that support postsecondary success through K-12 linkages, credit portability, and workforce alignment.	Convened by Educate Texas, the TSSC includes a broad group of state and field stakeholders from business and philanthropy, policymakers, state agencies, and K-12, community college, and university leaders.

Table 3: Descriptions of Primary Texas Transfer-Focused Groups (continued)

Background	Scope of Work	Membership
Houston Guided Pathways to Success (GPS)		
Houston GPS is an integrated system of cohesive strategies that are designed to smooth two-year to four-year college transfer and completion.	The GPS goals are: 1) provide a timely, structured, and seamless pathway for students transferring in the Gulf Coast-Houston region; 2) boost postsecondary attainment and increase completion and successful transfer rates in the area; and 3) build a culture of timely graduation.	University of Houston leads the initiative in a collaborative partnership with 13 two- and four-year institutions.
North Texas Community College Consortium (NTCCC) – Transfer Collaborative		
The NTCCC is a premier regional network providing high-quality, low-cost, close-to-home professional development opportunities for member institutions.	The purpose of the collaborative is to assist member institutions in creating and building transfer pathways by providing an ongoing forum for dialogue on issues of interest to the members; providing resources, support and professional development to member institutions; and conducting consortium-wide resource development projects.	The collaborative serves 15 college districts in the area with 86 locations in collaboration with UT-Dallas, U North Texas and UNT-Dallas.
Texas Postsecondary Innovation Network (TPIN)		
TPIN is a network focused on innovation and collaboration to develop innovations including dual enrollment and transfer support.	The network has developed MapMyPath, a technology-enabled course-sequencing tool. It has worked to streamline scalable solutions in reverse transfer.	The network includes nine two-and four-year institutions across the state.

Regional Collaborations are Critical to Transfer Success

The effectiveness of state policies relies on collaboration among institutions to implement them well, particularly at the local level between feeder community colleges and receiving universities. Most students who transfer directly from a community college want to stay in their region, and many students attend college within 50 miles of home (Hillman & Weichman, 2016). The power of local partnerships came through in the interviews, as participants described how to resolve transfer issues and provide clarity for students. Experts offered several examples of effective, multifaceted regional collaborations that provide clear transfer pathways for students by leveraging state policies and working hard on local implementation and collaboration.

Regional Impact Feedback

Comprehensive Approach

- “The El Paso collaborative worked together for over 30 years and has quarterly meetings with K-12, two-year, four-year, and workforce as a council with a second layer of high school and college advisors.”
- “Houston GPS implemented corequisite remediation and math alignment; proactive advising with informed choice; meta majors and degree maps; some structured schedules; and integration of Field of Study framework.”

Local Policy Implementation

- “Some regional partnerships have a 2+2 approach for a specific degree plan (Alamo and Texas Tech).”
- “El Paso CC and UT-El Paso are a case study for reverse transfer. No competition means more collaboration and the ability to have challenging conversations about transfer and revenue implications.”
- “Co-admission is a strong initiative that leads to no loss of credit. While at the community college, the student can use the library, attend sporting events, and feel immediately a part of the university, while paying reduced tuition at the community college. It has a positive impact on retention, affordability, engagement and student success. A great example is Texas A&M and Blinn College.”

Strengthened Advising

- “UNT and NTCC are reducing the numbers of students who change their major after transfer—an example of a community college advising students earlier.”
- “A&M Kingsville and Texas Southmost and South Texas college provide a ‘yellow brick road’ with institution guides, agreement on catalog years at both colleges, and a clear journey for students.”

Key Challenges Impede Efficient Transfer in Texas

Despite the strong policies, collaborations and transfer champions, critical challenges impede improved, efficient credit applicability. Stakeholders working in the field of transfer in Texas were asked, “With the many state-level policies and inter-institutional partnerships dedicated to efficient transfer, what is standing in the way of student success?” Their responses, affirmed by relevant literature, are categorized into the primary challenges presented by a decentralized higher education system, the tension between degree quality and efficiency, minimal accountability and incentives, data transparency, manual systems, quality of guidance tools, and the complexity of student behavior.

