

State Policies on Student Transitions: Results of a Fifty-State Inventory

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A central objective of state policy is to move larger numbers of citizens through the “educational pipeline” to attain a college degree. In part this objective recognizes that the U.S. is losing its historic dominance in the proportion of young adults with a postsecondary credential (OECD, 2007). Equally important in stimulating change is widespread recognition that possessing a high school diploma no longer guarantees middle class earnings and life styles. But acknowledgement of the importance of this goal across the states does not guarantee equal levels of policy attention and states vary widely in the ways they choose to address these issues. The intent of the NCHEMS Student Transitions Study, funded by the Lumina Foundation for Education, is to document these many differences.

The study concentrates on four key transitions that directly affect the number of college graduates that a state can generate.¹ The first is the transition from high school to college. This transition is influenced by policies that establish high school exit standards, put college-preparatory high school curricula in place, establish explicit competency or skill levels that define “college readiness,” or create dual enrollment programs through which high school students can earn college credit. The second transition is from pre-college to college-level work. This is affected by policies governing basic skills testing and placement. The third transition is from two-year to four-year institutions of higher education. This is affected by state policies about transfer of credits and degrees. The fourth and final transition is from the status of being enrolled in a postsecondary institution to having graduated from one. This is affected by policies on acceleration or the availability of alternative ways for students to make progress, and the provision of incentives to institutions to increase graduation rates or incentives to students to graduate on time. Sections of the report on each of these topics describe the approaches taken by the fifty states. Individual summaries of each state’s response can be found on the NCHEMS C2SP web page at www.nchems.org/c2sp. Most of these state entries contain multiple links to state web pages describing policies in detail.

Methodology

The approach used to conduct the Student Transitions study was broadly similar to the method NCHEMS used to conduct its fifty-state inventory of state Student Unit Record (SUR) databases in 2006 (Boeke and Ewell, 2006). State Higher Education Executive

¹ Policies addressed in this report are largely confined to the “traditional” educational pipeline, which begins with students who are recent high school graduates. How state policy addresses the “re-entry” pipeline consisting of working adults and students who did not complete high school is a more complex issue and will be the topic of the next NCHEMS survey.

Officers (SHEEOs) in each state were sent an initial letter describing the project and the type of information sought.² We then asked each SHEEO by telephone or email to designate a staff contact (or contacts) with whom we could work to assemble the information needed. NCHEMS staff then contacted each source by email to seeking answers to various policy questions. In most cases, agency staff could point to one or more websites describing the state policy or procedure in question. NCHEMS staff then reviewed this primary source material to develop initial answers to questions contained in a standard protocol.³ Gaps in topical coverage were addressed through follow-up phone or e-mail interviews with the original state informants—a process that frequently went through several rounds.

As in the state SUR database study, we used this approach rather than the more common method of simply sending a survey to state contacts because we believed that direct examination of primary source documentation would reveal more about actual state policies and procedures. Using this method, we successfully contacted the fifty states and obtained usable responses from all of them. At the conclusion of the data collection process, we summarized results in the form of a write-up for each state and sent respondents drafts of these write-ups for final verification.

The Transition from High School to College

Increasing the number and proportion of high school graduates who enter college is a challenge in most states because the entities governing and coordinating K-12 and postsecondary education are usually different. Only a few states (for example, New York, Pennsylvania, and Idaho) have a single agency or governing board responsible for both sectors. States also differ significantly in how each sector is funded and organized. Some have strong postsecondary governance arrangements and weak K-12 oversight, while others have the reverse. So a first policy concern in this arena is simply how the state is organized and how deliberate the state’s efforts have been to bridge the organizational gap across sectors. Table 1 provides an overview of state activities and policies associated with this first transition.

**Table 1
High School to College**

State	College-Prep Curriculum	ADP Participant	College-Ready Competencies	Dual Enrollment/AP	Student/Parent Recruitment Site
Alabama	no	yes	no	Dual Enroll	General
Alaska	no	no	no	Dual Enroll	Public Only
Arizona	developing	yes	developing	CC Only	General
Arkansas	required	yes	yes	Dual and AP	General
California	institution-set	yes	no	Dual Enroll	Full Service
Colorado	developing	yes	no	Dual Enroll	Full Service
Connecticut	developing	yes	developing	Dual Enroll	Full Service

² See Appendix A for a copy of the initial contact letter.

³ See Appendix B for a copy of the protocol.

