Lessons from a Multi-College Transfer Partnership

A case study on the partnership between Kent State University and three community colleges: Columbus State, Eastern Gateway, and Lorain County Community College

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Executive Summary

What does it look like to implement the Transfer Playbook strategies?

The Aspen Institute College Excellence Program explored how Kent State University (KSU), Columbus State Community College (CSCC), Eastern Gateway Community College (EGCC), and Lorain County Community College (LCCC) worked together over three-and-a-half years to advance a "statewide comprehensive transfer blueprint" modeled on Playbook Principles. The partners were able to progress reforms quickly in two of the Playbook's cornerstone strategies: Clear programmatic pathways and tailored transfer student advising. Progress in the Playbook's third strategy—prioritization through leadership, investments, data, and partnership—was more uneven. The four schools did improve their communications by meeting more regularly, but still found that reforms requiring complex organizational systems change—such as establishing new data sharing systems and advancing major initiatives like dual admissions agreements—were ultimately more challenging to implement. Overall, the partners have developed a highly replicable transfer pathway development process (detailed in this brief) and laid some foundational practices, such as more accessible pre-transfer advising and tailored orientation, that can be scaled to facilitate greater access, success, and equity for transfer students at other institutions in the future. Working in the partners' favor are strong commitments from senior leadership at all partner institutions. We conclude that doubling down on senior leadership commitment can help partners move from reforming transfer practices to reforming transfer systems.

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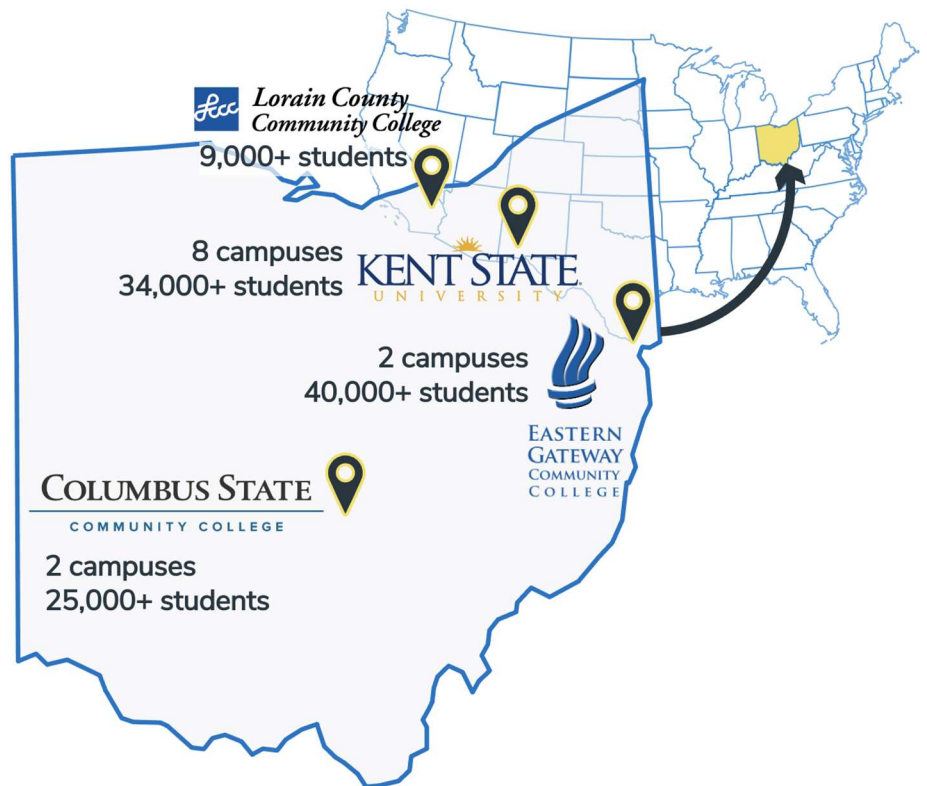
What is the Blueprint Partnership?

In 2019, Kent State University (KSU), a multi-campus institution in northeast Ohio, partnered with Columbus State Community College (CSCC), Eastern Gateway Community College (EGCC), and Lorain County Community College (LCCC) to "develop a statewide comprehensive transfer blueprint." The four institutions (hereby referred to as the "Blueprint Partners" or "Blueprint Partnership") represent different geographies and student populations, with various academic program offerings and varying levels of existing transfer. See more about each institution in Appendix A.

