Unpacking the Transfer Playbook:
Strengthening Community College Pathways to Bachelor's Completion

John Fink, Community College Research Center

Pascale Charlot, Aspen Institute College Excellence Program

Amy Bosley, Northwest Vista College
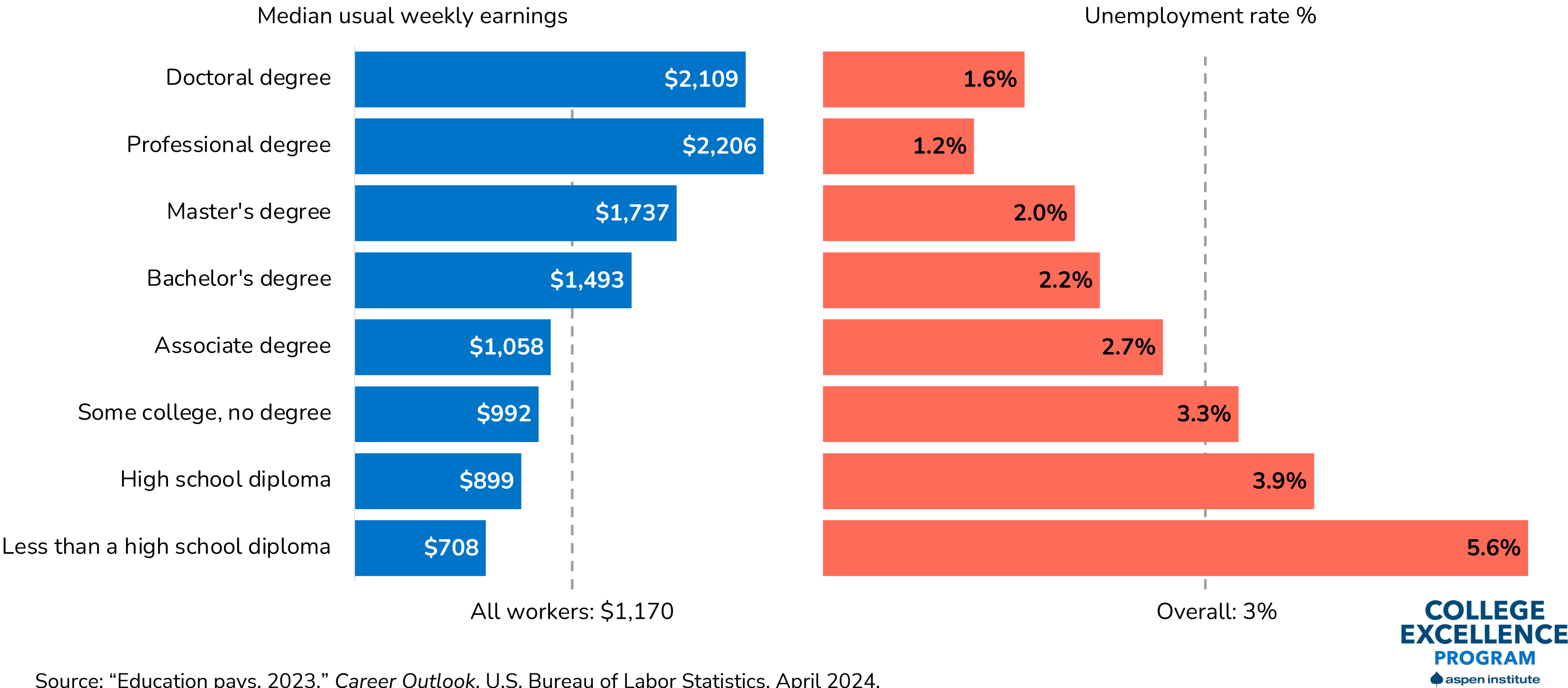
TACC.ORG/TSC

Texas Success Center

Postsecondary education is critical to economic mobility.

Earnings and unemployment rates by educational attainment, 2023

Median usual weekly earnings

Unemployment rate %

Educational attainment	Median usual weekly earnings	Unemployment rate %
Doctoral degree	$2,109	1.6%
Professional degree	$2,206	1.2%
Master's degree	$1,737	2.0%
Bachelor's degree	$1,493	2.2%
Associate degree	$1,058	2.7%
Some college, no degree	$992	3.3%
High school diploma	$899	3.9%
Less than a high school diploma	$708	5.6%

All workers: $1,170

Overall: 3%

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Two Thirds of Good Jobs Will Favor Bachelor's Degrees

Number of good jobs (in millions)

87.8 million

72.6 million

	2021	2031
Bachelor's degree pathway	42.6	58.2
Middle-skills pathway	16.2	16.4
High school pathway	13.8	13.2

