



BEYOND TRANSFER DEGREES

Opportunities for Future Learning



JULY 2025

INTRODUCTION

Washington’s statewide transfer framework serves as a national model. This is due to the collaboration between community and technical colleges (CTCs) and baccalaureate institutions who led the creation and implementation of state-specific transfer degrees. In practice, Washington’s CTCs award these degrees and baccalaureate institutions accept them. Institutions and sectors created this structure based on a shared commitment to transfer students. They focused on minimizing credit loss and ensuring coursework alignment. As transfer agreements continue to mature—through revision and the creation of specific coursework tied to majors at baccalaureate institutions—the landscape of transfer has become more structured and engaged, involving all public and most private institutions statewide. In recent years, Washington has begun questioning how to holistically define and measure “transfer student success” while centering student experiences.

Like any process, transferring in Washington has room for improvement. We continue to hear from students, administrators, and those engaged in the transfer ecosystem that more can be done. While core structural components exist, more resources are needed to be truly responsive to student needs. State assets have rarely been examined through a lens of change over time. This brief provides insights into the elements of transfer that have historically guided the work. It includes new opportunities for research or assessment to advance future opportunities for transfer students.

Background

In 2005, the Washington State Legislature tasked the Washington Student Achievement Council (WSAC) to provide a biannual transfer report. The report was to “monitor progress on the indicators, describe development of additional transfer associate degrees, and provide data on improvements in transfer efficiency.”

Over the past 20 years, WSAC’s transfer report has evolved, measuring student success by following various patterns of quantitative measures including transfer degree creation, transfer to a baccalaureate institution, and completion of bachelor’s degrees. Over time, the report also evolved to include disaggregation by key demographic factors such as age, race/ethnicity, income; deep dives into specific transfer degrees; and credit accumulation.

Today’s Transfer Components and Culture

Comparing our data landscape from 2005 to present, transfer data and reporting have expanded. Data is now reported to the state’s Education Research & Data Center (ERDC) by public institutions and is available via dashboards. The State Board for Community and Technical Colleges (SBCTC) also provides data dashboards specific to transfers. A listing of reports and dashboards is available in Appendix B. In the coming years, private, not-for-profit data are expected to be included in public use data sets via ERDC. Currently, SBCTC is redesigning its transfer dashboard to capture additional data points. These improvements will allow for a more robust analysis of student transfer across more Washington colleges.

Per the 2023 Transfer Equity Project report, in Washington “transfer is supported through institutional partnerships, joint commissions and councils, representing a decentralized system.” As a state, Washington’s transfer system is grounded in collaborative, multi-sector partnerships.¹ This system has been uplifted as a national model. Its components include:

- 1) State-specific transfer degrees awarded by Washington’s CTCs.
- 2) Widespread acceptance of these degrees by baccalaureate institutions.
- 3) A commitment to innovation in transfer across collaborating partners.

To continue to transform and innovate the transfer process, we must understand the factors that influence transfer student success. This includes existing infrastructure and its potential expansion.

State-Specific Transfer Degree Options

While students transfer with or without degrees, two types of associate degrees comprise “transfer degrees” in Washington.

- **Direct Transfer Agreement (DTA) associate degree.** This degree is designed to complete lower-division general education requirements for most bachelor’s degrees at baccalaureate institutions.
- **Associate of Science Transfer (AS-T) degree.** This degree has two tracks, intended for students who want to earn a bachelor’s degree in engineering or science. Coursework focuses on math and science courses for students preparing for a STEM degree. It also covers a more limited set of general education requirements.
 - Track 1: biological sciences, environmental/resource sciences, chemistry, geology, and earth science.
 - Track 2: engineering, engineering technology, physics, and atmospheric sciences.

Washington also offers Major Related Programs (MRPs) to prepare students for bachelor’s degrees in specific majors. The MRP is a course plan based on the DTA or AS-T. It is available in the following content areas: biology, business, computer science, construction management, engineering, mathematics education, music, nursing, practical nursing (ADN and BSN), and pre-nursing.