The project, funded by the Ascendium Education Group, used the Aspen Institute College Excellence Program (Aspen) and Community College Research Center's Transfer Playbook as a guide to planning and implementing transfer reforms. The Transfer Playbook, published in 2016, is based on research into excellent practices at leading transfer partnerships across the country. It provides a three-part framework for transfer reform: prioritize transfer, create clear programmatic pathways, and provide tailored transfer student advising.

Lorain County Community College
9,000+ students

8 campuses
34,000+ students
KENT STATE UNIVERSITY

2 campuses
40,000+ students

EASTERN GATEWAY COMMUNITY COLLEGE

COLUMBUS STATE COMMUNITY COLLEGE
2 campuses
25,000+ students

Background Data

The Ascendium grant served as seed money that allowed the schools to make several investments:

The overarching goal of the project was to reduce barriers to completing a bachelor's degree for low-income, first-generation, and students of color—and for the Blueprint Partners' combined student body of over 82,000 students.

Data from the 2018-19 academic year, before the project, suggests that the Blueprint Partners did provide strong access for low-income transfers (defined as those who receive federal Pell Grants) but could increase opportunity for transfer students of color.

Prior to the project, in 2018-19, KSU enrolled more than 900 transfer students from Ohio's 22 community colleges. Historically, over 20 percent of KSU transfers enrolled from the Blueprint community colleges. KSU outperforms statewide outcomes on transfer student graduation rates, but has room to improve outcomes for Black and low-income transfer students.

See Table 1A and 1B for more details on the transfer enrollment and graduation profiles of the Blueprint Partners. Data on transfer student graduation outcomes for other racial/ethnic groups and for students specifically from the Blueprint Partner community colleges are not available.

Table 1A: Comparing Blueprint Partner Community College Transfer Enrollment by Race/Ethnicity and Income to Overall Enrollment at Blueprint Partner and Ohio Community Colleges

	2018-19 Blueprint Partners Transfers to KSU	2018-19 Enrollment at Blueprint Partner CCs	2018-19 Enrollment at Ohio Community Colleges
Asian	1%	3%	2%
Black	6%	18%	16%
Hispanic	4%	9%	6%
Multi-Race	6%	4%	3%
White	79%	59%	65%
Pell Recipient	41%	32%	32%

Transfer enrollment data were retrieved from the [Ohio Department of Higher Education](#). Total undergraduate 12-month unduplicated headcount by race/ethnicity and total undergraduates receiving Pell Grants were retrieved from the Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System.

Table 1B: Transfer Student Completion Rates by Destination Institution Six Years After Starting Community College, 2009-10 First-Time Students in Ohio Public Two-Year Institutions

	All Ohio Public Four-Year University Main Campuses	KSU
| Overall	29.5%	36.7%
| Black Students	13%	12.1%
| Pell-Eligible Students	23.9%	30.8%

The Investment

The Ascendium grant served as seed money that allowed the schools to make several investments:

Personnel: Leaders at all the institutions realized they could use more staff in student-facing roles, specifically:

- Transfer Coordinators at the community colleges who maintain transfer agreements, liaise with partner school staff, present at orientations, meet with students one-on-one and respond to their emails, host events and conduct other marketing to build awareness about transfer and educate advising teams on pathways.
- A Transfer Enrollment Specialist at KSU, who is employed by the KSU system and serves as a pre-transfer liaison to students who declare an interest in transferring to KSU. Transfer coordinators at the community college can direct students to the KSU transfer enrollment specialist; the specialist can then connect students to departmental advisors or specific KSU offices for more detailed guidance.

Transfer centers: Not all community colleges had dedicated physical space on campus for transfer students to meet with the transfer coordinators and advisors and for the transfer coordinators to host events. The grant helped kickstart space investments and upgrades.

Technology: Due to the pandemic, the institutions pivoted to fully online transfer events and advising. They used grant funds to fund video calling subscriptions and to re-equip classrooms with proper technology to use services like Zoom and WebEx.