High school pathway   **Middle-skills pathway**   **Bachelor's degree pathway**
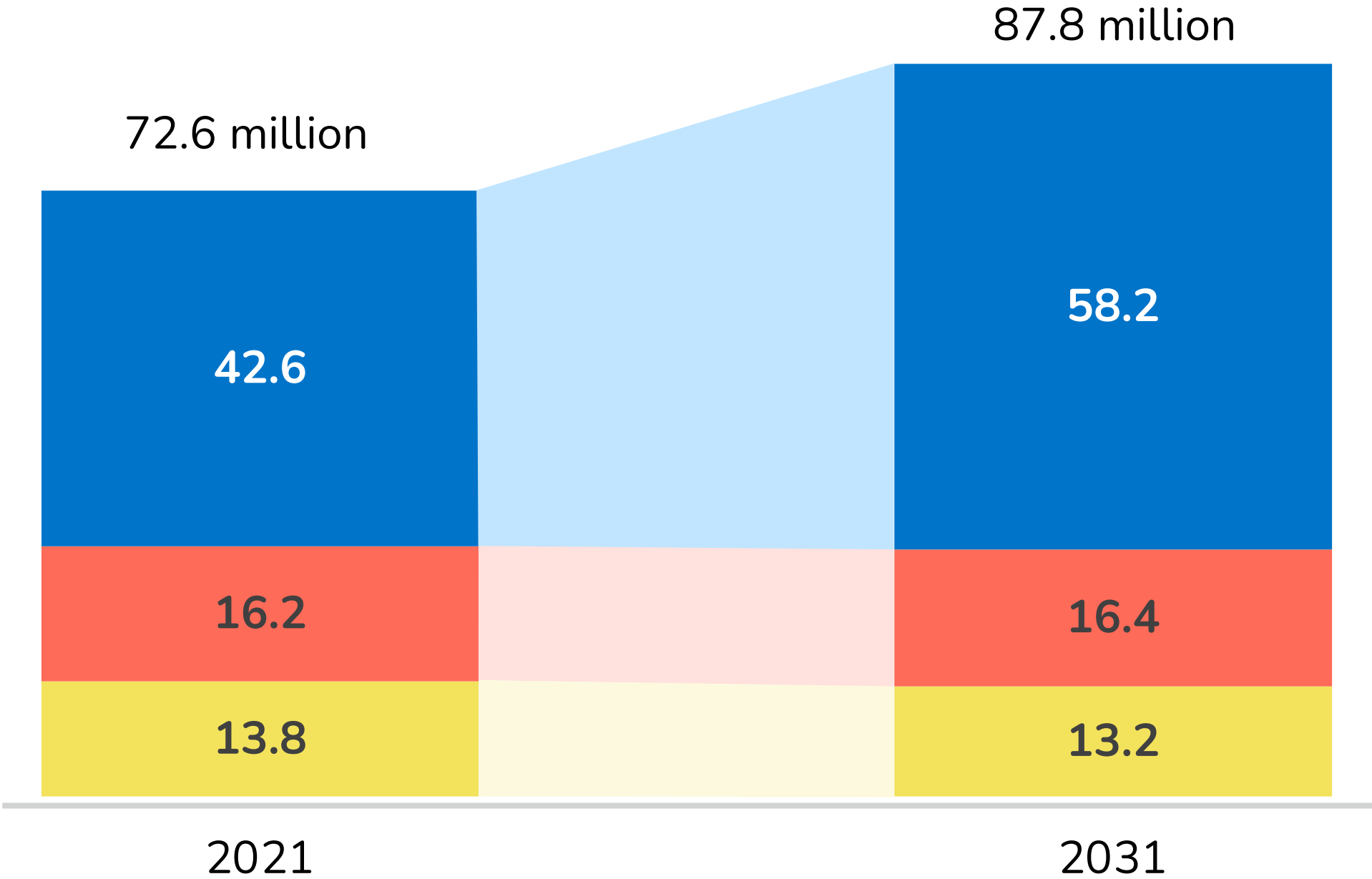
By 2031, the number of good jobs for workers on the bachelor's degree pathway will grow by more than 15 million net new jobs, while the number of good jobs on the high school pathway will decline by nearly 600,000.

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Broken transfer negatively impacts millions of students.

80% of community college students **want a bachelor's degree**

32% of community college students **transfer to a four-year institution**

16% of community college students will **graduate with a bachelor's degree** within six years of starting college
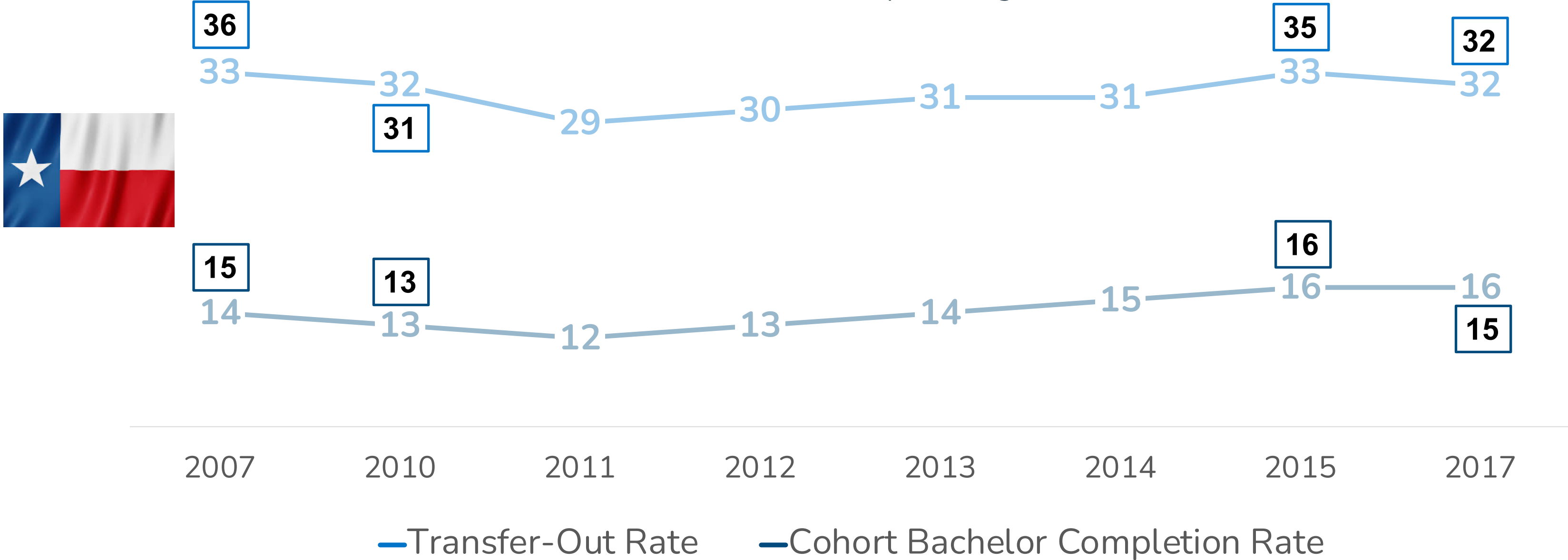
Source: Velasco, Fink, Bedoya-Guevara, Jenkins, & LaViolet. (2024, February). Tracking Transfer: Community College and Four-Year Institutional Effectiveness in Broadening Bachelor's Degree Attainment. In https://ccrc.tc.columbia.edu/publications/Tracking-Transfer-Community-College-and-Four-Year-Institutional-Effectiveness-in-Broadening-Bachelors-Degree-Attainment.html.