Widespread Acceptance of Transfer Degrees

Washington’s transfer degrees are widely accepted at baccalaureate institutions across the state. Students who complete statewide transfer degrees are granted junior standing upon admission to a public baccalaureate institution.² The DTA is accepted at all public baccalaureate institutions, all institutions comprising the Independent Colleges of Washington,³ and institutions that participate in the [Washington Council](#). By design, the acceptance of MRPs and AS-T tracks 1 and 2 is slightly more varied in acceptance due to the specificity of degree programs at each institution. The Council of Presidents (COP), representing Washington’s public baccalaureate institutions, and Independent Colleges of Washington (ICW), representing a subset of private, not-for-profit baccalaureate institutions, elect to

¹ <https://wsac.wa.gov/sites/default/files/Washington%20Transfer%20Equity%20Project%202023.pdf>

² [RCW 28B.10.696](#)

³ Participating ICW Colleges: https://icwashington.org/page/member_colleges

accept transfer degrees and signal participation by becoming signatories to the agreement. These institutions can opt in to accept transfer degrees at any time. An updated, [comprehensive listing of participating institutions and the transfer degree agreements](#) is published by WSAC. Institutions outside of these entities may elect to honor agreements but do not participate as signatories.

Transfer degrees are vetted through systems and institutions via the Joint Transfer Council (JTC) and the Washington Council's Intercollege Relations Commission (ICRC). JTC and ICRC have designated representatives across institutions and sectors, as well as agency representatives. Both use clear governance structures to ensure accountability and routine examination of issues. They have identified goals that 1) assist in supporting the transfer of credits as students move across institutions and 2) the experiences of transfer students. Pertaining specifically to transfer degrees:

- [JTC](#) is a multi-sector collaborative of institutional and sector representatives working in partnership toward transfer student success. Functionally, JTC convenes workgroups to revise existing degrees each year. JTC creates MRPs as needed, and works to improve transfer across and within sectors.
- [ICRC](#) coordinates transfer between institutions. In practice, ICRC's contributions include publishing up-to-date degree guidelines, including institutional-specific degree exceptions called "provisos." ICRC also stewards ongoing cultural work to ensure "mutual respect and cooperation prevails among the institutions of education in Washington."⁴
- Final policy decisions, such as the formal adoption of new degrees, are made at the institutional level with the direct input from sector representatives. These include COP, SBCTC, and ICW.
- WSAC serves as a repository for transfer degree agreements at wsac.wa.gov/transfers.

Commitment to Innovation in Transfer

The culture of transfer in Washington is a unique asset. The creation of transfer degrees grew out of a collaboration to streamline transfers. As demonstrated by the development and implementation of transfer degrees, institutions and systems have a long history of partnerships and cooperation. This includes JTC and ICRC, institutional-specific practices, and supports offered by each sector. Institutions and their sectors are the leaders in creating programs and infrastructure that support both the transfer plan of credits and the transfer student experience.

Across systems, sending and receiving institutions develop partnerships. They work together to better advise students, create consistent points of connection, and increase trust across institutions, regardless of whether a student transfers with or without a degree.

"Over the last two decades, our sector has moved from an outdated approach of one-size fits all to recognizing the unique needs and experiences of each student population as they transition to one of our campuses." — Council of Presidents, representing public baccalaureate institutions

⁴ <https://www.wa-council.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/10/2023-ICRC-Handbook.pdf>

Importantly, this work also extends beyond advising and degree structure. For instance, it includes faculty-to-faculty connections to discuss and coordinate coursework across institutions in a discipline-specific manner. This collaboration goes above and beyond course and credit equivalencies. Specific examples are available in Appendix A. They can also be found within the 2023 Transfer Equity Project.

“Our member campuses increasingly recognize the importance of enrolling transfer students and being good partners with neighboring community colleges.” — Independent Colleges of Washington, representing most private not-for-profit colleges in the state