State	College-Prep Curriculum	ADP Participant	College-Ready Competencies	Dual Enrollment/AP	Student/Parent Recruitment Site
Delaware	required	yes	yes	Developing	Full Service
Florida	recommended	no	test-based	Dual Enroll	Full Service
Georgia	developing	yes	developing	Dual Enroll	Full Service
Hawaii	recommended	yes	developing	Dual and AP	Developing
Idaho	developing	yes	no	Dual and AP	Full Service
Illinois	no	no	no	CC Only/AP	Full Service
Indiana	required	yes	yes	Dual Enroll	Full Service
Iowa	recommended	no	yes	Dual Enroll	General
Kansas	recommended	no	no	Dual Enroll	no
Kentucky	required	yes	yes	Developing	Full Service
Louisiana	recommended	yes	Eng/Math	Dual Enroll	Developing
Maine	recommended	yes	no	Local	Public Only
Maryland	recommended	yes	no	Developing	Full Service
Massachusetts	no	yes	yes	Dual Enroll	Full Service
Michigan	required	yes	test-based	Local	no
Minnesota	institution-set	yes	no	Dual and AP	Public Only
Mississippi	recommended	yes	developing	Dual Enroll	Developing
Missouri	recommended	no	developing	Dual and AP	Full Service
Montana	recommended	yes	test-based	Local	no
Nebraska	no	no	no	Local	General
Nevada	no	no	no	Local	no
New Hampshire	required	no	yes	Dual Enroll	Full Service
New Jersey	no	yes	no	Local	General
New Mexico	required	yes	developing	Dual Enroll	no
New York	recommended	no	yes	Dual Enroll	Developing
North Carolina	developing	yes	developing	Dual Enroll	Full Service
North Dakota	institution-set	no	test-based	Dual Enroll	General
Ohio	required	yes	Eng/Math	Dual Enroll	Full Service
Oklahoma	required	yes	yes	Dual and AP	Full Service
Oregon	institution-set	yes	no	Dual and AP	Developing
Pennsylvania	no	yes	Eng/Math	Dual Enroll	General
Rhode Island	no	yes	Eng/Math	Dual Enroll	General
South Carolina	recommended	no	yes	Developing	Developing
South Dakota	recommended	no	developing	Dual and AP	General
Tennessee	recommended	yes	test-based	Dual Enroll	Full Service
Texas	required	yes	developing	Dual and AP	Full Service
Utah	no	no	no	Dual Enroll	General
Vermont	no	no	no	Dual and AP	General
Virginia	no	yes	developing	Dual Enroll	Full Service
Washington	no	yes	developing	Dual and AP	General
West Virginia	recommended	No	yes	Dual Enroll	Full Service
Wisconsin	institution-set	Yes	no	Dual and AP	Full Service
Wyoming	required	No	developing	Dual and AP	Developing

Most states try to bridge the gap between K-12 and postsecondary education by formally establishing a **“P-16” Council** or a similar multi-agency body. Only five states report that no such effort is under way (Alabama, Alaska, Louisiana, Michigan, and New

Jersey), with four more indicating that such move is forthcoming (Colorado, Nevada, New Hampshire, and Washington). But how P-16 Councils are organized and which sector takes the lead varies widely across the states. In some states—including Arkansas, Delaware, Indiana, Missouri, South Carolina, and Texas—coordinating bodies were created by law. In others—including Hawaii, Kansas, Utah, Wisconsin, and Wyoming—they are voluntary bodies set up by mutual agreement. In Ohio and Rhode Island, the Governor serves as the chair of the body, a route that Washington also plans to take. In other states, such as Tennessee and New Hampshire, the SHEEO agency takes the lead but in still others, like Oklahoma, the agency responsible for K-12 Education does so.

States also vary a good deal in the level of investment and activity these bodies exhibit. States like Arizona, California, Florida, and Mississippi have highly visible websites and professional directors and staff. But others appear a good deal more informal. For instance, Louisiana has established a number of independent “working groups” to examine various aspects of the P-16 issue without establishing a body at all. Most of these efforts are also fairly new, with only a few dating back to the mid-1990s. For example, Mississippi hired its first executive director in 2007 and Arizona in 2005. Finally, a few state efforts appear to have stalled with changes in leadership or funding priorities. Illinois, for example, is looking at new legislation after an earlier effort became inactive. Nevada and Vermont also once had P-16 initiatives in place that have become inactive.

One significant outcome of state P-16 efforts is the adoption of a rigorous **college-preparatory high school curriculum**. Most states report that such a curriculum has been developed and is recommended for admission to public higher education institutions. In many cases, this has been developed through the American Diploma Project (ADP). But only a few states mandate a college-preparatory curriculum as the default curriculum for all high school graduates. Six more states indicate that this step will be taken in the near future. In some states with large state university systems, a *de facto* curriculum is in place because the systems’ admissions requirements specify what courses an applicant must have taken. Good examples here are the California State University and University of California systems in California and the University of Wisconsin system. Only eight states report that they do not have an explicit college-preparatory curriculum in place and do not plan to create one. The most commonly cited reason for this is that decisions about curriculum content and standards are matters of local school district control.

Fifteen states have taken the further step of identifying and defining the specific **competencies and areas of knowledge needed to be college-ready**. Fourteen additional states report that the development of competency-based definitions of college readiness is in process and that they should be in place within the next few years. Several additional states have *de facto* competency standards in place, defined in terms of particular scores on a common examination. Furthermore, some states have only defined such standards in a couple of fields—for example writing and mathematics. As above, many states reporting progress in this area mentioned that this was taking place within the framework of the American Diploma Project. Four of these states (including Arizona, Delaware,

New York, and Oklahoma) also noted that competencies had been defined for workplace readiness in addition to college readiness, following the guidelines established by ACT (ACT, 2006).