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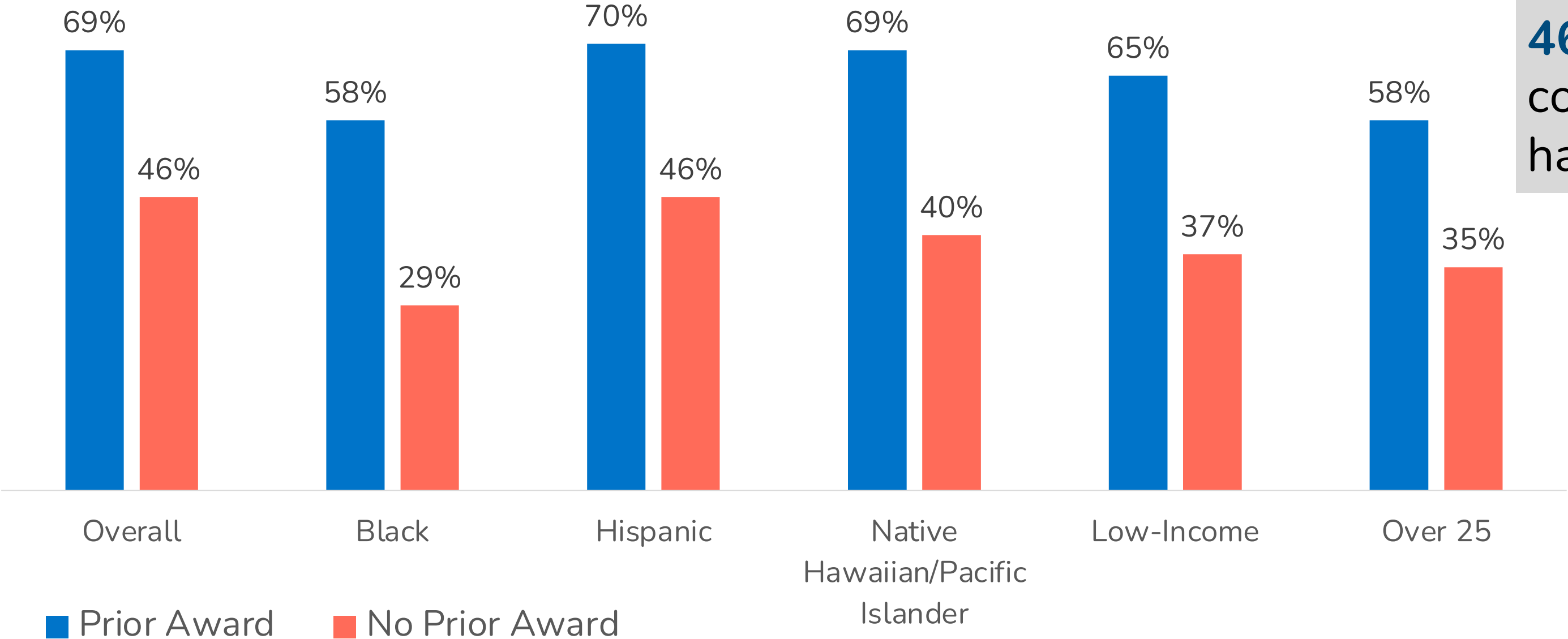# Transfer outcomes have improved slightly but remain too low.

Trends in National Transfer Outcome Rates: Fall 2007 to Fall 2017 FTIC Community College Entrants

Transfer-Out Rate:

36 → 31 → (29) → (30) → (31) → (31) → 35 → 32

33 → 32 → 29 → 30 → 31 → 31 → 33 → 32

Cohort Bachelor Completion Rate:

15 → 13 → (12) → (13) → (14) → (15) → 16 → 15

14 → 13 → 12 → 13 → 14 → 15 → 16 → 16

| 2007 | 2010 | 2011 | 2012 | 2013 | 2014 | 2015 | 2017 |

— Transfer-Out Rate　　　— Cohort Bachelor Completion Rate

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Prior award completion is associated with stronger outcomes.

Community College Transfer-In Bachelor's Completion Rate Within Four Years by Pre-Transfer Community College Award

Nationally, only **46%** of community college transfers have a prior award

Category	Prior Award	No Prior Award
Overall	69%	46%
Black	58%	29%
Hispanic	70%	46%
Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander	69%	40%
Low-Income	65%	37%
Over 25	58%	35%

■ Prior Award   ■ No Prior Award

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Prior Dual Enrollment Is Associated with Stronger Outcomes and Smaller Disparities


