

SUPPORTING POSTSECONDARY STUDENT SUCCESS

MEETING 2 | 2022 ISSUE BRIEF



Complete Tennessee
Leadership Institute
A PROJECT OF SCORE & THE HUNT INSTITUTE

ELEVATENC
HIGHER EDUCATION

INTRODUCTION

To make progress toward statewide postsecondary attainment goals, policymakers must encourage all constituents to consider higher education. Access to higher education is not enough, though, as just one in two students actually [complete their degree or credential](#). Various student groups enroll in higher education as well, with different experiences and needs that warrant specific support services. While these support services are beneficial for all students, they are especially important for students from underrepresented populations.

Students, such as first-generation and adult learners, often have basic needs insecurities, and providing support services helps students persist throughout their education. A study by the [University of Chicago Poverty Lab](#) found that offering wraparound support services to students increased full-time enrollment by 13 percent and increased retention from one term to the next by 11 to 16 percent. Further, providing wraparound support to community college students has even larger benefits, as students nearly doubled their retention to next term and ultimately led to a [35 percent](#) increase in full-time enrollment for students who took advantage of the services. Providing more comprehensive student services in North Carolina and Tennessee would help increase retention and persistence, which are integral to supporting a student through postsecondary completion.

Retention and Persistence

The first year of higher education is a pivotal moment for many students. Institutions who ensure students stay enrolled throughout their first year have a greater likelihood of completing their credential. In general, there are two indicators that states and their institutions use to track student progress towards a degree or credential:

- **Retention** – Continued enrollment within the same higher education institution in the fall semesters of a student’s first and second year.
- **Persistence** – Continued enrollment (or degree completion) at any higher education institution — including one different from the institution of initial enrollment — in the fall semesters of a student’s first and second year.

Source

Note: [In Tennessee](#), retention measures a student’s continued enrollment at any Tennessee community college or university

Unfortunately, the retention and persistence measures show that there is a sizeable population of students in both Tennessee ([12.3 percent](#)) and North Carolina ([13.4 percent](#)) who have started their postsecondary education but “stopped out” and paused their education with some credits but no degree or credential. Re-engaging these students is a critical component of raising attainment rates.

FIGURE 1
FALL-TO-FALL RETENTION RATE BY ENTERING COHORT YEAR

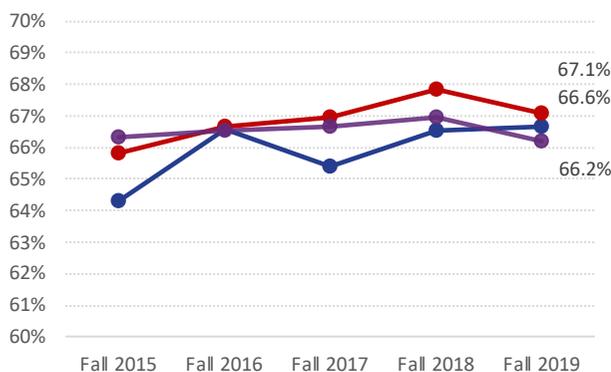
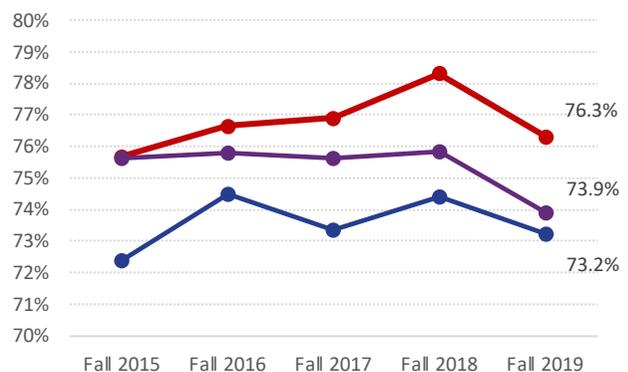


FIGURE 2
FALL-TO-FALL PERSISTENCE RATE BY ENTERING COHORT YEAR



Source

● Tennessee ● North Carolina ● National

RETENTION

Tennessee's retention rate has increased slightly over the years, and while much of the nation saw declines with the Fall 2019 cohort due to the COVID-19 pandemic, Tennessee's retention rate increased slightly (Figure 1).

North Carolina's retention rate has generally been slightly above the national average over the years but has seen declines due to the COVID-19 pandemic (Figure 1).

PERSISTENCE

Tennessee's overall retention and persistence rates have remained relatively steady over the last decade and closely mirrored the national average rates. Tennessee's statewide persistence rate for the Fall 2019 cohort is 0.8 percentage points higher than the rate for the Fall 2015 cohort and is just below the national average. (Figure 2).