Dispersed and Decentralized

With 170 higher education institutions across 268,000 square miles, the sheer size of Texas makes coordination a challenge. Texas has 37 four-year public institutions within six systems and 50 community college districts with over 100 community college locations. All of these institutions have unique governance structures, operating independently with conflicting demands in a political context that prioritizes local control and values autonomous institutions (Bailey et al). Policies and practices vary from institution to institution. Interviewees addressed the challenge of a large, decentralized system.

Decentralized Feedback

- “The biggest challenge is that Texas is massive – it is hard to create a system for so many pathways and institutions.”
- “Statewide solutions that are too detailed contribute to issues, as different campuses and regions have unique needs.”
- “As a Research I institution, we were missing the regional campus perspective. The varied missions are a strength and can add complications.”
- “Four-year institutions (specifically flagship institutions) vary on how closely they follow the agreements, which leads many community colleges to seek regional collaborations rather than statewide.”

Quality Versus Efficiency

The political context and culture also reflect perceptions about each sector’s role in transfer and understanding of decision-making. Four-year institutions, faculty councils at the state flagships in particular, have a history of expressing concerns about parallel quality standards and streamlining lower-division coursework that affect the value of the baccalaureate degree (Bailey et al.). Community colleges, however, take issue with assumptions of quality differences for similar coursework. Several interviewees pointed out that the receiving university often serves as the primary training institution for community college faculty. There are currently no transparent, specific, and universally agreed upon measures of quality either for community college or university coursework.

In general, there are differences in beliefs about the effects of the timing of transfer on completion outcomes. Community colleges tend to believe that students are more successful for having earned an associate degree prior to transfer, or at least having achieved the full 42-hour Core, and universities tend to believe that students are more successful if they transition earlier, with fewer transfer credits. Although there is a common understanding that many students intend to transfer and those who do lose credits, university faculty appear to drive institution-specific standards that dilute the effects of state-level policy (Bailey et al.). Although the flagship institutions accept fewer transfer students, their faculty concerns about student success in upper-division coursework and degree quality have influenced implementation of policy statewide. Experts note that the larger systems’ issues affect transfer, as well as the role of faculty.

Degree Quality Feedback

- “There is a concern too much centralization could threaten quality and lead to a degree that is not of high value. Faculty are committed to student success, and we need to bridge the communication gaps to reach mutual goals.”
- “The nature of the academy itself related to teaching and learning has long coveted a doctrine of academic freedom. We ask faculty to be responsible for course outcomes. This tenet can work counter to efficient transfer.”
- “This is about money and rigor. Four-year institutions earn revenue from entry-level courses and challenge the rigor of community college courses.”
- “Four-year institutions create major-specific preparation requirements, which leads to additional coursework beyond Core.”

Policies Without Enforcement or Incentive

The two primary policies, Core undergraduate coursework and Field of Study curriculum for specific disciplines, are widely seen as not as effective as they could be. Institutions determine program-specific degree requirements and course applicability. Field of Study pathways are often not followed by four-year institutions. Students who take the Core are still often asked to complete major-related lower-division requirements. Most four-year institutions do not follow common course numbering but provide equivalency crosswalks. In addition, the voluntary compacts lack standardization and vary in quality (Bailey et al). Ultimately, there is recognition that the state should monitor transfer credits and compliance with the requirements outlined in law (OECD).

The recent recommendations of the THECB Improving Transfer Workgroup aim to help, at least in part, with creating smooth transfer pathways that apply to a student’s program completion, and with creating more transparency and accountability in transfer. Data resulting from SB 25 (2019) will soon be available to identify opportunities where the state and institutions can work to improve transfer linkages that are particularly prone to credit loss. But interviewees noted that there is a long history in Texas of institutions not implementing policies, with little accountability. Moreover, there are little to no financial incentives related to transfer for either students or institutions. The state does not offer any financial aid to support transfer students, and the only financial incentive for institutions to improve transfer is represented by a reward for transfer student success in the community college funding formula. The combined lack of incentives and lack of accountability result in inconsistent implementation or, in some cases, disregard for state policy. The experts interviewed indicated that monitoring and accountability are needed while accommodating regional partnerships and the role of faculty in setting discipline requirements.