National Six-Year Transfer Outcomes Rates:
Fall 2017 Prior Dual Enrollment Students
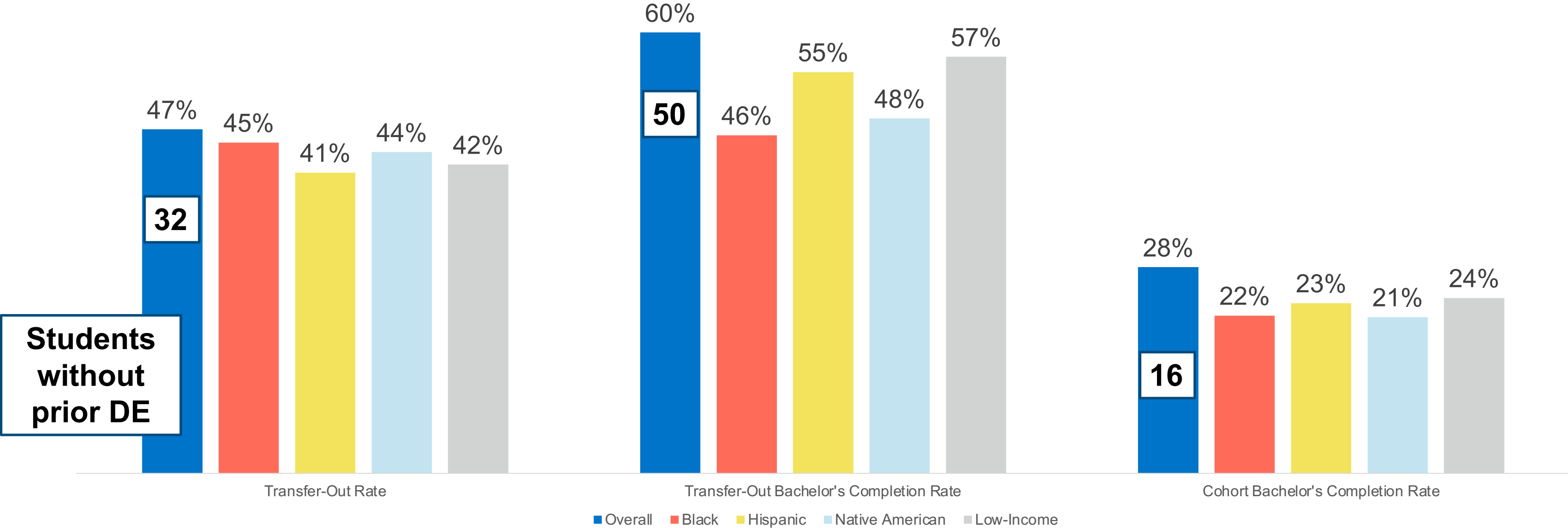
Source: National Student Clearinghouse (2025), Tracking Transfer Entering Community College Cohort Dashboard. Tracking Transfer – Entering Community College Cohort Dashboard