North Carolina's statewide persistence rate for the Fall 2019 cohort is 0.6 percentage points higher than the rate for the Fall 2015 cohort and remains above the national average. (Figure 2).

While both Tennessee and North Carolina have seen an overall increase in retention and persistence, aggregated state and institution-wide persistence and retention rates mask important nuances based on the different types of institutions, racial and ethnic subgroups, and socioeconomic status.

Analysis of postsecondary education persistence rates in Tennessee:

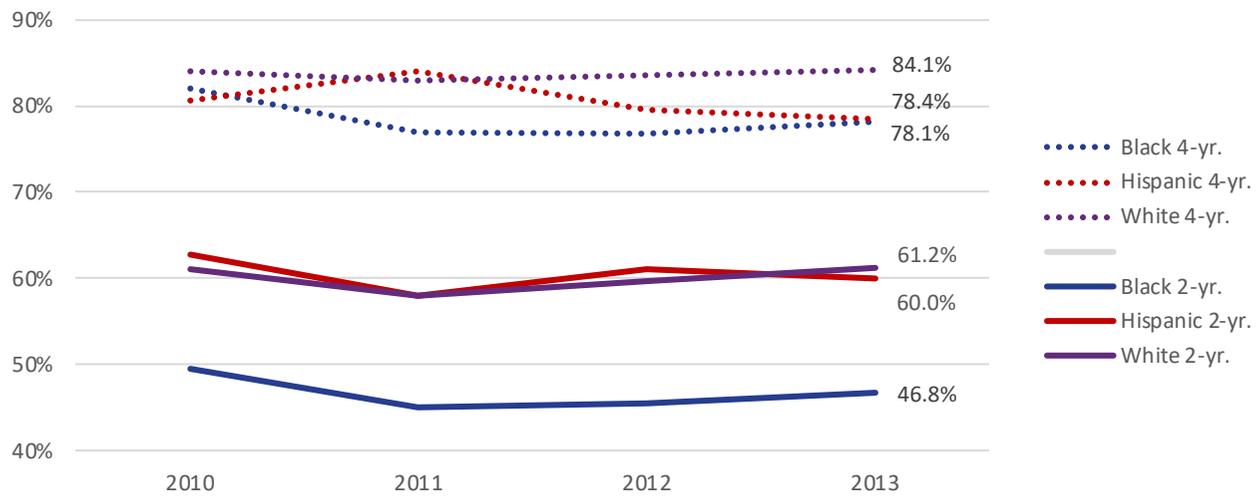
- Students at four-year IHEs are considerably more likely to stay enrolled through their second year when compared to students at two-year IHEs (Figure 4);
- There are significant equity gaps between the persistence rates of white students and the rates of Hispanic and Black students. This is even more pronounced at two-year IHEs, as the percentage of white students who remain enrolled at a two-year IHE is nearly 13 percentage points higher than the rate for Black students (Figure 3).
- Students are more likely to remain enrolled at Locally Governed Institutions and the UT System compared to the state's community colleges (Figure 4).

Analysis of postsecondary education persistence rates in North Carolina:

- Students at four-year IHEs are more likely to stay enrolled at their institution through their second year when compared to students at two-year IHEs - a trend that mirrors rates across the country (Figure 5);
- There are significant equity gaps between the retention rates of white students and the rates of American Indian and Black students. This is even more pronounced at two-year IHEs, as the percentage of white students who remain enrolled at a two-year IHE is nearly 12 percentage points higher than the rate for Black students (Figure 5).
- Gaps in overall persistence rates also exist across racial lines. Over a fourth of all two- and four-year students who began in fall 2016 did not return to any institution the following fall. This rate was 10 percentage points higher for American Indian students and five percentage points higher for Black students (Figure 6).



FIGURE 3
RETENTION RATES BY RACE AND ETHNICITY



Best Practices to Increase Student Retention and Persistence

As Tennessee and North Carolina look to build on the policies in place to encourage higher education student success, policymakers may consider adopting strategies and lessons learned from other states and IHEs. While there are numerous actions IHEs and states can take to improve postsecondary retention and persistence, two examples have recently emerged as best practices given their effects on increasing retention rates.