Another policy area that addresses this transition is the ability to **earn college credit while still enrolled in high school**. Virtually every state has put policies in place to encourage this. All but seven states encourage dual enrollment programs through which students can take college courses while attending high school and two are developing such policies. About half of these dual enrollment arrangements are governed by formal regulation or statute, with the remainder being options established by the SHEEO agency. Two states (Indiana and Texas) require all high school districts in the state to offer a minimum number of college-level options each year. Five states report that dual enrollment occurs, but it is arranged locally through inter-institutional agreements between individual colleges and high schools.

While state engagement with dual enrollment is thus nearly universal, only a few states report explicit financial support. Pennsylvania supports what is claimed as the largest dual enrollment system in the country. Louisiana, Maryland, Tennessee, and Utah also report direct support for such programs through state funding, while Oklahoma supports dual enrollment through tuition waivers. On the other hand, Massachusetts defunded its dual enrollment efforts three years ago. In most states, dual enrollment is supported largely through student tuition charges.

Advanced Placement (AP) represents another policy route to encourage acceleration because students with AP credit can potentially amass the number of college credits needed to graduate more quickly. Fourteen states report that they have formal policies governing AP credit in addition to their dual enrollment policies. Several states have also established more comprehensive “early college high school” programs that allow early admissions to postsecondary institutions and broadened access to college-level work.

A final area in which states can assist students in making the transition to college is to provide them directly with tools to assist them in doing so. To this end, more and more states are establishing **dedicated recruitment web portals for “students and parents.”** The simplest of these merely provide direct links to the admissions sites of constituent colleges and universities, together with general material on selecting an institution or preparing and paying for college. Some of these only address public institutions. In some states (for example, Louisiana) the SHEEO website points to a “students and parents” section on the website of each of the state’s public college and university systems.

Twenty-two states go somewhat farther by providing on-line inquiry tools that try to match student interests with programs or distinctive institutional features. Other enhancements can include financial calculators and detailed listings of resources about how to pay for college. Seven additional states report that they are in the process of developing a detailed college search site. Many of these “full service” websites are maintained by the state’s financial aid authority rather than by the SHEEO agency,

especially when large amounts of state scholarship resources are used to support attendance at independent colleges. Going further, states like Ohio couple such websites with a more extensive college access network intended to raise awareness about college opportunities and the benefits of completing college for underserved populations.

Transition from Pre-College to College-Level Work

Large and growing numbers of the nation’s undergraduates enter college with less than collegiate skill levels in reading, writing, and mathematics. This is particularly the case for students who attend community colleges or are drawn from low-income families. State policies that affect the progression of these students to college-level work govern the use of placement tests to detect academic deficiencies and how remedial instruction is conducted to bring student skills to the college level. Policies in many states also determine where remedial instruction takes place within public institutions, with many states confining developmental classes to community colleges. Table 2 summarizes state actions or policies in this second transition.⁴

**Table 2
Placement Policies**

State	Statewide Placement Policy	Common Test	Common Cut Score
Alabama	no	no	No
Alaska	no	no	No
Arizona	no	no	No
Arkansas	yes	yes	Yes
California	no	no	No
Colorado	yes	yes	Yes
Connecticut	no	no	No
Delaware	no	no	No
Florida	yes	yes	Yes
Georgia	yes	yes	Yes
Hawaii	CC only	CC only	CC only
Idaho	yes	yes	Yes
Illinois	no	no	No
Indiana	no	no	No
Iowa	no	no	No
Kansas	no	no	No
Kentucky	yes	yes	developing
Louisiana	yes	yes	Yes
Maine	no	no	No
Maryland	no	no	No
Massachusetts	yes	yes	Yes
Michigan	no	no	No
Minnesota	yes	Yes	developing
Mississippi	yes	yes	Yes
Missouri	no	no	No

⁴ Note: a “yes” entry in the table means that the policy in question covers all public institutions in the state.

State	Statewide Placement Policy	Common Test	Common Cut Score
Montana	no	no	No
Nebraska	no	no	No
Nevada	yes	choice of tests	some fields
New Hampshire	no	no	No
New Jersey	no	no	No
New Mexico	developing	developing	developing
New York	no	no	No
North Carolina	CC only	no	No
North Dakota	no	no	No
Ohio	developing	developing	No
Oklahoma	yes	no	No
Oregon	no	no	No
Pennsylvania	no	no	No
Rhode Island	developing	developing	developing
South Carolina	no	no	No
South Dakota	yes	yes	Yes
Tennessee	no	no	No
Texas	yes	yes	Yes
Utah	no	no	No
Vermont	no	no	No
Virginia	no	no	No
Washington	CC only	no	No
West Virginia	yes	yes	Yes
Wisconsin	yes	no	No
Wyoming	no	no	No

Seventeen states currently have a **statewide policy that governs college placement** for all public institutions. Three additional states report that such a policy is in place for their community college systems, but not for four-year colleges. Three more states say that they are in the process of developing such a policy. Some states prohibit their public four-year institutions from offering remedial education, confining it instead to the community colleges, which also affects the scope of placement policy.

Fourteen states not only have a statewide policy governing placement, but also use a **common set of placement tests** to govern placement decisions. Three more states say they are planning to move in this direction, with one additional state using common placement tests only in its community college system. In some of these fifteen states, institutions are allowed to choose which placement test to use from a state-established list. The most common tests used for this purpose are ACT's Compass and the ETS Accuplacer, which are specially designed placement tests. But SAT and ACT scores are also sometimes used. In the remaining states, individual institutions decide which tests to use.