Institutional Variation is Substantial Everywhere

Community College Transfer Outcomes by State (All FTIC Students)
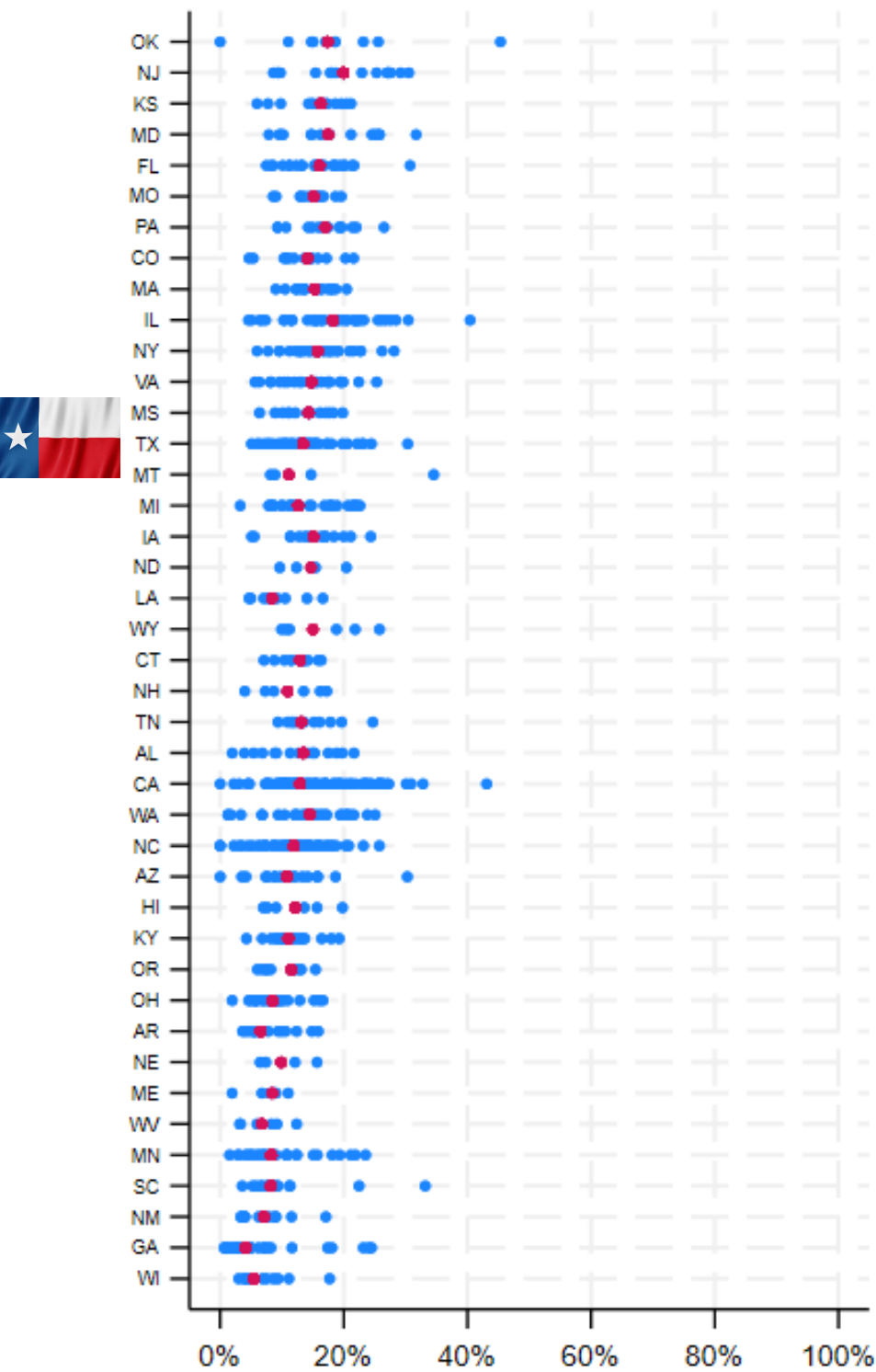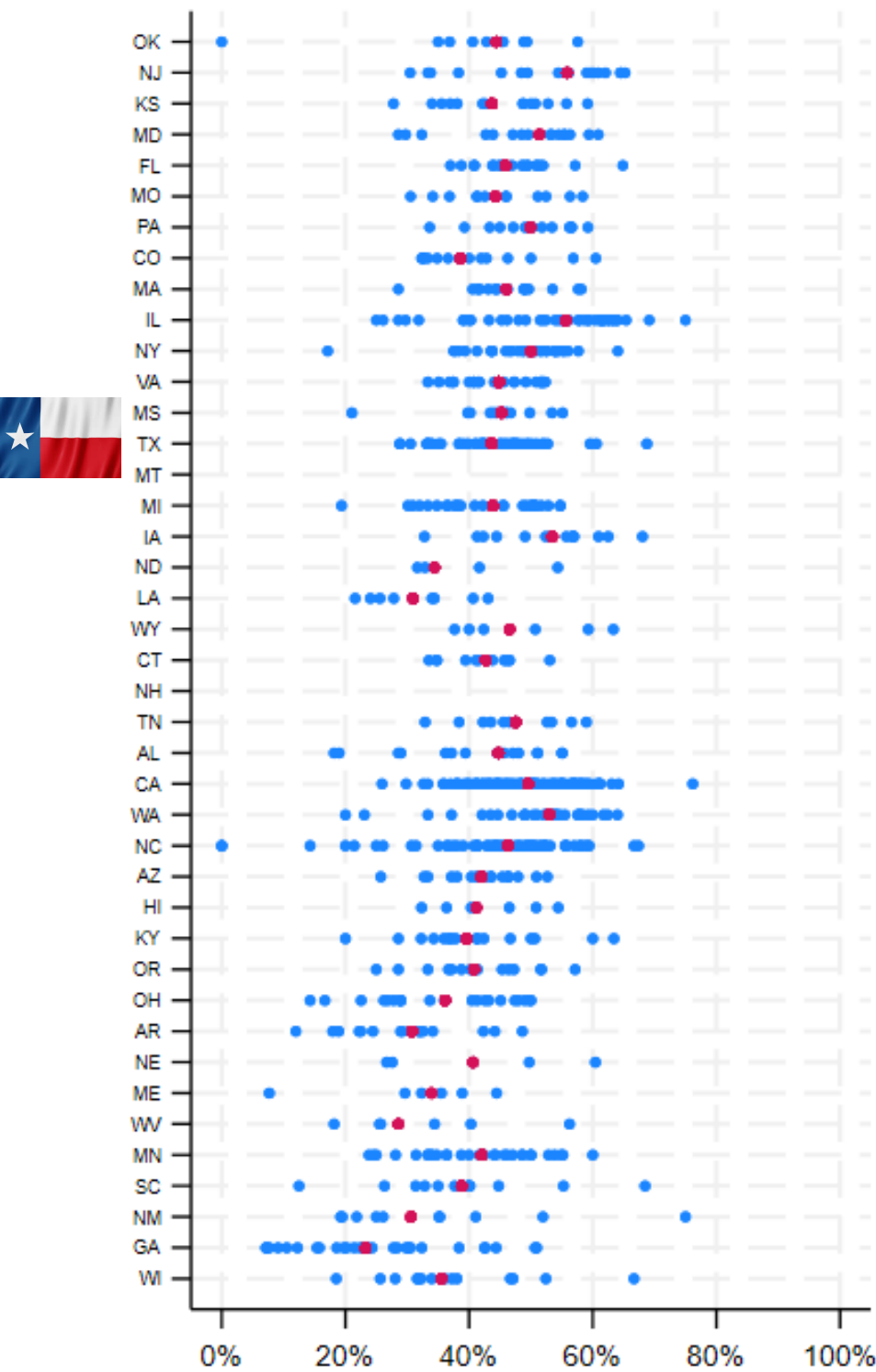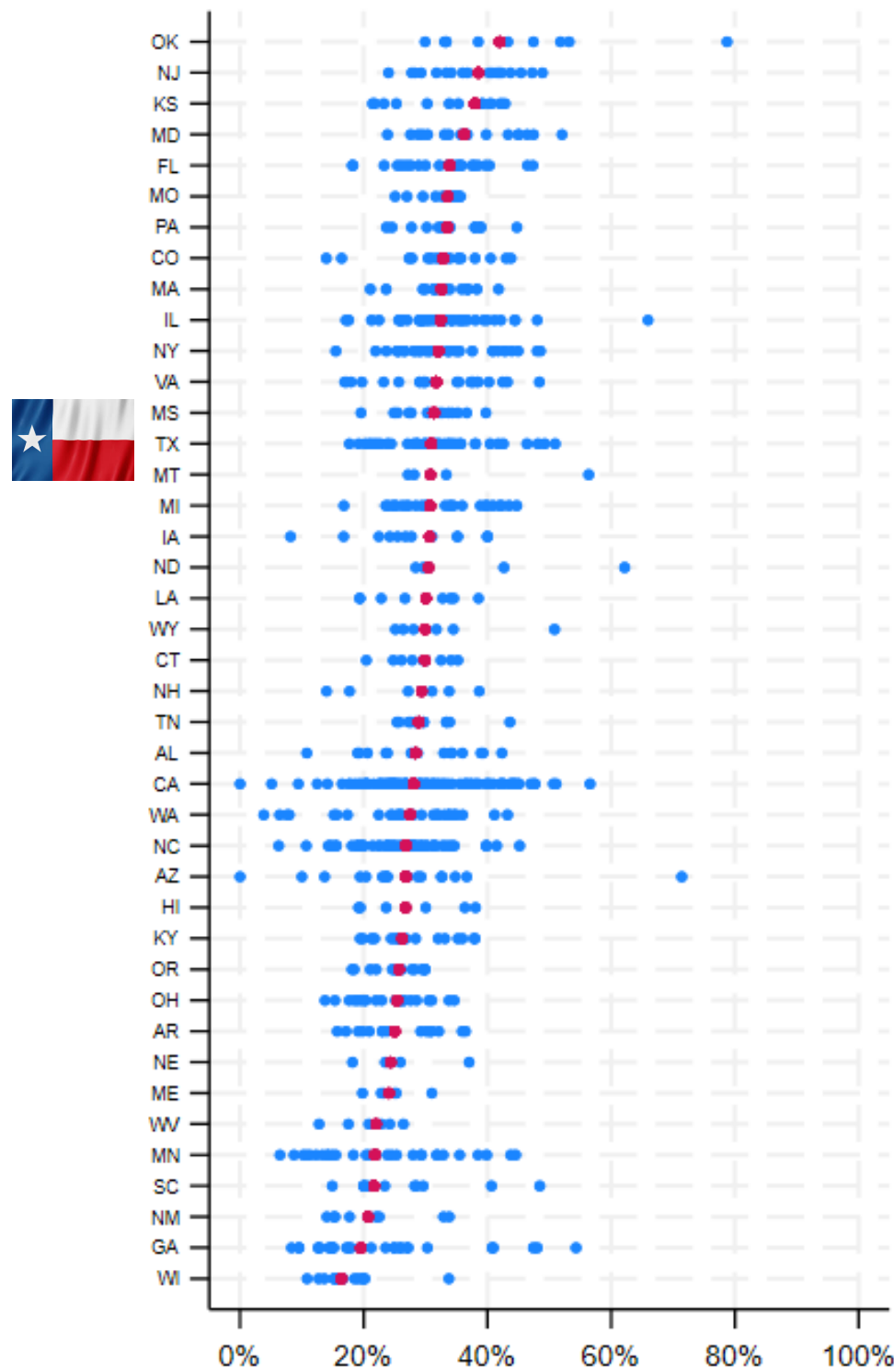
- ● Community College rate
- ● Median rate