Accountability Feedback

- “Although we have strong policies, there is no financial incentive or enforcement. Passing new policy won’t change outcomes if we don’t have infrastructure and partnerships necessary for implementation.”
- “Field of Study had implications for independent curriculum committees without thinking in meta-major mindset. It is hard to help 13 institutions in a region with a single state policy.”
- “Reverse transfer is an underutilized policy, and nothing happens when it is not offered.”
- “Common course numbering is not uniformly implemented. If we had a fully functional system with not just numbering but content, then students and advisers would be supported.”

Data Transparency and Automation

Although there are data on the number of students transferring, less clear are the nuances of transfer, including mobility patterns, dual credit transferability, and whether associate degrees under an articulation agreement improve baccalaureate outcomes. A further concern is that data on transfer student outcomes held at the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board are inconsistently disaggregated by key characteristics such as race and ethnicity, and even less frequently available at the intersection of characteristics, limiting insights into inequitable outcomes.

The Texas Transfer Alliance set statewide goals for transfer student outcomes and plans to continue to monitor the goals (Texas Transfer Alliance, 2020). As the goals were agreed upon by a state-level group with representatives from two- and four-year institutions, they provide a useful foundation for further data work. The goals are to:

- ★ Increase the six-year transfer-out rate from 21% to 33%, eliminating all gaps by race, ethnicity and Pell status.
- ★ Increase the four-year bachelor’s completion rate of community college transfers from 58% to 67%, eliminating all gaps by race, ethnicity and Pell status.
- ★ Decrease the average number of attempted credits to degree from 142.9 for transfer students and 136.4 for native students to 135 credits for both groups, while eliminating all gaps by race, ethnicity and Pell status.
- ★ Decrease the average time to degree for transfer students from 7.6 years to 6.5 years and eliminate all gaps by race, ethnicity and Pell status.
- ★ Increase the percentage of Texas community college students completing college-level math and writing in the first year to 45% (from 19% and 33%, respectively) and eliminate all gaps by race, ethnicity and Pell status.

The transfer policies need a comprehensive review to determine their efficacy in statewide transfer. Legislation passed in 2019, Senate Bill 25, provides an opportunity to learn more through required reporting. Four-year institutions are required to report on coursework that did not transfer and why, as well as provide information on required course sequencing for every program. A statewide advisory committee will review meta majors and the effectiveness of Core curriculum.

Experts also noted the need to clarify research questions and eliminate bias, improve transfer feedback reports, and automate processes. A manual transcript evaluation determines which courses meet lower-division requirements and are part of Core, for example. Students who are considered “Core complete” may still have requirements for readiness for the major for certain institutions (Mayer, 2020). When community college students have met the Core, there is a notation on the transcript. However, there is not a mechanism to automatically note Field of Study curriculum courses or pathway completion. At least half of community colleges have not reported Field of Study completions. Identification of reverse transfer awards is also a challenge (Mayer). Interviewees addressed the need for defining the problem areas and consistent feedback reports.

Data Systems Feedback

Clear Questions and Objective Analyses

- “We often develop a strategy or policy without clear data to define the problem, such as the type of transfer or mobility patterns.”
- “There can be a lack of objectivity depending on the perspective of who is analyzing the problem. The same data can be viewed as a problem or viewed as a success (such as the fact that 100,000 students are successfully transferring).”
- “We don’t have a consistent measurement for the value of coursework.”

Data Accessibility

- “We have data stored without systems to access and use it effectively.”
- “A robust analysis of transfer data requires an infrastructure to build capacity to do the work consistently and provide regular feedback. It is complex, with students co-enrolling, co-admitting, moving to multiple institutions, changing programs.”
- “The data related to ‘intent to transfer’ is inflated – it can be ‘a box to check’ at admission.”