Twelve states have established **mandated cut scores** on common tests, below which students are placed in developmental courses. Four more states say they are developing such a policy, and one more has such a policy only for its community college system. In

some cases, state policies allow students to take some college-level work at the same time as developmental courses—especially if the tested deficiency is in a skill area unrelated to the courses enrolled for. In other cases, common cut scores are established for one or two skills areas, but not for all three. Finally, some of the twelve states that have established mandated cut scores allow institutions to set and use higher cut scores if they notify state authorities. Other states within these twelve set different cut scores at different institutions.

Although thirty-three states currently have no common placement policy in place, many report that placement practices are becoming more aligned despite the absence of a formal policy. In Connecticut, for instance, community college test-adoption practices and placement standards are voluntarily aligned, and this is also happening for the state colleges. Similarly, with only a few exceptions, public institutions in Minnesota are moving toward common tests and aligned cut scores. But many other states note that there are no plans to move toward more commonality with respect to placement policy. In some cases, like New York and California, this is because the public colleges and universities are simply so numerous and diverse that policymakers feel that it would be futile or counterproductive to establish common policies and standards. In other cases, like Michigan or Pennsylvania, state coordinating agencies are either not present or lack the requisite authority. Finally, there is growing interest in administering college placement tests to students who have not yet graduated from high school. For example, the California State University system administers its placement tests to high school sophomores—a practice that both provides an early signal about collegiate expectations and provides time to remediate deficiencies before a student receives a high school diploma.

Transitions Among Postsecondary Institutions

Data from national longitudinal studies indicate high levels of transfer among postsecondary institutions, with as many as two thirds of all students eventually earning baccalaureate degrees having attended two or more colleges or universities (Adelman, 2006). While the majority of these transitions are “traditional” transfers from two-year to four-year institutions, increasing numbers of “nontraditional” transfers are also occurring. These include four-year to four-year transfers and four-year to two-year transfers, primarily to acquire job skills. Many states have long-standing policies governing transfer of credit that are designed to address traditional transfer, including both course-level and degree-level transfer. Some states are beginning to address the more complex, nontraditional patterns of inter-institutional migration that have come to be known as the “enrollment swirl.” Table 3 summarizes state transfer policies.

**Table 3
Transfer Policies**

State	Transfer Policy?	Institutional Coverage	Transferable Gen Ed Curric?	Does AA/AS Satisfy Gen Ed?	Do Specific Courses Transfer?
Alabama	yes	public	yes	no	yes
Alaska	yes	public	yes	yes	yes
Arizona	yes	public	yes	yes	yes
Arkansas	yes	public	no	no	yes
California	no	system level	no	no	no
Colorado	yes	public	developing	yes	yes
Connecticut	no	system level	no	no	no
Delaware	yes	public	no	no	yes
Florida	yes	public	yes	yes	yes
Georgia	yes	public	yes	no	yes
Hawaii	yes	public	no	yes	yes
Idaho	yes	public	no	yes	yes
Illinois	yes	voluntary	yes	no	no
Indiana	yes	public plus	no	yes	yes
Iowa	yes	public	yes	yes	no
Kansas	yes	public	no	no	no
Kentucky	yes	public	yes	yes	no
Louisiana	yes	public	yes	no	yes
Maine	yes	public	no	no	no
Maryland	no	developing	no	yes	no
Massachusetts	yes	public	yes	no	no
Michigan	no	none	no	no	no
Minnesota	yes	public plus	yes	no	yes
Mississippi	yes	public	yes	yes	yes
Missouri	yes	public plus	yes	yes	no
Montana	yes	public	yes	yes	yes
Nebraska	yes	voluntary	yes	no	yes
Nevada	yes	public	yes	yes	no
New Hampshire	yes	public	no	no	yes
New Jersey	yes	public plus	yes	yes	no
New Mexico	yes	public plus	yes	yes	yes
New York	no	system level	no	no	no
North Carolina	yes	public plus	no	yes	no
North Dakota	yes	public plus	yes	yes	yes
Ohio	yes	public plus	yes	yes	yes
Oklahoma	yes	public plus	yes	yes	yes
Oregon	yes	public	yes	yes	yes
Pennsylvania	yes	public	no	no	yes
Rhode Island	yes	public	no	no	yes
South Carolina	yes	public plus	yes	no	no
South Dakota	yes	public	yes	yes	yes
Tennessee	yes	system level	no	no	no
Texas	yes	public	yes	yes	yes
Utah	yes	public	yes	yes	yes

State	Transfer Policy?	Institutional Coverage	Transferable Gen Ed Curric?	Does AA/AS Satisfy Gen Ed?	Do Specific Courses Transfer?
Vermont	no	system level	no	no	no
Virginia	yes	public	yes	yes	no
Washington	yes	all	yes	yes	no
West Virginia	yes	public	no	yes	yes
Wisconsin	yes	public	no	yes	yes
Wyoming	yes	public	yes	yes	yes

All but six states have **explicit transfer policies**, either written into law or promulgated by a state governing or coordinating board. One of these six is currently developing such a policy. Four of the remaining states without a statewide policy (California, New York, Maryland, and Vermont) have such policies in place in one or more of their constituent higher education systems. The remaining state without a policy, Michigan, lacks a state-level higher education coordinating authority. Most of these policies are less than a decade old, although states with an explicit “two-plus-two” approach to public higher education enrollment planning have had them in place for more than twenty years. All of the states with a transfer policy apply it to all public institutions in the state. Washington is the only state whose transfer policy applies to all institutions—both public and independent—although ten additional states have some independent college participation. Two states (Illinois and Nebraska) have voluntary transfer networks in which individual institutions, both public and independent, choose to participate.