Evaluating the Blueprint Partnership

The Blueprint Partners committed to:

- building 31 "2+2" pathways to complement Ohio's statewide pathways,

- exploring a dual admission process,

- strengthening transfer advising and other engagements,

- sharing data about transfer students,

- and meeting the needs of underrepresented students.

The original project was slated to take three years, but due to the COVID-19 pandemic, it was extended to three and a half, concluding in December 2022.

Aspen evaluated the Blueprint project to understand how partnerships can effectively apply the lessons of the Transfer Playbook, with particular emphasis on the work of KSU, the primary grantee. In our assessment we analyzed work such as grant proposals and reports, pathways created through the grant, and preliminary findings from student focus groups. We also interviewed 36 current and former staff—including presidents, provosts, deans, transfer coordinators, academic advisors, and faculty—from across the four institutions and shadowed meetings between project partners.

We were not surprised to learn that some of the practices in the Transfer Playbook are easier for directors to adopt immediately, and others are more challenging to get done—or even impossible without significant commitment from college presidents and other senior leaders. This is because the reforms that best promote access, success, and equity for transfer students are large-scale and wide-reaching, requiring significant collaboration and investment within an institution and among transfer partners. Smaller changes, such as improving marketing and communications, may be easier to implement and are also important, but it's critical that institutions tackle major transfer reforms.

We'll start by exploring where the four partnering Ohio institutions made immediate progress: building clear program maps and easing access to early advising and high-quality information. We will then turn to the work the partnership found more difficult to implement: making transfer student success a priority through leadership, communication, investments, and data-sharing.

Expedite Transfer Pathway & Map Development with Dedicated Staff & A Replicable Process

A top priority for the Blueprint Partners was ensuring transfer students could identify and follow a clear degree pathway. Prior to the project, faculty members owned the process of identifying course equivalencies and mapping pathways. Given the many demands on faculty time, this sometimes resulted in a slow and uneven mapping process across departments. The Blueprint Partners invited faculty from multiple disciplines to bring their expertise to transfer pathway development while transitioning management responsibilities to other staff. The partnership developed an effective and replicable five-step process for developing pathways and translating them into "program maps"—user-friendly course sequences that students and advisors can use as guides in the transfer process. At the time of writing this case study, the partners had exceeded their goal to build 31 pathways: They've created 49, with several more in progress, and developed the student-facing maps accordingly. (See the appendix on page 26 for a comprehensive list of these pathways.)

> ## Blueprint Partners' Five Steps to Developing Clear Programmatic Pathways and Maps:
>
> 1. Charge Central Staff Members with Leading the Process
> 2. Identify Priority Programs of Study
> 3. Draft Pathways Using Existing Information
> 4. Improve and Innovate on Pathways with Faculty Feedback
> 5. Translate Pathways into Maps and Institutionalize Their Use

Step 1.

Charge Central Staff Members with Leading the Pathways Development Process

Recognizing the multiple demands on faculty time, the KSU team decided to shift the responsibility of program mapping to dedicated staff members to expedite the process. Two staff members (hereby referred to as "mapping staff") were charged with steering the development and maintenance of the pathways. As one of the team members described it, the mapping staff sits at the "nexus" of academic affairs, admissions, credit transfer, and curriculum services, which allows them to make all the necessary connections within KSU to create the pathways.

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Step 2.

Identify Priority Programs of Study

While the scope and starting point for transfer pathway development will differ by partnership, Aspen has observed that several partnerships with strong outcomes prioritize pathways that align with local workforce needs. Often, these partnerships also consider a variety of other factors, including program enrollment, equity for particular student communities, or where there is a high degree of interest in transfer from faculty.

For the Blueprint Partners, the Ohio Guaranteed Transfer Pathway (OGTP) initiative served as a strong starting point. OGTP includes approximately 50 pathways guaranteed to transfer within the state, mostly in liberal arts, business, and engineering fields. Because of this, the partners focused their pathway development efforts on more niche or applied programs that could broaden transfer opportunities. One area of focus was community college programs that were originally designed to support direct entry into the workforce. The partners saw that students were still transferring to universities from these programs, often without the guidance from an advisor or a designated transfer pathway. The partners wanted to clarify transfer pathways from these programs and reduce excess credit accumulation. They built pathways from applied associate degrees in business management, criminal justice, engineering technology, paralegal studies, respiratory care, and social work, among others. For a list of pathways developed as of fall 2022, see page 28, Appendix B.