Transfer Out

Transfer Out BA Completion

(Velasco et al., 2024)

Cohort BA Completion

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The Transfer Playbook 2.0

thetransferplaybook.org

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Strategies from The Transfer Playbook

The Transfer Playbook 2.0

Prioritize Transfer at the Executive Level to Achieve Sustainable Success at Scale

Align Program Pathways and High-Quality Instruction to Promote Timely Bachelor's Completion within a Major

Tailor Transfer Advising & Nonacademic Supports to Foster Trust and Engagement

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Strategy 1

Prioritize Transfer at the Executive Level to Achieve Sustainable Success at Scale

Essential Practice 1: President-led, team-based, and well-resourced partnerships

- Shared, president-led vision for the partnership's impact, clearly communicated with key stakeholders
- Individual and shared investment, including funding and dedicated staff
- Cabinet-supported teams that advance strategy, implementation, relationship-building, and collaboration

Essential Practice 2: End-to-end (re)design of the transfer student experience

Essential Practice 3: Transfer student-centered systems and processes

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Transformational Transfer Models

College Plans for High Schoolers (Imperial Valley College): HS seniors complete an IVC application & FAFSA, develop with college counselor in spring of senior year an initial educational plan that can link to transfer.

Mason Virginia Promise: Pell-eligible ADVANCE students qualify for a last-dollar scholarship that covers tuition and fees.

Arkansas Transfer Achievement Scholarship: Associate degree completers pay the same tuition rate at University of Arkansas four-year campuses.

Arizona Western College + Northern Arizona University-Yuma: Co-located campus with programs designed to meet local workforce needs.

Start Transfer in High School

Simplify Admissions

Guarantee Affordability

Link Transfer to Careers

Develop Local Talent

ADVANCE (Northern Virginia Community College & George Mason University): Dual admissions, dedicated advising, four-year maps, co-enrollment.

CUNY Justice Academy (CJA) (John Jay College of Criminal Justice & six CUNY community colleges): Automatic enrollment in CJA for specific CC majors results in guaranteed admission to JJ upon associate degree completion.

Virginia Commonwealth University's Mellon Pathways to the Arts and Humanities; HHMI STEM Pathways: Career exploration and specialized advising, defined pathways, community building events, and financial guidance for prospective transfer students from **Reynolds and Brightpoint Community Colleges.**

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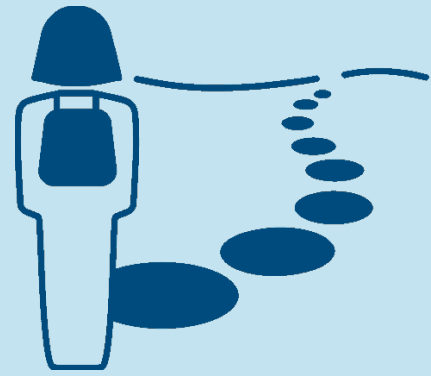
Align Program Pathways and High-Quality Instruction to Promote Timely Bachelor's Completion within a Major

Essential Practice 1: Clear four-year sequences that promote learning and major progression

- Create and maintain clear, term-by-term, four-year maps within each major that set expectations for timely completion and are adjustable for part-time students
- Frontload courses that inspire early major exploration, commitment, or changes
- Expect at least one major-specific course each term in community college
- Embed college-level, program-specific math and English in the first year

Essential Practice 2: Systematized translation of maps into tailored educational plans

Essential Practice 3: Strengthened instruction, academic support, and curricular alignment

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CUNY-John Jay & Queensborough Community College

