



# Kentucky's Moment

## *A Statewide Vision for Transfer Student Success*

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Kentucky Council on Postsecondary Education  
2023



## **About the Council on Postsecondary Education**

The Council on Postsecondary Education is Kentucky's higher education coordinating agency committed to strengthening our workforce, economy and quality of life. We do this by guiding the continuous improvement and efficient operation of a high-quality, diverse and accessible system of postsecondary education.

Key responsibilities include:

- Developing and implementing a strategic agenda for postsecondary education that includes measures of progress.
- Producing and submitting a biennial budget request for adequate public funding of postsecondary education.
- Determining tuition rates and admission criteria at public postsecondary institutions.
- Collecting and distributing data about postsecondary education performance.
- Ensuring the coordination and connectivity of technology among public institutions.
- Licensing non-public postsecondary institutions to operate in the Commonwealth.

# Introduction

Kentucky’s educational North Star is the 60 by 30 attainment goal—to have 60 percent of our working-age population with a degree or credential by the year 2030. This goal, developed through extensive data analysis, focuses on cultivating a highly skilled workforce to keep the state’s economy thriving. Promoting and facilitating the seamless transfer of students and credits among institutions is an essential piece of the attainment puzzle. Transfer has always been a major element of the work of the Kentucky Council on Postsecondary Education (CPE). Improving transfer is one of the objectives in the statewide postsecondary education strategic agenda, and it is a primary statutory duty. For Kentucky to prosper in the future, a statewide effort focused on credit mobility and recognition of learning must be prioritized by all. While this document outlines a strategy for pursuing systematic improvements specifically in transfer, credit mobility, and recognition of learning, these issues are intrinsically connected to CPE’s broader strategic agenda: affordability, transitions, success, talent, and value are all impacted by efforts to improve transfer, credit mobility and recognition of learning.

As with the broader statewide postsecondary education strategic agenda, every piece of this transfer strategy was developed through an equity lens. The National Association of System Heads (NASHE) Equity Action Framework and the Kentucky Student Success Collaborative Equity by Design process will serve as foundational resources for CPE as we seek to make progress on the strategic objectives and priorities outlined here. CPE agrees with NASHE that “equity is measurable and should be attended to along the student success continuum, ensuring access to and completion of quality education programs across student populations, disaggregated whenever possible by protected status including race/ethnicity, religion, income, gender, gender identity, ability, first-generation, and veteran status.” We must pursue progress on the strategic objectives and priorities outlined here with a clear-eyed focus on operationalizing our commitment to equity.

CPE would like to thank the many stakeholders, including transfer specialists, advisors, presidents, associate provosts and provosts whose thoughtful input served as the groundwork for this strategy.

# A Data Snapshot of Transfer in Kentucky

In 2020-21, **4,835** students transferred from KCTCS to a four-year institution.

↳ **53%** of these transfers completed an Associate of Arts degree prior to transfer.

In 2020-21, KCTCS awarded **4,915** Associate of Arts and Associate of Science degrees.

↳ **2,359** of these graduates did not transfer (**48%**).

In Kentucky, **71%** of credits earned by first-time students who transferred in Fall 2021 were accepted by the four-year institution.

↳ Students brought with them an average of **50** credit hours toward a bachelor's degree.

In Kentucky, **3.8** is the average GPA of transfer students at the four-year institution, demonstrating the quality of educational preparation at the community college and academic success at the four-year college.

For every 100 Kentucky students who graduate with an associate degree

↳ **52** will transfer and **36** will complete a bachelor's degree within four years after community college.

The bachelor's graduation rate for transfer students is **70%** at public institutions (within four years of completing an Associate of Arts degree).