To understand which pathways to develop with which community colleges, the KSU mapping staff worked with the transfer and articulation lead at the community college to answer: "What program pathways would interest your students?" Community college partners shared their recommendations based on their day-to-day conversations with students through advising and student success programming, leveraging their on-the-ground knowledge to ensure that the pathways were aligned to student needs.

Step 3.

Draft Pathways Using Existing Information

Typically, transfer pathway development processes involve convening faculty members across partner institutions. This works well because faculty members can establish cross-sector relationships, build

confidence in the integrity of the pathways, and develop habits for continuous improvement of the pathways down the line. The challenge is that the initial, and necessary, steps to map courses require manually comparing course descriptions and syllabi. This time-intensive process can draw faculty time away from important discussions about curricular and learning outcomes alignment.

Rather than tasking faculty with this initial manual work, the Blueprint Partners mapping staff used existing curricula and course equivalences to develop draft transfer pathways for faculty to consider. This was made possible largely by Ohio's Transfer Assurance Guide (TAG) and Ohio Transfer 36 (OT36), which establish courses that are guaranteed to transfer across the state. The initial pathway draft maximized transfer coursework when more TAG courses were built into the associate degree program. The partners then focused faculty attention on the trickier work of reviewing courses in which no equivalencies had been previously established. Other transfer partnerships could replicate the Blueprint Partners' process using existing course equivalencies or statewide transfer agreements to scaffold initial transfer pathways.

Step 4.

Improve & Innovate on Pathways with Faculty Feedback

Faculty members across the Blueprint Partners remained important decision makers throughout the mapping process. They had two main opportunities to provide feedback:

Pathway Draft Review

First, individual faculty members from the community colleges and KSU would independently review a transfer pathway draft and provide the mapping staff syllabi for courses without existing equivalencies that could be included in the pathway. Then KSU mapping staff would confirm course equivalencies with the corresponding faculty and update maps accordingly.

Feedback Session

Next, the KSU mapping staff invited faculty members from KSU and the partnering community colleges to provide collective feedback on the revised pathway in a meeting with the transfer coordinator from the community college, faculty from both institutions, and sometimes department chairs or deans. The KSU mapping staff set the stage in these meetings, facilitating discussions about

the two schools, their program offerings, and student bodies. They pointed out excess credits and facilitated discussions about curricular changes, missing equivalencies, and how to make the pathways

more cost- and time-effective for students. Faculty had the opportunity to ask each other for more details on specific courses and share curricular updates to create greater alignment. For example, CSCC faculty added a chemistry requirement to their AAS in exercise science to better prepare students for the KSU degree.

Though KSU and some of the community colleges used grant money to provide stipends to participate in the pathway development process, the Blueprint Partners largely credit making it easy for faculty to participate in the process and creating space for cross-campus conversations as the core elements of their success. Overall, the transfer pathway and map production timeline developed by the Blueprint Partners is very efficient: it typically takes one semester to go from initially brainstorming the pathway to publishing the final version.

Opportunities for Continuous Improvement:
Using Draft Maps to Support Faculty Transfer Summits

The Blueprint Partners' approach to drafting transfer maps often revealed excess credits. While faculty resolved some of these issues in the feedback meetings, some pathways still require more credits for transfers in comparison to direct-entry students. The partners can address these issues by (1) having senior leadership from all partners set a clear directive that pathways should eliminate excess credits and (2) hosting faculty summits that convene participants by academic discipline, strengthen faculty relationships across institutions, and create alignment around transfer goals across the partnership. The pre-work of outlining the current state of transfer pathways maximizes the time faculty members can spend building relationships and discussing course content.

Step 5.

Translate Pathways into Maps and Institutionalize Their Use

The Blueprint Partners were intentional about ensuring that the pathways and equivalencies they created were put to good use. The mapping staff at KSU used a spreadsheet to draft the pathways, but this format was not conducive for student or advisor use. The partners translated the information in the spreadsheet into public-facing, student- and advisor-friendly program maps. The maps are hosted on all institutional transfer websites and are linked to from other sites that students commonly

access. The partners also coordinated co-branded marketing materials, hosted various events, and conducted outreach to engage students, advisors, and faculty with the maps. Transfer coordinators at the community colleges were essential to this outreach.