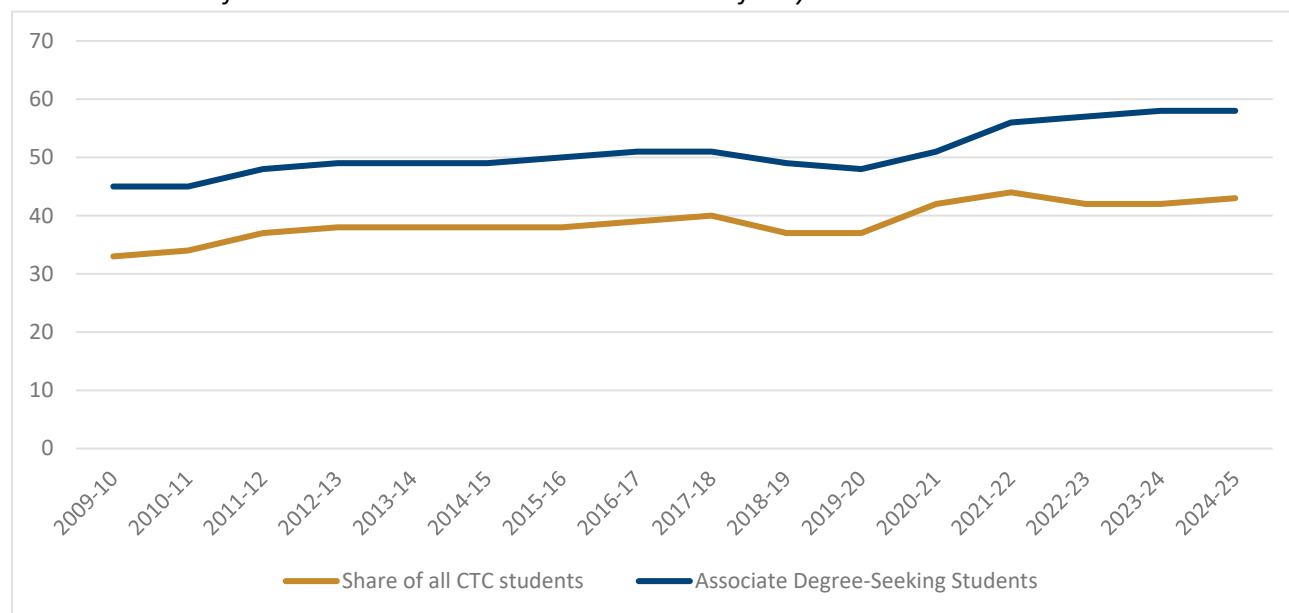
There is also a widespread consensus across the state that students’ experiences—how they create understanding of transfer degrees and experience transfer across institutions—is a vital perspective. Many of the practices reflected in Appendix A are the direct result of centering student needs.

“The student voice has become even more paramount for transfer discussions and policy implementations.” —Washington’s State Board for Community and Technical Colleges

Transfer Degrees Remain Relevant

Regardless of the data source in Washington, transfer degrees have remained relevant over the past twenty years. The percentage of transfer degrees awarded by CTCs continues to grow steadily. Since 2009-10, the percentage of CTC students enrolled in academic transfer programs grew 13 percentage points. In this same time frame, major-related transfer degrees awarded grew by 12 percentage points.

Chart 1: Percent of CTC Students Enrolled with Intent to Transfer by Academic Year



Source: SBCTC Enrollment Data Dashboard, accessed 02/03/2025 at <https://www.sbctc.edu/colleges-staff/research/data-public/enrollment-data-dashboard>. Associate Degree-Seeking Students includes prof/tech and transfer associate degrees. CTC students include the following: Prof/Tech, Transfer, Basic Ed and Other. 'Other' includes students enrolled the following programs: Alternative High School, Apprenticeship, BAS, BAS (matriculated), BEdA courses, BFET, College in the High School, Incarcerated Students, I-Best, International, International Contract, Running Start, WorkFirst, Worker Retraining.

Table 1: Count of CTC Transfer Degrees Awarded and Percent Major Related by Academic Year.