Twenty-nine states have established a **common or core general education curriculum** through their transfer policies. Twenty-nine states have also established policies that mandate that a student who has earned an Associate degree containing the required transfer requirement be given junior year standing at transfer institutions as well as satisfying the transfer institution’s general education requirement. In a few cases, transfer curricula have been established for only a few fields of study—for example, Nursing or Teacher Education. In most cases, the core curriculum for transfer consists of five to eight broad content areas with associated credit values (e.g. physical sciences) rather than explicit course lists or titles. Only a few states fully describe their transferrable general education curricula in terms of specific courses, but some prescribe a few specific courses.⁵

One alternative to establishing a transferrable curriculum, followed by ten states, is to develop a **transferrable course matrix**. Courses contained in the matrix transfer fully to all institutions followed by the policy as those specific courses, so long as the receiving institution has the same course. Courses not in the matrix, or that have no equivalent at the receiving institution, are awarded general credit toward the degree. Six states (Florida, Georgia, Idaho, New Mexico, Texas, and Wyoming) have established full or partial common course numbering schemes among public institutions to regularize the transfer process. Only three states (Minnesota, Missouri, and New Mexico) report that

⁵ These courses are almost always prescribed state history courses.

they have established explicit competencies or learning outcomes for their statewide general education curricula.

States use a variety of mechanisms to enforce their transfer policies. States that have a statewide SUR database with transcript-level detail can directly audit institutional records to ensure that institutions are following the established transfer policy. Other states have set up a public appeals process. Through this process, students who have had prospective transfer credits denied can gain adjudication on a case-by-case basis. Still other states govern their transfer policies by means of an inter-institutional committee that meets regularly to establish and review policies and to adjudicate grievances. Finally, many states leave transfer governance and enforcement up to individual institutions through the establishment of bilateral articulation agreements. Institutionally-established articulation agreements are also frequently put in place to establish more explicit or institution-specific provisions for transfer within a state’s more general transfer policy.

Retention, Completion, and Acceleration

Finally, a range of state policies affect student “transition” from a beginning student to a degree holder, whether or not the degree is obtained from the same institution at which a student began enrollment. Some of these policies are designed to improve retention and degree completion rates through such mechanisms as performance reporting and incentive funding. An important auxiliary to such policies are increasingly sophisticated longitudinal databases constructed from SUR records to support retention studies designed to uncover reasons why students are progressing. Other policies are intended to make it easier for students to complete degree programs by studying on-line or enrolling in a newly-created virtual institution. Still others are designed to reduce the time required for students to earn their degrees. Table 4 lists state incentives to increase retention and degree completion.

**Table 4
Incentives for Retention/Completion**

State	Institutional Incentives: Graduation	Student Incentives: Graduation	Institutional Incentives: Excess Credit	Student Incentives: Excess Credit
Alabama	no	no	no	no
Alaska	reporting	no	no	no
Arizona	no	no	no	fin aid
Arkansas	funding	no	no	no
California	no	no	no	no
Colorado	funding	no	no	no
Connecticut	no	no	no	no
Delaware	no	no	no	no
Florida	no	no	no	fin aid
Georgia	reporting	no	no	tuition
Hawaii	no	no	no	no
Idaho	no	no	no	no
Illinois	reporting	no	no	no

State	Institutional Incentives: Graduation	Student Incentives: Graduation	Institutional Incentives: Excess Credit	Student Incentives: Excess Credit
Indiana	funding	no	no	fin aid
Iowa	no	no	no	no
Kansas	funding	no	no	no
Kentucky	funding	no	no	no
Louisiana	plan funding	no	no	fin aid
Maine	no	no	no	no
Maryland	no	no	no	no
Massachusetts	no	partial	no	no
Michigan	no	no	no	no
Minnesota	no	no	no	no
Mississippi	no	no	no	no
Missouri	plan funding	no	no	no
Montana	no	no	no	no
Nebraska	no	no	no	no
Nevada	no	no	no	no
New Hampshire	reporting	no	no	tuition
New Jersey	no	no	no	fin aid
New Mexico	funding	no	no	no
New York	Funding	no	no	no
North Carolina	No	no	no	tuition
North Dakota	No	no	no	no
Ohio	Funding	no	no	no
Oklahoma	Funding	no	no	no
Oregon	No	no	no	no
Pennsylvania	No	no	no	no
Rhode Island	No	no	no	no
South Carolina	No	no	no	fin aid
South Dakota	No	no	no	no
Tennessee	Funding	no	no	fin aid
Texas	No	no	yes	bonus/tuition
Utah	No	no	no	tuition
Vermont	No	no	no	no
Virginia	Funding	no	no	tuition
Washington	reporting	no	no	fin aid
West Virginia	Funding	no	no	no
Wisconsin	reporting	no	no	tuition
Wyoming	No	no	no	no

