



ANALYSIS: Pennsylvania Transfer Policy



In an effort to assist Pennsylvania in the progression of existing statewide transfer policies, Education Commission of the States co-facilitated a meeting with the Pennsylvania Department of Education (PDE) Transfer and Articulation Oversight Committee (TAOC). The meeting included information on Pennsylvania State System of Higher Education’s (PASSHE) new/revised Board of Governors’ Student Transfer Policy, an overview of Pennsylvania’s two statewide transfer policies and work-group discussions regarding those transfer policies.

The group facilitation portion tasked TAOC members to think through policy reforms for the 30-Credit Transfer Framework and the Statewide Program-to-Program Articulation Agreements (P2P). The workgroups used the **State Education Policy Checklist** designed by Education Commission of the States. The end result of the facilitation was a collection of ideas on how Pennsylvania could improve these two policies.

This brief provides an overview of the policy landscape in Pennsylvania, transfer student data information, key policy components for transfer policies, application of those components in Pennsylvania’s transfer policies and recommendations for policy revision. An appendix provides

TAOC member feedback from the State Education Policy Checklist. The main goal for improving transfer policies is to ensure successful transfer of credit for students without additional accrued debt. Transfer policies should aim to ease the transition between institutions and create clear pathways for students to follow toward timely completion of a postsecondary credential.

Pennsylvania Transfer Policy Landscape

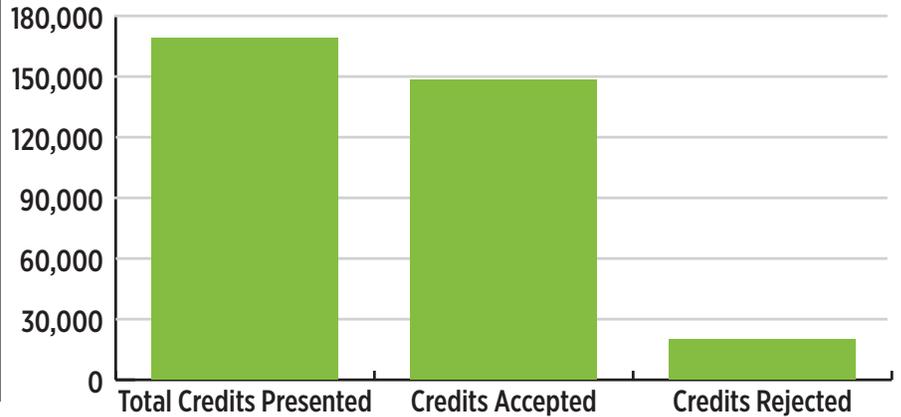
Generally, statewide transfer policies exist to ease the movement of academic credit between institutions, which in turn saves students money, decreases the amount of time needed to earn a degree and increases the chances of degree completion. Two commonly enacted transfer policies include a transferable core of lower-division courses and statewide guaranteed transfer of an associate degree. Pennsylvania currently uses versions of these policies: the 30-Credit Transfer Framework and the Statewide P2P Articulation Agreements. Both policies require compliance by the state’s 14 public community colleges and the 14 state universities in the PASSHE as well as the colleges and universities that voluntarily participate in the statewide transfer system.¹²

Program	Elements	Year Enacted
30-Credit Framework ³	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Includes foundation courses in English, public speaking, math, natural science, art and humanities and behavioral and social sciences. Allows students to transfer up to 30 credits of foundation-level courses toward a degree at any participating college or university. 	Law passed in 2006 ; 30-Credit Framework applies to students matriculating fall 2008 and beyond .
Statewide P2P ⁴	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Provide direct pathways to specific majors at four-year PA Transfer and Articulation Center (TRAC) colleges. Aligns certain associate degrees with the first 60 credits of parallel bachelor degrees in specific programs. Upon acceptance, students have junior standing. Does not guarantee admission to a Pennsylvania TRAC college or intended major. 	Law passed in 2010 ; Students began benefiting 2012 .