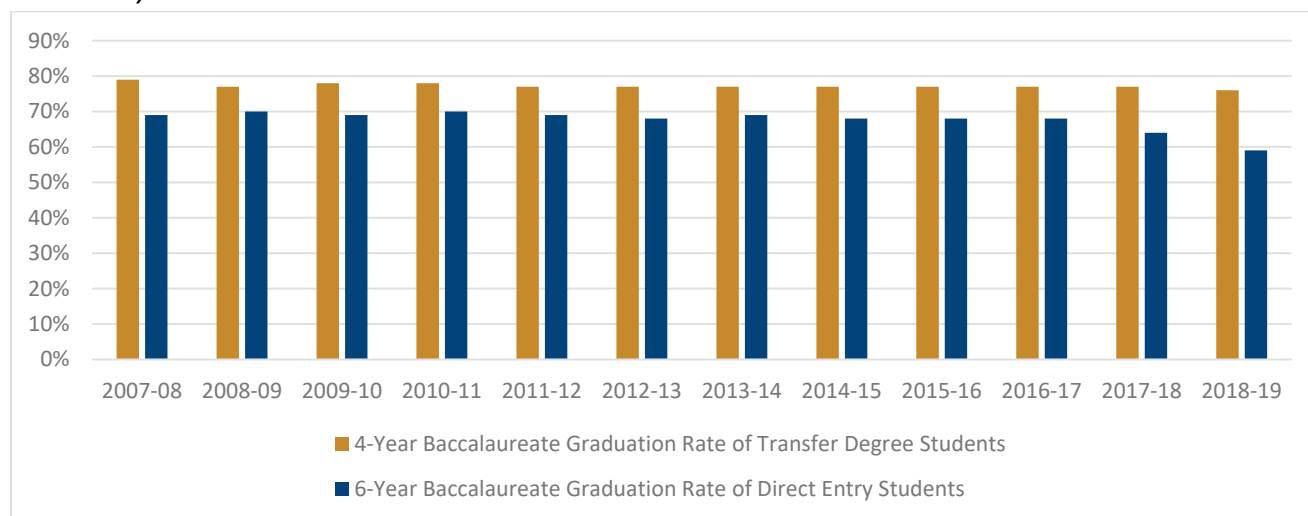
Academic Year	All Transfer Degrees	Transfer Degrees (includes MRPs and AS-T degrees)	
2009-10	14,137	2,081	14.7%
2010-11	16,331	2,507	15.4%
2011-12	16,901	2,619	15.5%
2012-13	17,654	3,107	17.6%
2013-14	17,652	3,351	19.0%
2014-15	18,624	3,555	19.1%
2015-16	19,321	3,979	20.6%
2016-17	19,417	4,390	22.6%
2017-18	20,543	4,737	23.1%
2018-19	20,967	5,238	25.0%
2019-20	20,146	5,008	24.9%
2020-21	20,713	5,483	26.5%
2021-22	18,122	4,617	25.5%
2022-23	15,843	4,096	25.9%
2023-24	15,964	4,299	26.9%

Source: SBCTC Credentials Awarded Dashboard, accessed 01/07/2025 at

www.sbctc.edu/colleges-staff/research/data-public/credentials-awarded-dashboard.

Furthermore, when a student enrolls at a public baccalaureate institution after completing a transfer degree from a CTC, they graduate at higher rates than their direct-entry peers.⁵

Chart 2: Public Baccalaureate Graduation Rates of CTC Transfer Degree Students and Direct Entry Students by Academic Year



Source: PCHEES Dashboard - Graduation/Continuation, accessed 11/23/2024 at https://data.wa.gov/education/PCHEES-Dashboard-Graduation-Continuation/98ng-jhtx/about_data.

⁵ This chart shows the percentage of students with transfer degrees (DTA/AS-T) who graduated within four years of transferring to a baccalaureate institution. It does not reflect the total time it took a student to complete their associate degree prior to transferring.

Deep dives into transfer enrollment and completion can be found in WSAC's past legislative reports, linked in Appendix B, as well as ERDC and SBCTC dashboards.

Opportunities for Transfer Research and Learning

Research and assessment opportunities focusing on the lived experiences of transfer students have the potential to drive additional data-driven decision making across institutions and systems. This need has been identified through ongoing conversations in JTC and ICRC, as well as with transfer professionals (advisors, faculty), community organizations supporting college-going culture, institutional leads at college and universities, and leaders across postsecondary sectors. These data could lead to the development of consistent strategies for transfer student success. This would expand beyond the transfer of credit to include a more student focused-holistic framework—such as better preparing students to meet specific majors—that continues to meet students' educational and career goals.

Gathering and evaluating both qualitative and quantitative data on the transfer student experience can inform the following challenges and opportunities:

- **Identifying the transition challenges, including student decision factors and their impact on transfer.** ERDC's [Demographics and Postsecondary Enrollment for Students with Academic Transfer Degrees](#) (2022) helped the state identify that 54.8 percent of students who completed transfer degrees do not enroll in public baccalaureate institutions in the state within three years. This represents approximately 16,300 students who took other paths. These paths may include transferring out of state or to a private institution, or not pursuing additional education. Knowing the pathways students took helps us understand factors that impact transfer at the juncture of earning an associate degree and transitioning to new institutions. Including the perspectives of students who both did and did not transfer will provide insights into resources and supports that could be created, changed, or transformed.
- **Evaluating student supports in the transfer process.** Institutions have created student-centered resources, such as degree pathways and advising, to help student transfer transition across institutions. Understanding the features and assets of these resources will help us to adopt and scale better practices in the future.
- **Exploring gaps in enrollment and completion by demographic factors.** Recent transfer reports have included evaluation of transfer by race/ethnicity, gender, and income. Examining patterns of enrollment and completion across transfer degrees, transfer to new institutions, and completion of bachelor's degrees remains important to identifying strategies to address equity gaps. Additional factors to be considered include the proximity of institutions and regional student needs.
- **Situating transfer within and outside of traditional transfer degree pathways.** As students become more mobile, the transfer of credit and the experiences of transfer students can become increasingly complex. For example, as more students enroll in dual credit programs (Washington's Running Start and College in the High School), they will earn college credit from multiple institutions while completing their high school diploma. While this coursework could include the completion of a transfer degree, we anticipate that more high school graduates will have completed *some* college coursework. Available data is focused on students who take the