Clear, four-year maps create a seamless transfer experience

CSIS Four-Year Academic Plan

Student Name:_____   Student ID:_____   Major: Computer Science and Information Security AS/BS

YEAR 1 at Queensborough Community College

Immersion Summer	Semester 1		Semester 2		Summer	
	G MA 440 (Pre-Calc)*	4	**G** ENGL 101	3		
	M ET 574	3	**M** MA 471 (Intro to Discrete Math)	3		
	M ET 704 (Networking Fundamentals I)	4	**M** ET 506 (Linux Operating System)	3		
	G Life and Physical Sciences**	3-4	**M** ET 575 (Intro to C++)	3		
	G Life and Physical Sciences Lab**	0-1	**G** World Cultures & Global Issues**	3		
	Total Hours	15	Total Hours	15	Total Hours	

YEAR 2 at Queensborough Community College

	Semester 1		Semester 2		Summer	
	G ENGL 102	3	**M** MA 442 (Analytical Geometry & Calculus II)	4		
	G MA 441 (Analytical Geometry & Calculus I)	4	**M** ET 585 (Computer Architecture)	3		
	M ET 580 (Object Oriented Programming)	3	**G** Creative Expression**	3		
	M ET 725 (Computer Network Security)	3	**G** Additional Flexible Common Core**	3		
	G U.S. Experience in Its Diversity**	3	**G** CRIM 101	3		
	Total Hours	16	Total Hours	16	Total Hours	

YEAR 3 at John Jay College from Queensborough

Semester 1		Semester 2		Summer	
M MAT 301 (Prob. & Math. Statistics I)	3	**M** CSCI 360 (Cryptography and Cryptanalysis)	3		
M CSCI 373 (Advanced Data Structures)	3	**M** CSCI 374 (Programming Languages)	3		
M CSCI 375 (Operating Systems)	3	**M** PHI 216 (Ethics and Information Technology)	3		
M CSCI 377 (Computer Algorithms)	3	**E** Elective or Learning from the Past/Communications*	3		
G 300-Level Justice Gen. Education	3	**E** Elective	3		
Total Hours	15	Total Hours	15	Total Hours	

YEAR 4 at John Jay College from Queensborough

Semester 1		Semester 2		Summer	
M CSCI 400 (Capstone I)	3	**M** CSCI 401 (Capstone II)	3		
M CSCI 411 (Computer Security and Forensics)	3	**E** Elective	3		
E Elective	3	**E** Elective	3		
E Elective	3	**E** Elective	3		
E Elective	3	**E** Elective	3		
Total Hours	15	Total Hours	15	Total Hours	

G GenEd   **M** Major   **E** Elective

Comments:
This plan assumes that students are transferring to John Jay College with 60 credits. Students are required to earn 120 total credits in order to graduate with the BS degree.

CUNY JUSTICE ACADEMY
JOHN JAY COLLEGE
in partnership with
BRONX COMMUNITY COLLEGE

Total credit hours = 122

CUNY Justice Academy, Your Four-Year Academic Plan: https://resources.jjay.cuny.edu/cja/acad_plan.php

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Strategy 3

Tailor Transfer Advising & Nonacademic Supports to Foster Trust and Engagement

Essential Practice 1: Early, sustained, and inevitable advising systems

Essential Practice 2: A trained, knowledgeable, and caring advising corps

Essential Practice 3: A transfer-specific approach to holistic success

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Start Advising in High School

- University, community college, and K-12 partners showcase community college transfer pathways to a bachelor's degree—including generating interest in high school dual enrollment opportunities—as part of their outreach efforts.

- Advisors have conversations with students about their career goals, the salaries and demand for those jobs, and whether the transfer pathway to a bachelor's degree is right for them.

- Advisors support prospective community college transfer students who are interested in participating in high school dual enrollment to develop an educational plan that links their DE coursework to a transfer pathway.

- Advisors help all prospective community college transfer students pick a program of study, submit an application, and complete a FAFSA.

- Advisors support admitted community college students to identify courses they will take in their first term (taking into consideration any prior dual enrollment credit).

- Advisors upload any educational plans into the community college's degree planning/advising platform for future access.

Inevitable Support in Community College

Before Day 1: Advisors build a relationship with students, understanding their goals and motivations. They help students create first-term plans or modify ones developed in high school, upload them to degree-planning/advising platforms, and support students with registration.

0-14 credits: Advisors support students in creating a complete, tailored educational plan based on their career goals and specific transfer destinations. Digitized plan formats ease future access and monitoring.

15-60 credits: Advisors monitor students' progress through plans, meeting them after reaching the **15-**, **30-**, and **45**-credit marks to ensure timely milestone completion or course corrections.

Throughout:

- Community college advisors collaborate with university advisors to help prospective transfer students navigate four-year options, admissions requirements, and pathways.

- Advisors or coaches proactively engage students with other nonacademic and academic supports.

- If academic advisors are not faculty members, students have opportunities to meet with faculty advisors/mentors to enable discipline-specific guidance.

Transition and Progression through University

Before Day 1: Admitted transfer students meet with a university advisor to continue building their educational plan based on their major and goals. Orientation supports institutional knowledge development, community building, and advisor-assisted registration for first-term classes.

First Term: Transfer students and advisors continue to build a complete, tailored educational plan through graduation, including participation in internships and other high-impact practices. Digitized plan formats ease future access and monitoring.

Throughout:

- Advisors monitor students' progress through plans, meeting at least once per term to ensure timely milestone completion or course corrections.

- If academic advisors are not faculty members, students have opportunities to meet with faculty advisors/mentors to enable discipline-specific guidance.

- Advisors or coaches proactively engage students with other nonacademic and academic supports.