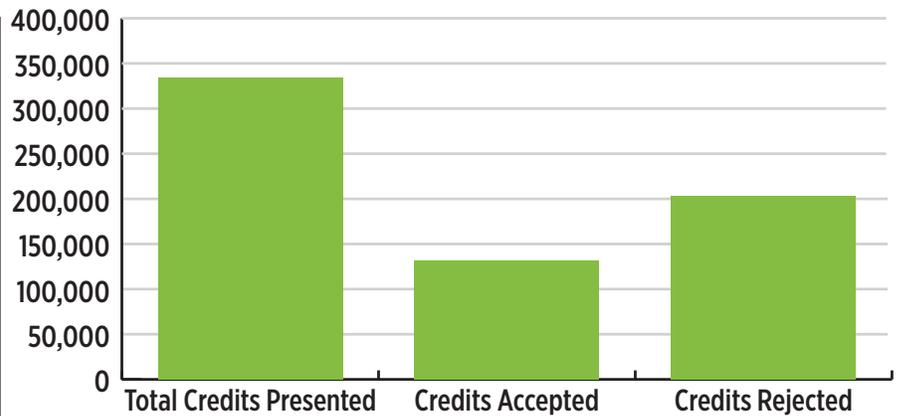
Transfer Student Data

CREDIT TRANSFER TO 4-YEAR PUBLIC INSTITUTIONS



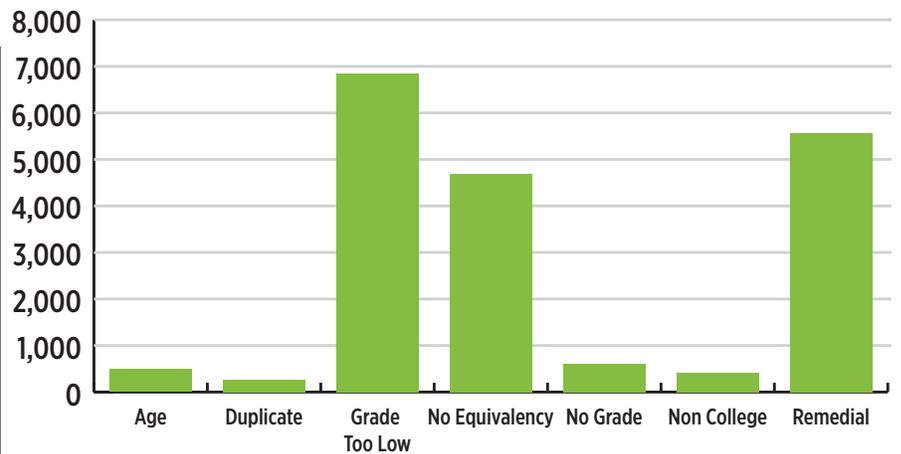
Source: Data Warehouse, Transfer submission, preliminary data, PSSHE

CREDIT TRANSFER TO 2-YEAR PUBLIC INSTITUTIONS



Source: Pennsylvania Community College Data reported to the PDE.

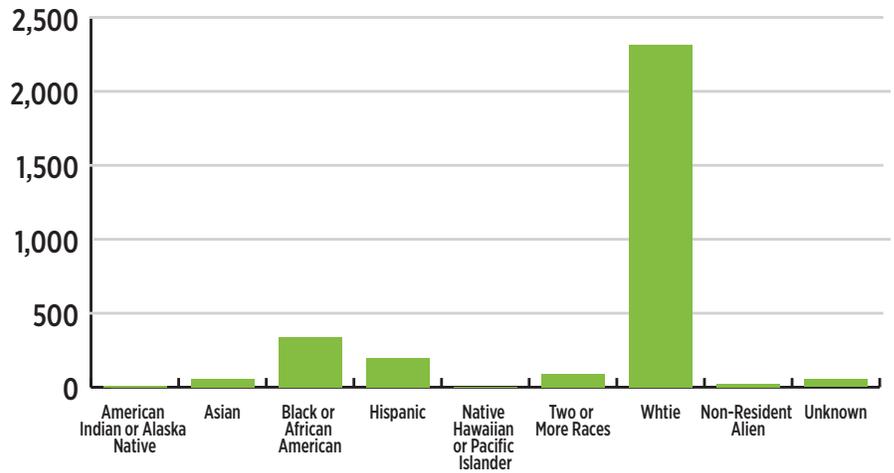
4-YEAR INSTITUTIONS CREDIT REJECTION REASON



Source: Data Warehouse, Transfer submission, preliminary data, PSSHE



**UNDER-GRADUATE
2-YR TO 4-YR
TRANSFER
STUDENTS BY
RACE/ETHNICITY**



Source: Data Warehouse, Student Data Submission, PSSHE.

Key Policy Components of the Two Transfer Policies (transferable lower-division core and guaranteed transfer of associate degree)

Education Commission of the States completed a 50-State Comparison of statewide transfer policies, including transferable core of lower-division courses and statewide guaranteed transfer of an associate degree. Within each policy there are key policy and implementation components found across multiple states that create a well-rounded policy. The key components are noted below for each policy area. These key components are not all encompassing of all statewide policies; however, these are designed to benefit the largest number of students and provide pathways to successful transfer of credits.