Twelve states have some version of **performance funding** that provides public institutions with incentives to increase their degree-completion rates. In states like Tennessee and Oklahoma, these are “classic” performance funding schemes in which increases in degrees completed or degree-completion rates are tied to additional funds through a formula. In other states, for example Colorado and Kansas, degree-completion is part of individual performance agreements negotiated between institutions and the state board, with performance penalties incorporated if targets are not met. Two additional states are planning to adopt performance funding for degree completion in the very near

future. All of these policies apply only to public institutions in their respective states. But New York operates a long-standing incentive program for independent institutions that provides them with incentive dollars for each degree produced.

Only one state (Texas) has any institutional incentives for on-time graduation or graduating without excess credits. But states employ a number of incentives for students to induce them to graduate without excessive credits. Seven states employ **tuition policy** to attack this issue. Some, like Texas, provide students with a bonus payment if they complete their degrees without excessive credits. Others, like New Hampshire or North Carolina, apply a tuition surcharge for hours taken over a given total. Eight additional states report that their **financial aid policies** discourage excess course enrollment indirectly because they specify that a student can only receive financial aid support for four years of academic work.⁶

States can also make it easier for students to complete their degrees by providing alternative ways to earn college credit and participate in courses. Table 5 lists a number of mechanisms that states use to accelerate student progress.

**Table 5
Acceleration Mechanisms**

State	Acceleration Provisions?	Alternative Institution?	Central On-Line Course Bank?
Alabama	No	No	no
Alaska	No	No	yes
Arizona	CLEP	no	no
Arkansas	No	no	no
California	No	no	no
Colorado	No	no	yes
Connecticut	No	yes	yes
Delaware	No	no	no
Florida	Test-Out	no	yes
Georgia	Pilot PLA	no	developing
Hawaii	No	no	no
Idaho	No	yes	yes
Illinois	No	no	yes
Indiana	No	no	yes
Iowa	No	no	yes
Kansas	No	no	developing
Kentucky	Pilot PLA	yes	yes
Louisiana	No	developing	yes
Maine	No	no	yes
Maryland	No	yes	no
Massachusetts	No	no	yes
Michigan	No	no	no

⁶ This number may be underreported because state respondents were not specifically asked questions about the role of financial aid policy in promoting on-time degree completion; these responses were volunteered in response to a more general question about incentives.

State	Acceleration Provisions?	Alternative Institution?	Central On-Line Course Bank?
Minnesota	No	yes	yes
Mississippi	No	no	yes
Missouri	No	no	no
Montana	No	no	developing
Nebraska	No	no	no
Nevada	CLEP	no	yes
New Hampshire	No	no	yes
New Jersey	No	yes	no
New Mexico	No	no	developing
New York	No	yes	no
North Carolina	No	no	system-level
North Dakota	Test-Out	yes	no
Ohio	No	no	yes
Oklahoma	PLA	no	yes
Oregon	No	no	no
Pennsylvania	PLA	no	no
Rhode Island	No	No	no
South Carolina	No	No	yes
South Dakota	Test-Out	Yes	yes
Tennessee	No	system-level	system-level
Texas	CLEP	Yes	yes
Utah	CLEP	Yes	yes
Vermont	No	Yes	no
Virginia	No	Yes	partial participation
Washington	No	No	CCs Only
West Virginia	PLA	No	No
Wisconsin	CLEP	No	Yes
Wyoming	No	No	Developing

Test-out provisions and Assessment of Prior Learning are prominent alternatives for accelerating progress and earning college credit, and most colleges offer them at this point. Authority to do so is also frequently written into state codes regulating public higher education. Entries in the chart above indicate the five states where explicit statewide policies or codes such as this exist for course equivalency tests under such programs as the College Level Examination Program (CLEP).⁷ Three states have gone farther than this by themselves offering **test-out or course challenge alternatives** under which students can demonstrate course competencies directly to accelerate their progress. The Florida program, for example, draws on a statewide battery of subject examinations for most courses, aided by the state’s common course numbering system. In South Dakota, students can challenge any course using available national subject examinations. If no examination is available to cover the content of a given course, the faculty is obliged to create one. In addition, three states have established statewide policies on

⁷ This also includes other established course equivalency tests such as the ACT PEP program or the Department of Defense DAN TES program.

Prior Learning Assessment (PLA), under which students can be awarded credit on the basis of work or life experience. Two additional states are developing such a program.

Thirteen states have developed an **alternative public institution** designed specifically to aid student degree completion—especially for non-traditional students who have particular difficulties in finishing their programs. One additional state is developing an institution of this kind and a second maintains two electronic access colleges—one at the four-year and one at the two-year level. Most of these alternative institutions are fairly new, but some, like Charter Oak State College in Connecticut, Thomas Edison University in New Jersey, and Excelsior College in New York, date back to the 1960s and 1970s. These institutions and several of their more recently-established counterparts are competency based. That is, students are assessed for mastery of course content and do not attend formal classes. Another form of alternative institution is a specially-created on-line state university or community college that is formally chartered as a separate institution. Not counted in these totals are the many states that have established consortia of institutions to offer on-line instruction. Also not counted are the many states that reported participation in third-party initiatives like the SREB Electronic Campus.