## Building on Unique Strengths

For the past decade, through legislation and policy, CPE has worked to create the conditions for better and more equitable outcomes for transfer students in Kentucky. The building blocks now in place include:

- A statewide general education core of 30 credit hours accepted for transfer at any public institution built around learning outcomes rather than courses;
- Guidelines and guiding principles for awarding college credit for learning acquired outside of a college classroom, including college-level knowledge acquired in high school, the workplace, and through military service;
- State policy requiring institutions to notify CPE of any changes that could potentially affect transferability of credits;
- Extensive program-based pathways work to allow baccalaureate-seeking students to begin their education at one of Kentucky's community and technical colleges; and
- Common course numbering for the sixteen community and technical colleges.

In addition to the well-established convening power of the CPE, the Kentucky Student Success Collaborative is poised to serve as an accelerator of improvement. By providing access to national experts, networked peer learning opportunities, and technical assistance, the collaborative is positioned to support accelerated progress.

## Transfer Strategy Aligned to CPE Strategy and Kentucky Pathways

While transfer is one of the three student success objectives in the *Statewide Strategic Agenda for Kentucky Postsecondary Education 2022-2030*, it also is a way to make college more affordable for many Kentuckians. By smoothing students' transitions between institutions, we can help more students reach their education goals and experience the value of higher education.

Transfer is integral to the success of the state's broader strategy and should be viewed through the lens of the Kentucky Student Success Framework, which expands the traditionally narrow view of transfer to include the entire student learning journey.

# Three Strategic Objectives Grounded in Core Values

Our strategic objectives are the enduring, foundational priorities and longterm guideposts for statewide transfer improvement efforts. These objectives aim directly at the state’s educational North Star goal, and their pursuit must be understood as integral to our success in achieving this goal.

1. We will center students’ needs above all else in the pursuit of scalable improvements in transfer, credit mobility, and recognition of learning across Kentucky.
2. We will prioritize efforts related to strengthening institutional collaboration in service to better and more equitable outcomes for students who attend multiple institutions, and who acquire learning in a variety of settings, on their way to a credential.
3. We will focus on removing obstacles to seamless transfer and credit mobility for Kentuckians, and our efforts will be aimed at maximizing the applicability of credits toward students’ programs of study.

## 2023-2026 Strategic Priorities Aligned to Objectives

Visible commitment to nearer-term priorities is integral and indispensable to the long-term success and value of any strategy. The strategic priorities outlined here are designed to inform and guide concrete, near-term improvement efforts aligned to the strategic objectives. The strategic priorities were chosen because they speak to the most important work currently underway, they reflect the current state of national evidence about promising policies and practices, or they were raised as significant areas of near-term opportunity by a cross-section of vital internal stakeholders including institutional leaders and practitioners.

### 1. Centering Student Needs

We will launch, monitor, refine, and continuously improve a student-facing transfer website to help students map out how to complete any program in the state. Serving as an informal degree audit tool, the website will empower students to make informed decisions and plan effectively for the completion of a credential.

The website will also have an institutional-facing component to support faculty collaboration for creating seamless pathways and to equip advisors to provide accurate information to students.

We will support institutions in creating student journey maps that show how transfer students are faring and where they are encountering barriers to seamless transfer and maximum applicability of transfer credits. By helping institutions take clear-eyed stock of the impact of their policies and practices on transfer students, we will make visible the equity implications of transfer improvement efforts and foster the courageous leadership required for success.

We will build on and utilize our substantial data infrastructure to make student experience, progression, and outcomes transparent to institutional leaders at every level, including state-level actors and equity-minded advocates of our North Star attainment goal. In addition to ensuring the availability and effective use of finely disaggregated quantitative data, we will evaluate credit mobility patterns across the state and make this information available on an annual basis. In addition, we will build the statewide infrastructure for producing and using rich qualitative data about student experience, progression, and outcomes.

## **2. Building on Institutional Collaborations**

We will leverage and expand our work on creating “improvement communities” to strengthen bilateral, regional, and statewide pathways work and to cultivate a critical mass of champions at every level capable of tackling the most persistent problems of practice impacting transfer students. By adopting improvement science methodologies and improved strategies, we will help institutions prototype small tests of change and scale improvements. Through this work, we will help two-year and four-year institutions strengthen advising and student supports; address ‘hidden’ prerequisites that cost students time and money; increase transfer scholarships and financial aid for transfer students; effectively translate prior learning into credits applied toward a credential; and increase the baccalaureate completion rate for students who transfer after completing an Associate of Arts or Associate of Science.