Core of Lower-Division Courses

- Faculty/administration consensus on a core group of courses that is fully transferable as a package or individual courses.
- Core counts toward completion of general education requirements.
- Communication plan to inform students of policy and courses included.

- All public two- and four-year institutions required to participate.
- Provide course equivalencies (not necessarily common courses) across institutions.
- Intensive data collection (both two- and four-year) and use.
- Annual evaluation of policy effectiveness based on data.

Guaranteed Transfer of Associate Degree

- Completed associate degrees guaranteed to transfer to four-year institutions.
- Associate degrees align with bachelor degrees, not only specified majors.
- Guaranteed junior status to transfer student.
- Completed associate degrees fulfill all general education requirements (unless there are additional courses required for a specific major).
- Participation in policy noted on student transcript for ease of transfer.
- Communication plan to inform students of the policy and degree maps.
- Intensive data collection (both two- and four-year) and use.
- Annual evaluation of policy effectiveness based on data.



Applications of Key Policy Components in Pennsylvania

In order to benefit the greatest number of transfer students, Pennsylvania should incorporate the key policy and implementation components into the 30-Credit Framework and the Statewide P2P agreements. Changes to these policies could be made through revisions to current legislation or a full repeal and replacement of the current policies.

30-Credit Framework

The Framework in place in Pennsylvania could and should be expanded to encompass more transferable credits. Currently 37 states have a statewide core of lower-division courses that is fully transferable between public institutions. Typically, these policies require the core to be comprised of 45 credits or more. Institution representatives are charged with creating the lower-division core to ensure ease of credit transfer. This process works best when faculty are involved and the institutions meet together to compare courses and come to a consensus. The PDE Transfer and Articulation Oversight Committee developed the Framework in consultation with faculty and personnel and should use a similar inclusive process to update courses accepted and increase the number of credits permitted to transfer under the Framework.

A key component to a successful core of lower-division courses is that they count toward general education completion at all public institutions. Currently, this is not the case in Pennsylvania but could be accomplished through continued conversations between faculty and the PDE. Having the Framework tied directly to general education completion could encourage students to follow a degree plan that sets them up for a successful transfer and increased success rate after transfer.

Communication with students regarding any policy is key to increasing the use and success of that policy. A clear communication plan of the 30-Credit Framework needs to be put into place in Pennsylvania. The Framework could be included in designated degree plans or advising practices. Students should be made aware of the Framework early in their academic careers, especially at a community

college if they have plans to transfer in the future. Options Pennsylvania might consider include intrusive advising, a transfer indicator field on admissions applications or degree maps including the Framework.

An often overlooked component is intensive data collection and the use of that data to evaluate the policy. Having a strong data collection process in place allows policy administrators to continually evaluate a policy and seek areas for improvement. Updated or reintroduced legislation can require specific data collections and reporting. Providing this data to institutions directly can be a stronger policy lever to continually improve coordination of a transfer policy. Pennsylvania could also utilize a third-party evaluator for their policies to provide an unbiased perspective on the effectiveness of its transfer policies.

Statewide P2P Agreements

Pennsylvania's Statewide P2P agreements have a similar structure to other policies across the country. Currently, 31 states have guaranteed transfer of an associate degree. Some of the more progressive policies include guaranteed admission to a four-year institution and allowing full transfer of an associate degree not linked to a specific major. In the latter instance, the associate degree fulfills the student's general education requirements unless the student enters a major requiring specific lower-division courses not included in the associate degree. The former component, guaranteed admission to a four-year institution, exists in [Florida](#).⁵ A student is guaranteed admission to a four-year, however not necessarily the four-year of their choice.

The Pennsylvania P2P program links specific associate degrees with parallel bachelor degrees in certain majors. In order to expand the reach of this policy the P2P program could expand to allow the completion of an associate degree to fulfill the general education requirement and count toward a bachelor degree of the student's choosing. Studies show students have a higher baccalaureate completion rate if they earn an associate degree before transferring to a four-year institution with all of their credits.⁶ Providing this opportunity to more Pennsylvania community college graduates could improve completion rates after transfer.

Student communication is an important component to guaranteed transfer of associate degree policies. Students need to know the direct path to transferring their degree. The P2P agreements could incorporate student communication in the admissions phase to inform students upon enrollment about this option. Pennsylvania might explore creating degree maps and guided pathways for students to follow for ease of transfer and minimal loss of credit. Intrusive advising for students indicating an interest in transferring could increase the number of successful students transferring with an associate degree.