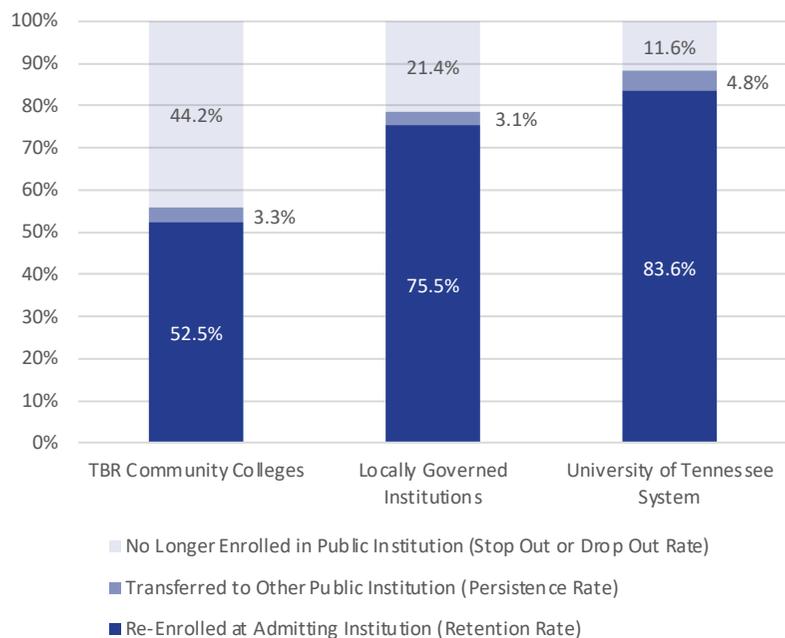
Georgia – Using Predictive Analytics to Keep Students on Track

Since 2012, Georgia State University has leveraged its institutional data to ensure that students stay on track to complete their degrees on time. The institution’s GPS Advising system allows GSU counselors to target supportive interventions for students who enroll in courses that do not help them make progress toward their degree, or to those who are underperforming in key courses. GSU has also implemented a number of complementary completion initiatives for students such as the Panther Retention Grants program, which provides small amounts of aid for students who experience some sort of financial emergency that may prevent them from completing their studies.

California – Providing a Suite of Support Services to Help Students Adapt to Higher Education

The Educational Opportunity Program (EOP) at California State University (CSU) provides a holistic set of counseling and support services for low-income and traditionally underserved students who attend a school

FIGURE 4
FALL 2019 - FALL 2020 PERSISTENCE AND RETENTION RATE BY INSTITUTION TYPE



in the CSU system. While the specific services vary by campus, EOP generally provides participants with ongoing advising, tutoring, mentoring, and workshops designed to increase student retention and persistence rates.

Transfer Students

Policymakers should also ensure that students who transfer from one IHE to another receive the support and guidance they need to succeed. The primary way to support transfer students is through the establishment of credit transfer agreements that govern the transferability of courses and credits between IHEs.

There are a number of different approaches that policymakers can use to enhance the transferability of credits, although some of the most common strategies include:

- **Common Course Numbering** – a strategy where IHE leaders determine which courses share the same learning goals and content and then assign those courses the same prefix, number, title, credits, and other descriptions.
- **Articulation Agreement** – a specific agreement that governs the transfer of specific coursework between two or more IHEs.

- **Guaranteed Admissions** – a system that allows students who graduate with a certain degree (such as an Associate Degree) to automatically receive guaranteed admission to another public IHE (such as a four-year college or university).

Although credit transfer agreements sound simple, there are a number of complex issues that are involved in the implementation of such agreements. These include:

- **Credit Loss and Applicability** – While a course may meet a degree requirement at one institution, it may count as only an elective at the second, or not at all, which students may not discover until after they transfer. Additional coursework needed to graduate increases costs and postpones time to degree.
- **College in High School programs** – many states offer programs that allow high school students to take courses that confer college credit, such as early college high schools and dual enrollment. However, not all state credit transfer agreements contain language that governs the transfer of such courses or provide students the advising they need to ensure they enroll in the correct courses.
- **Reverse Transfer** – when students transfer from a two-year IHE to a four-year IHE, credit transfer agreements often account for how the credits earned at the two-year school will count toward a four-year degree. Such agreements don't always consider how a transfer student may be eligible for a two-year degree, or a certificate, based on a combination of credits from both IHEs. Reverse transfer initiatives seek to ensure students get the degree or credential they have earned.

CURRENT STATUS OF TRANSFER IN TENNESSEE

Following the passage of the Complete College Tennessee Act in 2010, state leaders implemented a number of statewide policies to provide support for transfer students.

- The **Tennessee Transfer Pathways (TPPs) program** is a framework that allows students who earn an associate degree from any community college in the state to automatically transfer all the credits they have earned to many of the state's public four-year IHEs. The TPPs program created a 60-hour block of courses that would be guaranteed for



transfer between community colleges and universities if approved within a “transfer pathway” for specific programs of study. A recent [report](#) by SCORE found that the majority of students transferring between public institutions in 2019 were doing so without being enrolled in TTP, demonstrating that intentional efforts should be made to better understand student barriers to utilizing TTP and completing a credential through TTP.