We will create venues and opportunities for high-quality professional learning for faculty, staff, and administrators tasked with building transfer-affirming and transfer-receptive institutions and programs. In addition to providing access to national experts and technical assistance through the Kentucky Student Success Collaborative, we will include faculty, staff, and administrators in statewide conversations. Ensuring practitioners have access to leading-edge professional

learning opportunities and a seat at the statewide table is essential to improving outcomes for students.

We will build on creative approaches to accelerating baccalaureate completion, including reverse transfer, and following national trends we will widen our lens on institutional collaborations to explore course sharing and program sharing as next-generation approaches to ensuring learners in Kentucky—including geographically isolated students—have access to the courses and programs they need to achieve their educational and career goals.

### **3. Removing Obstacles to Seamless Transfer and Recognition of Learning**

We will analyze Kentucky’s postsecondary ecosystem to better understand how barriers and disincentives to seamless transfer and recognition of learning exist within structures, policies, and practices. With the goal of creating new incentives for seamless transfer and meaningful recognition of learning, we will examine existing policies and participate in broader national conversations about the role of state, system, and institutional policies in establishing the conditions for better and more equitable outcomes for today’s learners. CPE will set the table and support a statewide effort to analyze curriculum, assess curricular complexity, and make course sequences and bachelor’s degree requirements fully transparent. Additionally, CPE will support data efforts aimed at unpacking issues related to affordability of bachelor’s degrees for transfer students.

We will update our policy around high school dual credit to promote the seamless applicability of dual credits into program pathways. Ensuring that credits achieved in high school are meaningfully counted toward a student’s program of study is an important piece of the equity puzzle for learners in Kentucky, and our work in dual credit will be one of the many places our work on credit mobility is aligned to our work on guided pathways.

Another key area where credit mobility efforts will align to our ongoing work on guided pathways is in the development and expansion of statewide transfer pathways in high-priority, high-impact workforce areas. Beginning with the work currently underway to build a statewide transfer agreement for nursing students, we will broaden our efforts to increase the number of statewide agreements in programs vital to the future of Kentucky.

We will intensify efforts around credit for prior learning/credit by exam to ensure that learning acquired through military service and work is effectively translated into credits that apply toward a student’s program of study.



To keep up with the times and prepare for the future, we will continue to explore the use of promising technologies, including machine learning and AI to improve equitable credit evaluation and to analyze curricular complexity. Gaining a better understanding of how credit evaluation practices impact learners will provide greater curricular transparency while delivering insights for institutional improvement.

## Making It Real

To achieve our statewide postsecondary attainment goal, CPE must visibly commit to the courageous leadership required for sustainable progress on the objectives and priorities outlined here. Toward that end, CPE will begin implementation of the strategic priorities by setting goals with metrics that align with the North Star. By setting goals and showing the contribution of transfer, credit mobility, and recognition of learning efforts to the 2030 statewide attainment goals, CPE will set the table for accelerated progress on strategic priorities. In addition to setting goals with clear metrics and key progress indicators, CPE is committed to monitoring and transparently reporting progress.

CPE will model our commitment to centering student needs above all else and will advocate for a broader public understanding of the moral and economic imperatives to improve transfer, credit mobility, and recognition of learning in our great state. By supporting courageous leadership across the state, Kentucky secure its own future and serve as a national exemplar.

The Kentucky Student Success Collaborative will serve as an engine of progress, and its work will be tuned to the strategic priorities outlined here. By providing technical assistance and structured learning opportunities, the collaborative will help create the conditions for skilled and committed adoption of student-focused policies and practices across Kentucky's diverse institutional contexts. In addition to supporting the accelerated progress on priorities, the collaborative will also provide Kentucky's institutions access to national student success conversations and elevate the profile of Kentucky's work on national stages.