traditional pathway of transferring from two-year to four-year institutions. Learning must expand to additional patterns in transfer. This includes understanding *why* students move across institutions and *how* students make decisions about coursework and transfer. These will be imperative to understanding and augmenting a system responsive to student needs and realities.

- Washington has some policies to assist students transferring without a transfer degree. However, additional study could help understand the impact and efficacy of existing policies. These include:
 - a. Washington 45 (RCW 28B.10.696) is a list of courses taught at public CTCs that most public baccalaureate institutions accept as meeting a year's worth of general education requirements.
 - b. Reverse Transfer allows students who transferred to a baccalaureate institution without completing an associate degree to transfer their credits back to their CTC to complete an associate degree.
 - c. Applied baccalaureate degrees (BAS) offered at CTCs, as well as public baccalaureate institutions, are designed as a pathway toward a bachelor's degree. BAS degrees build upon professional technical degrees at the associate level. More work is needed to examine the role of BAS degrees in the transfer environment.

Each of these suggestions for future research and evaluation can inform strategies with broad-reaching implications. These range from degree pathways to student belonging. Transfer collaborators should engage in ongoing learning and continuous improvement to ensure that these questions and strategies evolve to remain relevant. At the core, any entry point into postsecondary education offers a possibility model to students. This is true whether a student pursues a transfer degree or moves across multiple institutions to complete a credential. We also recommend referencing the Transfer Equity Project's priority research questions⁶ for additional research directions.

Conclusion

The landscape of transfer has become more robust, inclusive, and engaged over the past 20 years. This is exemplified by the efforts of cross-sector relationships, programs, and transfer degrees. With this foundation, there are opportunities to understand and implement strategies that are responsive to student experiences, which begin with data-driven insights via research, evaluation and analysis. Transfer stakeholders agree that students should be able to access information to make informed choices and follow efficient transfer pathways. At the same time, we must ensure that systems and institutions have the resources to support these efforts.

⁶ [Transfer Equity Project, Appendix B](#)

APPENDIX A: EXAMPLES IN TRANSFER MODERNIZATION

In Washington, institutions and their sectors are the leaders in creating programs and infrastructure that support both the transfer of credits and the experiences of transfer students. Many changes have been made to this system over the past ten years alone.

This is a non-comprehensive list, but it is designed to highlight programs and efforts that capture the breadth and depth of transfer programs within and across institutions. Statewide transfer updates, including current projects, can be viewed in WSAC's [2025 Transfer Report](#).

- The overall availability of information has expanded. Most colleges and universities maintain websites dedicated to providing transfer information to students. Exemplars include [Renton Technical College](#), [Cascadia College](#), and [Columbia Basin College](#). Their sites are student-friendly and detailed, providing planning tools and FAQs. In addition, they outline the how-to process of applying to baccalaureate institutions.
- Increased formal pathways across institutions:
 - The University of Washington - Seattle has partnered with Seattle Colleges to create a [Path to UW](#) via the Seattle Promise Program. This includes individualized admission and academic advising. It also includes seminar courses for prospective and new transfer students.
 - The Spokane Colleges and Eastern Washington University recently worked together to align developmental math and subsequent articulation.
 - Whitman College offers concurrent enrollment for Walla Walla Community College (WWCC) students through its Gateway Program. The program allows WWCC students to complete an associate's degree while taking courses at Whitman.
 - Saint Martin's engineering departments allow South Puget Sound Community College students to enroll concurrently in lower division engineering courses at the university while completing their associate's degrees.
 - Seattle Colleges models the development of transfer agreements beyond Washington-specific transfer degrees including agreements with out-of-state institutions.
 - Baccalaureate institutions offer a variety of bachelor's and master's degrees on [CTC campuses](#). These centers enhance transfer partnerships across sending and receiving institutions.
- Institutions are convening strategy groups to align and implement high-impact practices. Many campuses provide advising guides. These help transfer students select appropriate pre- and post-transfer courses to meet degree requirements, often with the help of transfer-specific advisors.
 - Seattle Pacific University has created courses and modules for students transferring into psychology to ensure they are prepared for upper-division work alongside their direct-entry peers.
 - Washington State University's Voiland College of Engineering and Architecture has dedicated transfer advisors who travel to institutions to provide pre-advising for highly specific degree programs.