- Public IHE leaders reached an agreement that they would work to ensure [Common Course Numbering](#) and establish [Articulation Agreements](#) that cover a core set of general education courses as well as certain pre-major pathways. All public IHEs offer 41 hours of general education coursework that can be successfully transferred – either in its entirety or by completed general education subject. In addition, IHE leaders have created articulation agreements that govern the transfer of designated pre-major pathway courses for 38 different baccalaureate degree majors. All courses that meet general education or pre-major pathway requirements carry the same course number at all public IHEs. While common course numbering and articulation agreements are helpful in preventing credit loss, often courses in approved programs of study can become outdated and are no longer guaranteed to transfer.
- Lastly, the Tennessee General Assembly passed legislation in 2012 to codify requirements around [Reverse Transfer](#) agreements between community colleges and four-year institutions. However, students must opt-in to receive their degree or credential, and unfortunately many students aren’t aware of the program, resulting in reverse transfer being underutilized.

CURRENT STATUS OF TRANSFER IN NORTH CAROLINA

Over the past decade, North Carolina has worked to include transfer pathways for students. However, for Black, Indigenous, Latinx, and Hawaiian/Pacific Islander students in North Carolina, [successful transfer is less likely than their white peers](#), demonstrating the need for greater support for transfer students. As such, certain policies have been put in place:

- Reverse transfer policies** allow students who transfer from a North Carolina Community College System institution to a [UNC System](#) or [North Carolina Independent Colleges and Universities institution](#) to gain credentials as they complete their degrees.
- Comprehensive Articulation Agreements (CAAs)** allow students who complete their coursework or attainment at one of the North Carolina Community College System institutions to transfer their credit to institutions of [North Carolina Independent Colleges and Universities](#) and the [UNC System](#), governing the transfer of credit with the North Carolina Community College System. For students who have completed an associate degree, CAAs allow students to enter the four-year institution with a “junior” standing, decreasing the time to completion. A recent [report](#) from the Belk Center for Community College Leadership and Report found that for students moving between a community college and an institution within the UNC System, the revisions made to the CAAs increased time to completion for all students. Additionally, CAAs were found to disproportionately impact Black and Latinx students, who were less likely to benefit from the transfer of credit and had an average of an additional semester to graduation.
- The **Transfer Assured Admissions Policy**, which is part of the Comprehensive Articulation Agreement, assures admission to institutions within the [UNC System](#) for



North Carolina Community College System students who graduate with an AA or AS. The [policy](#) requires students to have a GPA of 2.0 and meet application requirements at the receiving institution. However, this policy does not guarantee admission to a specific institution within the UNC System nor a specific program.

- As of December 2020, the [UNC System Office](#) is establishing and maintaining a **common course numbering system** for undergraduate lower division courses for institutions within the system, inclusive of credits that would transfer from the North Carolina Community College System.

BEST PRACTICE EXAMPLES FROM OTHER STATES TO INCREASE TRANSFER PATHWAYS

Georgia – Leveraging Online Learning Platforms to Facilitate Credit Transfer

The University System of Georgia (USG)'s eCore program gives students the opportunity to complete a core curriculum of undergraduate requirements that are offered online by public IHEs. All courses offered through the eCore program are transferrable to any institution within the USG system, as well as most regionally accredited schools.

Virginia – Using Guaranteed Dual Admission Programs to Support Transfer students.

State leaders in Virginia established system-wide guaranteed admissions agreements that apply to any student who earns an associate degree from one of the state's 23 community colleges and maintains a minimum grade point average. Students are admitted to both a four-year institution of higher education and a two-year college to ensure ownership of the student from the beginning.

Texas – Transfer Alliance Goals

Setting statewide transfer goals ensures accountability for improving transfer success. The Texas Transfer Alliance is a collaboration of Texas universities and community colleges focused on improving transfer student outcomes. They set goals for increasing the six-year transfer rate, increasing four-year bachelor's completion rate of community college transfers, decreasing attempted credits to degree, decreasing the average time-to-degree, and increasing the percent of community college students who complete college-level math and writing in their first year. Each of these goals creates accountability indicators for Texas to measure their improvement in transfer success.

Guiding Questions

- How can institutions of higher education better ensure their students retain or persist from year to year? What support systems are currently in place and what improvements need to be made to close racial gaps?
- How can Comprehensive Articulation Agreements improve to promote attainment gaps and time to completion for students in the state? What improvements could improve transfer between two-year and four-year institutions?
- How can higher education systems support their institutions to foster positive and successful student transfer? What training or capacity-building is lacking at institutions and why?





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