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Tailor Transfer Advising & Nonacademic Supports to Foster Trust and Engagement

Essential Practice 1: Early, sustained, and inevitable advising systems

Essential Practice 2: A trained, knowledgeable, and caring advising corps

- Hiring and training encourage advisor empathy for transfer students
- Investments in mandatory, routine, transfer-specific professional development
- Advising protocols that start with students' career goals

Essential Practice 3: A transfer-specific approach to holistic success

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What are the major barriers to transfer student success you want to tackle?
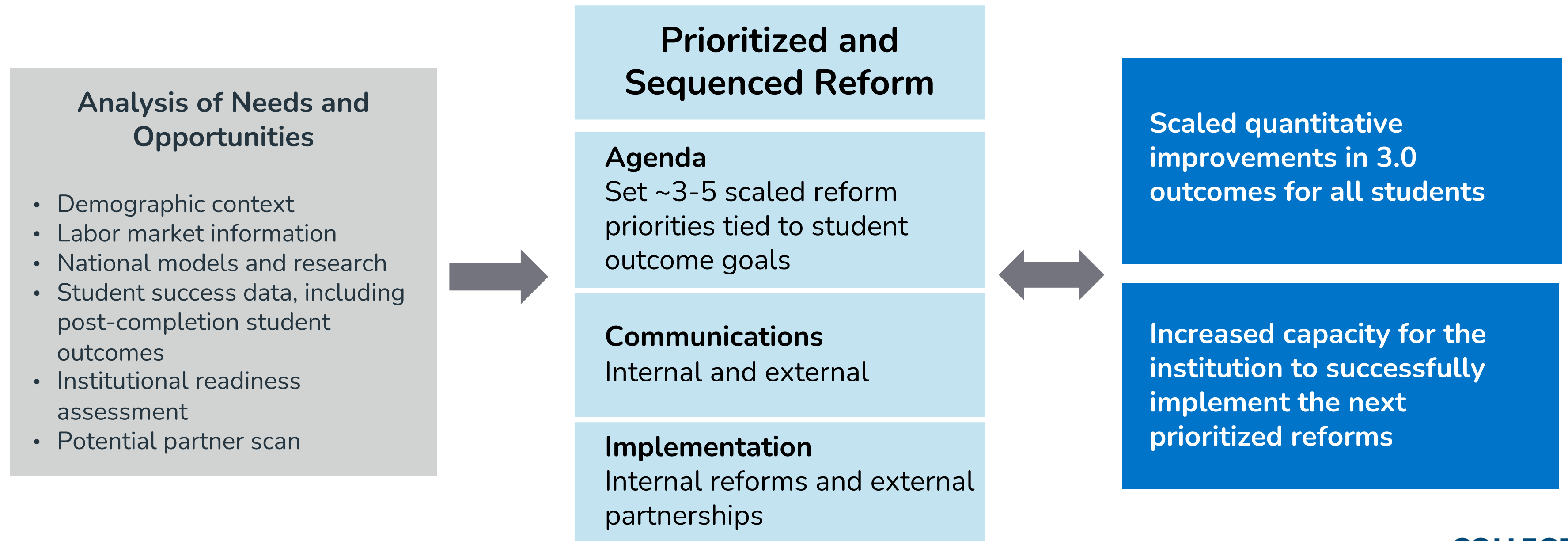
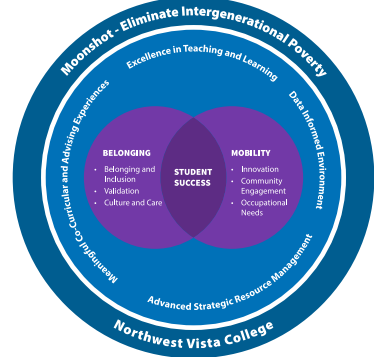Which ideas from the Playbook are most actionable in your context?

A President's Model:
Strengthening college-wide student outcomes through prioritized and sequenced reforms

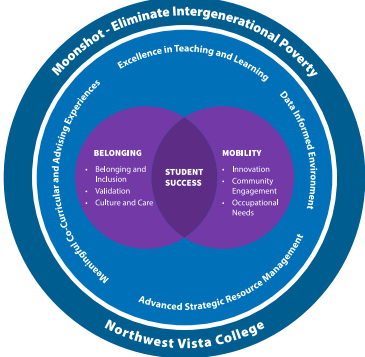## Advance Talent Development in the Community and Economic Mobility for All Students

Analysis of Needs and Opportunities

- Demographic context
- Labor market information
- National models and research
- Student success data, including post-completion student outcomes
- Institutional readiness assessment
- Potential partner scan

Prioritized and Sequenced Reform

Agenda
Set ~3-5 scaled reform priorities tied to student outcome goals

Communications
Internal and external

Implementation
Internal reforms and external partnerships

Scaled quantitative improvements in 3.0 outcomes for all students

Increased capacity for the institution to successfully implement the next prioritized reforms

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	Community College 1.0: Access	Community College 2.0: Completion	Community College 3.0: Post-completion Success
HB-8 Funding Priority: Economically Disadvantaged			
HB-8 Funding Priority: Academically Disadvantaged			
HB-8 Funding Priority: Adults over 25			

	Community College 1.0: Access	Community College 2.0: Completion	Community College 3.0: Post-completion Success
HB-8 Funding Priority: Economically Disadvantaged	• FAFSA outreach • Alamo Promise • Career Navigation	• Mission-directed dual credit • Strategic scheduling • On campus employment • Advocacy Services	• Academic program planning and evaluation – Unlocking Opportunity
HB-8 Funding Priority: Academically Disadvantaged	• GED on campus • TSI bootcamps • Mission-directed dual credit	• Integrated learning support and mentoring • Vista Faculty Development • Work-based learning	• Transfer peer mentorship • Career mentorship • Short-term, stackable credentials
HB-8 Funding Priority: Adults over 25	• ESL expansion • Justice-impacted support • Credit for prior learning	• On-site class guarantee • Evening/weekend childcare • Accelerated terms • Relevant student engagement	• Work-based learning • Apprenticeships • Earn-and-learn