Manual Processes

- “Even with common course numbering, the lack of systems, infrastructure and process mean ‘policy is perfect until put into practice’ – and then the onus is on the student.”
- “Field of Study pathways are only represented in the data to the extent to which institutions’ course sequences follow them, without four-years-following common course numbering.”

Quality of Guidance Tools

The myriad transfer pathways across numerous disciplines with varied requirements necessitate quality information, advising and support. Transfer policies and regional partnerships in Texas are supportive of students, yet the complexity could pose a barrier to positive outcomes (OECD). Some students struggle to find information on whether credits will transfer and later find out they have credits that do not apply toward their degree (Bailey et al). There is insufficient information and supports to help students navigate transfer, including clear and current information on Texas campus websites (Absher, Bradley & Schudde, 2020). Advisors in the state believe that pathway alignment concerns result in excess credits (Mayer). Four-year institutions believe inadequate advising at the community college level is a barrier to transfer (THECB, 2018). They also identified insufficient financial aid for transfer students and the increase in dual credit without addressing alignment as a concern. Interviewees noted the importance of quality supports and tools for transfer students.

Advising Feedback

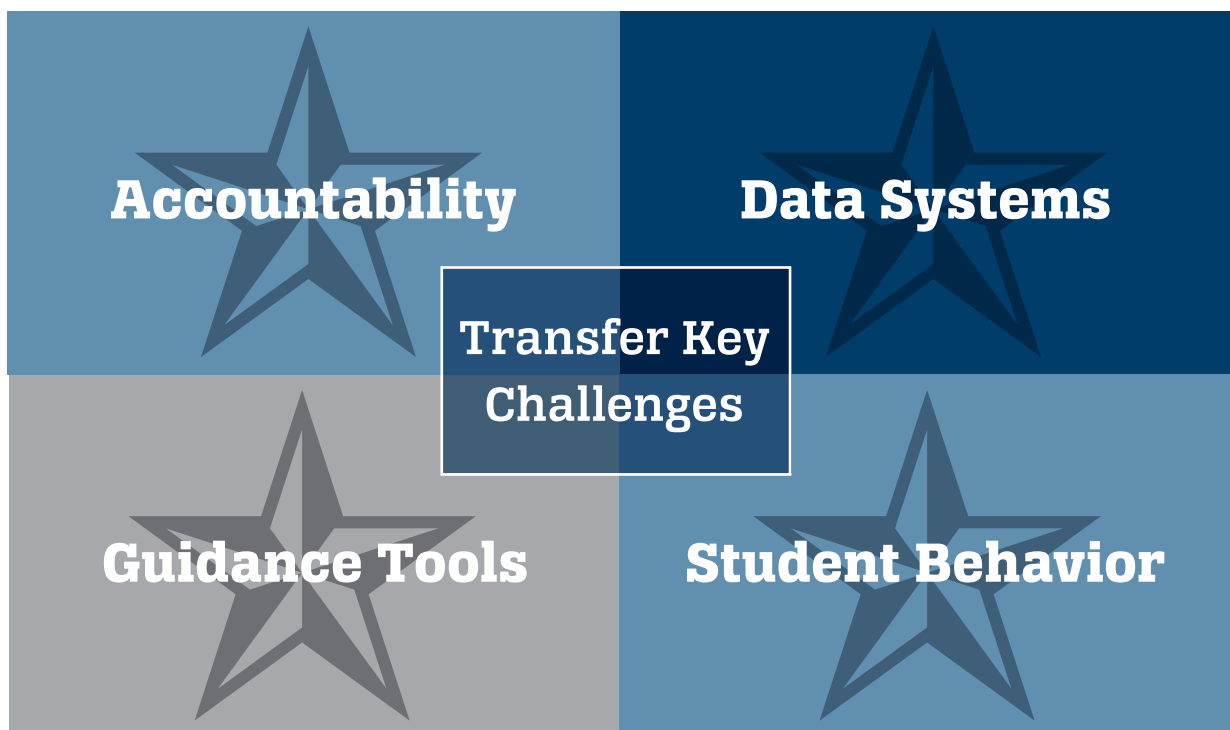
- “The transition points — both into the community colleges and at the point of transfer — are key areas to support students.”
- “Community college students need support to understand earlier if they want to transfer and help them prepare.”
- “We use jargon, and our catalogs are written by faculty.”