- Pierce College and Tacoma Community College have developed a partnership in academic advising and transition with the University of Washington – Tacoma. The partnership jointly employs advisors to work with students transferring between these specific institutions.
- [Washington State University](#) (WSU) and [Central Washington University](#) (CWU) have created Transfer Centers. These provide a one-stop shop of resources to potential and current transfer students. Resources include pre-advising, searchable course equivalency information, and appointments with staff. CWU also employs “transfer peer ambassadors” who meet with current or prospective transfer students to engage in peer-to-peer support and connect them with resources.
- Across SBCTC, intentional work to simplify student-facing terminology and provide increased communication regarding various degree options. This has occurred alongside and in alignment with Guided Pathways implementation. This includes the development of areas of study (meta-majors) and the integration of broader transfer pathways. SBCTC also utilizes common course numbers across all CTCs and continues to offer credit for prior learning assessments. They also use reciprocity agreements for credits earned at any college in the system.
- Washington’s Council for Engineering and Related Technical Education (WCERTE) has supported the development of discipline-driven faculty groups who are creating cross-institutional learning communities. These groups have aided in building faculty knowledge of each other’s courses, increasing trust, and collaboration.
- Washington’s public baccalaureate institutions have engaged in substantial alignment work for students transferring with technical associate’s degrees. They continually evaluate student experiences in admissions. They also provide advising through workshops and information sessions. At some institutions, admissions recruiters are hired to focus on supporting transfer students.
- Across ICW institutions, efforts are being made to ensure equity in scholarships for transfer students compared to their direct entry peers. ICW provides dedicated scholarships to transfer students. In academic year (AY) 2023-24, this fund provided nearly \$100,000 to students. In AY2024-25, support exceeded \$200,000.

APPENDIX B: TRANSFER DATA IN WASHINGTON

This information is publicly available and is collated for easy access. It is inclusive of the most recent five-year period.

Reports and Research

- WSAC's Legislative Transfer Reports: ([2023](#)) ([2021](#)); reports for years 2011-2019 available via <https://wsac.wa.gov/reports-and-publications#research-and-data>
- Transfer Equity Project: Summary of Themes & Priorities ([2023](#))
- Demographics and Postsecondary Enrollment for Students with Academic Transfer Degrees ([2022](#))
- Washington Public Baccalaureate Summary: Reverse Transfer ([2021](#))
- From Professional-Technical Credit to a Baccalaureate Degree ([updated continually](#))
- Strengthening Transfer Pathways to the Liberal Arts ([2021](#))
- Assessing Dual Credit Transferability ([2024](#))
- Community College Research Initiatives' Transfer STEM Student Success Data Notes
 - Data Note 1 | Structuring STEM Transfer Partnership Success ([2022](#))
 - Data Note 2 | Complex Networks of Community: Transformative Partnerships Praxis for Equitable STEM Transfer ([2023](#))
 - Data Note 3 | Learning from Students: How Teams Rethink Their STEM Transfer Process Through Student Input ([2023](#))
 - Data Note 4 | Progress in Improving STEM Transfer Partnership Pathways ([2024](#))
 - Data Note 5 | The Power of Partnership: Building Strong STEM Transfer Connections ([2024](#))

Dashboards

- ERDC's [PCHEES Dashboard for Graduation/Continuation](#)
- SBCTC [Transfers Dashboard](#)

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS AND CONTACT INFORMATION

WSAC is grateful for our partners at the State Board for Community and Technical Colleges, Council of Presidents, and Independent Colleges of Washington. They shared their learning, reflection, and future goals with us to represent this body of work in the state, for the benefit of all transfer students in Washington.

About the Washington Student Achievement Council

The Washington Student Achievement Council is committed to increasing educational opportunities and attainment in Washington. The Council has three main functions:

- Lead statewide strategic planning to increase educational attainment.
- Administer programs that help people access and pay for college.
- Advocate for the economic, social, and civic benefits of higher education.

The Council has ten members. Four members represent each of Washington's major education sectors: four-year public baccalaureates, four-year private colleges, public community and technical colleges, and K-12 public schools. Six are citizen members, including two current students (one graduate student and one undergraduate student).

If you would like copies of this document in an alternative format, please contact the Washington Student Achievement Council at:

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