As with a core of lower-division courses, data collection and use is a pertinent component of policy development and coordination. By using data to continually evaluate policies, administrators can view success rates and implement improvements needed to reach a larger numbers of students. With guaranteed transfer of an associate degree, faculty should be involved in the evaluation process in order to continue alignment of the two- and four-year degrees and update curriculums as needed.

Important Data Points

- Number of students transferring between 2- and 4-year institutions.
- Number of credits accepted/rejected within framework.
- Number of P2P degrees transferred.
- Completion rates of P2P transfer students.
- Additional coursework/number of repeat courses required of transfer students.

Policy Recommendations/Next Steps

After reviewing the current transfer policies in Pennsylvania, Education Commission of the States compiled recommendations for policy reform. The following recommendations can be incorporated into revised policies, the implementation process or continued administration of the transfer policies.

Shift 30-Credit Framework to competency-based - In order to provide ease of transferability and avoid course limitations the Framework should be redesigned based on

competencies rather than course equivalency standards. The process of changing to a competency-based Framework should include faculty workgroups as well as administrative implementation including academic advisors and registrars. **Indiana** provides an example of using a set of core competencies for their transferable lower-division core courses. Their policy also requires the core to fulfil general education requirements.⁷

Program additions for P2P agreements - Adding more transferable associate degrees to the P2P will allow a great number of students to utilize the agreements. Aligning associate and bachelor programs is helpful to cut down additional courses after transfer. Education Commission of the States suggests adding technical and nursing programs specifically.

Consistent process for reviewing transfer credit per policies in the state - Transferring credit consistently between institutions is a difficulty in many states. Education Commission of the States recommends TAOC responsibilities include transfer credit oversight. This includes annual audits of institutions to ensure Framework courses are counting toward graduation and students are not being required to complete additional courses after transfer. If this recommendation is not feasible in Pennsylvania, then it could be incorporated into required data reporting. Institutions could be required to collect data regarding transfer students, including students utilizing the 30-Credit Framework or a P2P agreement. The data should be reviewed at the PDE to ensure compliance of the state policies.

Create a data collection process for transfer - This recommendation requires a complete overhaul of how transfer data is collected and utilized in the state. Collecting key data points can help in the policy evaluation process and to pinpoint areas needing improvement. The collection process should include tracking transfer students between institutions and what courses/degrees they are transferring with them. A key component to collecting this data is to upgrade electronic transcripts to notate 30-Credit Framework courses and P2P degrees. Tracking this information on an electronic transcript allows students and administrators to confirm that transfer credit moved successfully and can source reports required to the PDE.



TAOC and faculty workgroups to continue buy-in – Faculty and administrators need to continue conversations around these policies to ensure there is uniform compliance across the state. Faculty involvement is extremely important to uphold the integrity of the courses and degrees for transfer. This recommendation also includes strong partnerships between two- and four-year institutions. Clear communications between institutions increases transparency with students. A sub-recommendation would require these workgroups to develop standards for the awarding of credit for military credit and standardized exams such as Advanced Placement, International Baccalaureate, DANTES and the College Level Examination Program. Students earn college credit in many ways and it would be advantageous for the student to have the ability to move that credit between institutions.

Endnotes

1. Article XX-C of the Public School Code of 1949 mandates Pennsylvania's 14 community colleges and the 14 universities in the Pennsylvania's State System of Higher Education participate all aspects of the statewide transfer system and PA TRAC. Several other institutions of higher education in Pennsylvania voluntarily participate. Collectively, these colleges are referred to as "participating PA TRAC colleges".
2. The commonwealth has four state-related universities -- Lincoln University, Penn State University (PSU) , Temple University and University of Pittsburgh (Pitt) -- that have varying levels of participation in the statewide transfer system. Lincoln University has elected to participate fully in the transfer system and is considered a "participating PA TRAC college". PSU, Temple and Pitt meet the minimum legislative requirements for state-related institutions; each has identified at least 30 credits from the 30-Credit Transfer Framework that they will accept for transfer from the participating PA TRAC colleges.
3. [24 P.S. § 20-2002-C\(a\)](#)
4. [24 P.S. § 20-2002-C\(c\)](#)
5. Fla. Stat. § 1007.23
6. National Student Clearinghouse Research Center, *Snapshot Report: Degree Attainment* (Indianapolis, IN: Lumina Foundation, 2012),<http://nscresearchcenter.org/wp-content/uploads/SnapshotReport8-GradRates2-4Transfers.pdf>
7. Ind. Code. § 21-42-3-2

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