Complexity of Student Behavior

Student mobility is complex. Decision-making by students can be influenced by a variety of factors, including cost, timing of transfer, choice of institution and change of major, all of which influence transfer outcomes (Mayer). Students’ lives are complicated, and many factors will influence their choices, including whether and when they pursue a bachelor’s degree. Students’ background characteristics, socioeconomic status and academic preparation are also correlated with successful transfer and completion (Shapiro, Dundar, Huie, Wakhungu, Bhimdiwala, & Wilson, 2018). Experts spoke to how student choices affect transfer outcomes and add to the complexity of transfer.

Student Choices Feedback

- “Increased mobility across institutions seems unusual, yet there are compelling reasons to change campuses; decision-making related to transfer is complicated.”
- “Students who decide to change majors or institutions need transparent processes and clear requirements.”
- “Students are price-sensitive and earn the associate degree for the lower cost, and in the end the courses don’t count and they pay more.”



Transfer Concerns are Heightened by COVID-19, But Experts Offer Solutions

Higher education students have been affected in significant ways by the COVID-19 crisis. Nevertheless, Texas has key infrastructure in place, in the form of policies and partnerships, that provide a strong foundation, and recommendations from a number of studies and experts that could improve transfer student outcomes. For example, one Texas-focused research study suggested the state design clear paths for community college students, including guided pathway reforms and use of meta-majors; develop field-focused agreements; leverage the momentum in dual credit and determine the transferability of coursework; and address enrollment concerns through strengthened regional partnerships (Bailey et al). Other Texas-specific recommendations to reduce inefficiencies have included enhanced advising, strengthened partnerships, consistent adherence to common course numbering, ensuring dual-credit students follow Core, and requiring institutions to certify Field of Study or Core courses not applied to the degree (Greater Texas Foundation). The recent legislation and state-level proposals stemming from the THECB Improving Transfer Workgroup have included several of these strategies.

Economic Crisis Amplifies Transfer Challenges

Researchers anticipated a larger wave of transfer students due to the current economic recession and heightened equity concerns (Scaling Partners, 2020); however, early results indicate reduced transfer enrollments (Causey et al., 2020). The financial effects on families has led to changes in enrollment decisions – whether delaying enrollment, taking fewer classes, or changing to lower-cost or closer institutions. In fall 2020, transfer enrollments fell nationally by over 8%, three times that of non-transfer students (Causey et al., 2020).

COVID Impact Feedback

Enrollment Impact

- “Four-year campuses that are reliant on community college transfers might be impacted by the current declines in community college enrollments.”
- “Transfer student numbers are down, and we are trying to determine if they went to another campus or not at all.”

Student Concerns

- “There were complicated reasons for transfer prior to COVID, including mental health issues that amplify mobility. With a global health pandemic and more online classes, these issues are more pervasive and complex.”
- “We are focused on helping those most impacted, such as service workers, to reskill and return to work; they are less focused on transfer.”

Innovation

- “Campuses that are strong with competency-based education are doing well in response to COVID and may carry the mantle for future innovation.”

Black and Hispanic transfer students were affected the most. Community colleges are accommodating more dual-credit students and are ultimately anticipating a larger wave of academic transfer students (Causey et al., 2020).

Though transfer outcomes were concerning prior to the current crisis, there is now a greater need to address how credits earned at community colleges apply toward baccalaureate degree requirements. There have been recent calls to action for systemic change in transfer policies and practices that have contributed to longstanding inequitable outcomes (Scaling Partners). Several experts expressed concern about the effects of the pandemic on institutions and transfer student outcomes.