Finally, twenty-three states have created a **web-based integrated course catalog** to assist students in choosing and on-line degree program or in locating on-line courses to help them through their programs. These consist of full listings of all distance-delivered programs and course offerings by public institutions in the state (some include courses offered by independent institutions as well), together with information on how to access these courses. The most straightforward only contain these features, while the most sophisticated include on-line utilities to aid student choice and enrollment. Five additional states report that they are developing such a resource, while three more states have such a resource for one or more of their public postsecondary systems. But such resources are difficult for states to maintain and may, as a result, be discontinued because of budget cuts or because they are perceived to duplicate similar institution-level websites. This appears to have occurred in Oregon.

Trends and Conclusions

This report is intended to present the overall pattern of state initiatives affecting student transitions. Readers wishing to examine the details of what any particular state is doing in any of these areas should consult the individual state write-ups on the NCHEMS website at www.nchems.org/projects/c2sp. Examining state policies and actions as a whole, however, several observations can be made about the progress that states have made:

- State action in these arenas has, for the most part, been fairly recent. This is especially true for P-16 initiatives and explicit requirements for placement testing using common examinations and test scores, where states have been engaging in these activities since only the mid-1990s. The numbers of states that are planning to put policies in place is also indicative of rapid change. Initiatives like recommended high school curricula and common transferable general education

curricula have been around a little longer, but still are in many cases quite new. It is also important to note that in a few cases states have dropped initiatives in some of these areas. In short, state policies governing student transitions can be quite volatile and, as a result, this is an area that organizations like NCHEMS should continue to monitor closely.

- State action in these arenas has also, for the most part, been more integrated and intentional. State policies affecting student transitions in the 1970s through the mid-1990s tended to be enacted and maintained in isolation. Admissions policies had little connection to college-level placement which, in turn, had little to do with incentives designed to promote effective student progression and transfer. Each of these domains was deemed a separate arena for policy, with activities developed more or less independently. This study reveals a good deal more intentionality with respect to how different elements of state policy affect one another and how the pieces fit together. This has been undoubtedly aided by the overall metaphor of the “education pipeline” popularized by NCHEMS and the National Center for Public Policy in Higher Education. Many states have used the “pipeline” metaphor explicitly as an organizing principle for looking at data about student flow and for developing a “public agenda” for higher education aimed at meeting state need and educating larger numbers of citizens.
- Finally, state action in these arenas has, overall, become more directive. In the realm of curriculum—both high school college-prep and transferable collegiate general education—the trend has been toward greater specificity with respect to the courses included. In the realm of college-level placement, the trend has been toward more commonality in choosing aligned placement tests and cut scores, and toward directed placement of students scoring below the college level. Finally, after a hiatus of about a decade with respect to the use of performance funding as a state higher education policy tool, it is coming back in this arena. All of these trends suggest a new commitment and seriousness on the part of many states to significantly improve collegiate attainment levels.

On the other side, a set of parallel observations can be made about challenges that the states still face in these important areas:

- Despite reported progress, there remains an enormous policy divide between policies governing K-12 education and those applied to postsecondary study. In the vast majority of states, different governing authorities—each with its own processes and agendas—apply to secondary and postsecondary education. These differences are reinforced by different approaches to funding, different ways of ensuring or inducing institutional compliance, different ways of counting things, and fundamentally different languages and cultures. P-16 structures are undoubtedly helping, but there is a great deal of work remaining to close these communications and policy gaps.

- State policies on student progression still lack the important dimension of ensuring the quality of learning outcomes. States have made great progress in putting policies into place to ensure that greater numbers of citizens can earn postsecondary credentials. But there remains little external evidence available about the academic standards that these credentials represent, what actual learning they embody, and the extent to which they are internationally competitive. In the wake of the Spellings Commission and SHEEO's National Commission on Higher Education Accountability, states are beginning to turn their attention to assessment and accountability once again. But few have returned to the level of policy interest in these topics that many of them exhibited in the late 1980s and early 1990s.
- State policies in many areas are in place, but the extent to which they are enforced remains unclear. Enforcement is probably clearest in the area of high school preparation, where admissions standards at public colleges and universities exert a powerful influence on K-12 behavior. In states with common college placement standards and cut scores, institutional compliance can be monitored through state-level student unit record databases. But the enforcement of transfer policies is a good deal spottier and few states have effective mechanisms to detect when, and under what circumstances, transfer credits are being denied to students who meet established guidelines. In most cases, it is up to the student to bring a case forward and institutions can always maintain that a given course indeed "counts" toward the degree but fails to meet a specific academic requirement.

Finally, it is clear that states are very uneven with respect to the attention they devote to these issues and the vigor with which they pursue them. In some states, there is a lot of activity, most of it focused and intentional. In others, there are still few initiatives in place. Sometimes the latter is because there is no state policy actor capable of setting the required agenda. Sometimes it is because there are simply too many actors, with overlapping jurisdictions and authorities. What remains clear from these data is that a growing number of states are acting to meet the challenges of moving students through these successive transitions smoothly and effectively.