Experts Recommend Strengthening Texas Transfer Systems

The 15 transfer experts were asked what actions should be undertaken to achieve optimal transfer student outcomes in Texas. Their feedback provides suggestions in the areas of equity, clear goals, collaboration, policies, pathways, state versus regional approaches, data systems and advising. Interviewees provided strategies, policies and approaches to address the key challenges exacerbated by the economic crisis.



Emerging Recommendations

This landscape analysis suggests the following integrated path forward:

- ★ Support implementation of the recommendations of the THECB Improving Transfer Workgroup to ensure that students are guaranteed to transfer 60 credits that apply to the major, streamlining discipline-specific requirements;
- ★ Ensure that the new advisory committee stemming from the recommendations of the THECB Improving Transfer Workgroup is equipped to increase accountability for and oversight of transfer pathways;
- ★ Elevate the goals of the Texas Transfer Alliance to provide statewide transparency for metrics agreed upon by two- and four-year representatives that are disaggregated by key characteristics, including, at least, income and race/ethnicity;
- ★ Bolster the capacity of the THECB to disaggregate data on transfer student outcomes by at least income and race/ethnicity;
- ★ Develop financial incentives and accountability for two- and four-year institutions to build strong transfer partnerships and implement the recommendations of the THECB Improving Transfer Workgroup;
- ★ Design need-based financial aid supports for transfer students that provide incentives for students to use transfer pathways;
- ★ Invest in a technology-enabled portal designed to improve the quality of information and advising for students, ensure academic requirements are clear and visible, and smooth the credit evaluation process;
- ★ Leverage the new data analysis stemming from SB 25 to better understand how credits are transferring and applying to student completion of the major; and
- ★ Continue to support, and find ways to build networks between, institutional practice efforts designed to implement statewide transfer innovations, such as the work of the Texas Success Center, Houston Guided Pathways to Success, the North Texas Community College Consortium, and the Texas Transfer Alliance's Transfer Partnership Strategy led by the Dana Center.

Areas for Further Research

Several questions emerged from the transfer interviews that lend themselves to further understanding and research.

- ★ Are community college students more successful if they transfer with an associate degree, or if they transfer earlier?
- ★ What research can help to clarify transfer student outcomes, drilled down to the institution and program level?
- ★ How can data analysis of transfer student outcomes be improved to better account for differences in academic preparation, curricular changes, and other characteristics?
- ★ How is the value of a degree or course defined and measured?
- ★ What incentives, supports, accountability and/or enforcement might drive improved and more consistent implementation of state policies?
- ★ What gaps do regional partnerships face, and how can networks be connected across the state?

Expert Recommendations

Be Equity-Focused

- “We need to focus on equity and own what that means.”
- “Following Dr. Bensimon’s social justice philosophy, eliminate bureaucratic hoops for students and don’t create colorblind policies.”
- “Be cautious to not ‘pigeonhole’ students in certain majors to achieve outcomes which can limit opportunities.”

Define Goals – State vs. Regional

- “We need enforceable policy at the state level to reach the vision of an associate degree that transfers with full junior status applied to university requirements.”
- “Redirect resources spent on articulation agreements and Field of Study by issuing and enforcing a single state policy.”
- “Define goals for regions. We need to isolate and work with the handful of institutions and their partners to take a deep dive and make real progress.”

Use Inclusive Process

- “Progress requires persistence, willingness, passion, focus, and a willingness to not wait for the perfect solution.”
- “Need to include the K-12 perspective for alignment and communication to be sure students are aware of the need to take Core coursework.”
- “Rely on relationships and regional, intentional work that follows student mobility patterns to the top majors at the top campuses.”

Expand Accountability and Incentive Structures

- “We need accountability by all partners.”
- “We need to address funding and revenue streams.”

Expand Pathways

- “Follow the recommendations of the THECB task force on improving transfer that addresses the disconnects. The discipline-specific committees will be key and will allow for improvements.”
- “Co-admission programs are working well which are not considered transfer, but they are.”
- “We need to provide flexibility to the four-year institutions with a clear process for the community colleges. Focus on easier majors since specialties will be more difficult.”

Build Data and Technology Systems

- “The state could use better feedback reports that convey the details of pipeline issues from high school through postsecondary and within sectors, including dual credit, outcomes with or without degrees, and various pathways.”
- “We need regional data highlights noting the top four-year transfer-receiving institutions.”
- “Consider all the factors that relate to excess credit, such as changing majors multiple times.”

Strengthen Advising

- “Any policies or strategies need to support advisors and quality advising for consistency. Advisors and students are the end users and need to be considered as we shape policy, strategies and tools.”
- “Provide a user-friendly transfer portal to provide resources for mapping and planning.”

Conclusion

The challenges to student transfer outcomes in Texas, amplified by the pandemic, demand leaders leverage recent momentum and hasten improvements to policies and practices in support of student success.

The Texas workforce called for improved baccalaureate attainment prior to the recent economic crisis brought on by COVID-19. Providing equitable opportunities for more Texans to acquire the skills and credentials for higher-paying jobs is even more important now. With over 100 community college locations across the state and strong systems of four-year institutions, the two- to four-year transfer pathway to a bachelor's degree can provide an affordable and convenient option for Texans. But even with a guarantee for transferability of lower-division coursework, the lack of a simplified "2+2" statewide agreement until now has led to issues including credit loss, increased time to degree, and other barriers to completion. The inefficiencies cost students, institutions and the state.

Experts expressed concern about the pandemic and economic crisis further harming institutions and transfer student outcomes are complicated and numerous: a large decentralized system; the tension between faculty discretion and clarity and efficiency for students; the lack of enforcement or incentives for existing transfer policy; inadequate data systems, automation, and guidance tools; and the inherent complexity of students' lives and decisions. While those challenges are complex, experts see a way forward: through partnerships and policy development guided principles of equity and evidence, Texas can leverage transfer student baccalaureate attainment for economic opportunity and workforce competitiveness.

Appendix: Interview Participants & Scope of Inquiry

The Texas Association of Community Colleges, HCM Strategists and Philanthropy Advocates extend their appreciation to the following experts who provided their insights and perspectives on transfer:

Organization	Name	Title
UT-Austin Charles A. Dana Center	Martha Ellis	Interim Managing Director
Texas Association of Community Colleges	Jacob Fraire	President and CEO
Educate Texas	Priscilla Aquino Garza	Director of Policy
Educate Texas	Kelty Garbee	Former Director of Programs
Temple College	Susan Guzmán-Treviño	Vice President, Academic Affairs and Student Services
Texas A&M Univ. System	James Hallmark	Vice Chancellor, Academic Affairs
Texas State Univ. System	John Hayek	Chief Academic and Health Affairs Officer
McLennan Community College	Fred Hills	Vice President, Instruction and Student Engagement
Univ. of Texas - Dallas	Serenity King	Associate Provost, Policy and Program Coordination
Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board	Ray Martinez	Deputy Commissioner, Academic Affairs and Workforce Education
Univ. of Houston	Nicole McDonald	Assistant Vice Provost, Student Success Strategies
Univ. of Texas - Austin	Lauren Schudde	Assistant Professor, Educational Leadership and Policy
Dallas College	Dina Sosa-Hegarty	Senior Manager, Transfer and Transition Services
Univ. of Texas System	David Troutman	Associate Vice Chancellor, Institutional Research
Postsecondary Innovation Network	Jenna Watts	Associate Director, Office of Strategy and Policy, UT-Austin

Scope of Inquiry

Organization Overview

Interviewee background
Organization overview (transfer goals, scope of work)
Region

Partnerships

Interaction with other groups
Alignment across groups
Strengths in advocacy and/or practice

Policy and Practice

Primary assets
Key challenges
Best practices

Data and Analyses

Sources
Impact of COVID-19

Recommendations

Organization's recommended strategies
Interest in public rule-making

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Credits

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