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Appendix A: Initial Contact Letter

March 2, 2007

Dear ***

NCHEMS is in the second year of a five year grant from the Lumina Foundation for Education intended to document and improve state policies directed at increasing the flow of students through the “postsecondary educational pipeline.” As part of this effort last year, we completed a fifty-state survey of state-level Student Unit Record (SUR) databases, which was published by Lumina last month under the title *Critical Connections: Linking States’ Unit Record Systems to Track Student Progress*. For this second year of the grant, we would like to conduct a second fifty-state survey directed at state policies and programs intended to improve key student transitions in the educational pipeline and to accelerate progress. Examples of the kinds of policies or programs we are looking for include statewide P-16 efforts, earning college credit while enrolled in high school, policies governing college placement and remediation, transfer and articulation, and incentives for improved degree production. I am writing to seek your participation in this data gathering effort.

A member of our staff—either Marianne Boeke or Stacey Zis—will get in touch with you by telephone or email to establish a contact in your office with whom we can work in getting the information we need and to block out the specific questions we would like each agency to answer. Meanwhile, we will be searching your web pages to determine what is already documented there, so in many cases all that will be required is for someone to tell us where to look. We expect the vast majority of this activity will take place through email exchange and we want to make this effort as easy as possible for the participating agencies. It is quite possible—indeed likely—that several people in your agency may have the requisite information. It is also possible that you will refer us to a university or community college system effort within your state that is not being undertaken by the SHEEO agency itself.

Marianne or Stacey will be calling or emailing you within the next few weeks to discuss this request and to set up next steps. Meanwhile, if you have any thoughts or concerns, do not hesitate to contact me at (303) 497-0371 or by email at peter@nchems.org.

Thanks in advance for your help on this.

Best regards,

Peter T. Ewell
Vice-President

Appendix B: Transitions Data Collection Protocol

Topics to Explore on SHEEO Websites for Next C2SP Inventory

For 2007, we would like to do an inventory of state policies and practices in the realm of student transitions across institutional boundaries in connection with improving flow through the educational pipeline. This will be similar in method to the recently-completed inventory of state-level Student Unit Record databases. That is, we will try to find out as much as we can in advance through exploration on the web and in the literature, then identify a contact person at each SHEEO office to complete an e-survey.

To begin the process, we should first take a systematic look at websites for the fifty SHEEO agencies and try to document the following:

1. Is there an identifiable “P-16” effort visible? This might take the form of a P-16 Council, Working group, or other visible and semi-permanent effort.
2. Does the agency include a utility or function on the website designed explicitly to help potential students locate an appropriate college or university to attend?
3. Is there a mandated or recommended college preparatory curriculum in place? An example would be the Indiana 21st Century Scholars program (“Core 40”) or the Missouri statewide college preparatory curriculum.
4. Has the state articulated a set of explicit competencies or skills that define what it means to be “college ready?” Note that Achieve has just completed a survey of SHEEOs on this issue, so don’t go too far on this one.
5. Are systematic programs in place that encourage students to accelerate progress by taking college-level courses while still enrolled in high school (e.g. AP, Dual Enrollment, Middle College High Schools, etc.)?
6. Is there a statewide policy on placement into college-level courses or remedial courses? Is a standard set of placement tests recommended or required? If yes, are common cut scores for placement decisions in place or do institutions get to set their own? [Note: practices here may differ for community colleges and for four-year institutions, and this should be noted.]
7. Is there a visible statewide transfer and articulation policy? Does this cover all institutions or only public institutions? What are the specifics of this policy?
8. Is the transfer/articulation policy accompanied by a statewide transferable general education requirement? Does this name actual courses and/or credits? Are specific competencies identified that the student should meet through this

- coursework? Is testing used to guarantee student competency for progress or transfer (e.g. FL CLAST or SD ACT CAAP)?
9. More specifically, does an AA or AS degree from a community college in the state meet general education requirements at public four-year institutions? What mechanisms are in place to make sure this actually happens?
 10. Does credit from transfer courses meet specific course requirements at the transfer institution (e.g. American History counts for American History) or do just the credits transfer to count against the total needed for graduation?
 11. Are there statewide test-out or competency-based provisions that will allow a student to accelerate progress toward a degree through alternative certification? [E.g. Florida has this through something called PEP testing.]
 12. Does the state have an easily-accessible alternative institution that allows degree-completion electronically (for example, the KY or CO electronic community colleges)?
 13. Does the state have an accessible central bank or catalog of on-line courses contributed by many institutions that enable students to do “one-stop shopping” for electronic courses?
 14. Does the state provide incentives to institutions for improvements in degree production or graduation rates? For minimizing the number of students graduating with excessive numbers of credits (e.g. more than 120 SCH)?
 15. Does the state provide incentives for students who successfully complete their degrees (e.g. tuition rebates or cash bonuses)? For students who complete their programs without amassing additional credits (e.g. within 120 SCH)? Are their financial disincentives for students to take more than the number of credits needed to graduate (e.g. full or out-of-state tuition)?