One example: the transfer coordinator from CSCC worked with KSU to make a customized flyer for the paralegal program, prompting students to schedule one-on-one appointments with a transfer enrollment specialist at KSU. Similarly, the EGCC coordinator would share the maps during "Transfer Talk Tuesdays" events that typically draw between 35 and 85 students.

Beyond highlighting the maps for students, transfer coordinators also trained advisors and faculty members how to access the program maps, read them, and use them in different settings like advising appointments, in the classroom, and during orientation.

The KSU mapping staff also created backend processes to ensure internal systems match the external information provided to students, faculty, and advisors. For example, mapping staff routinely added agreed-upon course equivalencies from the faculty feedback discussions into KSU's student information system. The added course then transfers automatically for any future student who enters KSU from the partner community college.

Future Outlook:

The Blueprint Partners will continue developing and maintaining transfer pathways beyond the grant. The KSU mapping staff also developed a process to maintain pathways every year. Once KSU's student catalog is published each summer, the KSU mapping staff go through every transfer pathway to identify which courses and curricular programs and requirements have changed. The mapping staff also cross reference the catalogs of their community college partners. They send changes they identify to transfer coordinators at the community college, who work with their faculty to retrieve syllabi and make updates. The KSU mapping staff share those updates with KSU faculty for approval. These standard business operating procedures are essential to maintaining the progress made through the grant-funded project.

Virtual Engagements and Digital Tools Facilitate Tailored Transfer Student Advising Delivery at Scale

As part of the grant, the partners planned to strengthen advising, develop specialized orientations and first-year experience courses, and develop other academic and non-academic opportunities for transfer students. Each partner community college has different advising systems and structures— and the eight KSU campuses historically had decentralized and uncoordinated transfer services and programming, such as recruiting, enrollment and academic advising, and orientation. During the pandemic, the Blueprint Partners successfully created a suite of virtual engagements and digital tools that increased students' access to and use of transfer-specific advising, including standardized, critical information about KSU that prospective and new transfer students need to succeed.

Virtual Formats Expand Access to Pre-Transfer Advising

As mentioned earlier, one way that KSU solves for the challenges above is with transfer enrollment specialists. These liaisons connect students early in their transfer journey with relevant departments for more specific questions about credit articulation, financial aid, or academic programs. With advising varying widely across the partner community colleges, the specialists also provide a common set of information and direction. The Ascendium grant helped KSU hire an additional transfer enrollment specialist, who focuses on reaching students at the three partner colleges and a few others in the state. Kent State aims to use institutional funds to maintain the additional transfer enrollment specialist role beyond the grant-supported project.

Through the Blueprint Partners' various outreach efforts, events, and digital advertisements, community college students are encouraged to sign up for pre-transfer advising appointments with KSU's transfer enrollment specialists. Students can select a 30-minute appointment time and the online booking syncs with KSU's customer relationship management (CRM) system. In these appointments, the transfer enrollment specialists share information about different programs at KSU, encourage students to get on a pathway, answer any questions they have, and connect them with other departments as needed. For the 2021-2022 academic year, the transfer enrollment specialists set a goal to conduct pre-transfer advising appointments with 600 prospective transfer students. The

specialists exceeded that goal, providing 876 virtual and in-person appointments that year. Virtual appointments played a crucial role in increasing access to pre-transfer advising.

Before the pandemic, KSU maintained a physical space at EGCC's Steubenville campus for pre-transfer advising appointments. A KSU representative was typically on campus one to two days per week—the presence was helpful, but the dates were limiting. The pandemic forced pre-transfer advising, college fairs, and other pre-transfer engagements to shift to a virtual format across the partnership, and these online appointments and experiences brought additional flexibility that worked well for many prospective transfers.

For example: previously EGCC students could only meet with the KSU enrollment specialists on those one or two days of the week. Virtual pre-transfer advising allows students from across the partner community colleges to book appointments at times convenient for them, and they do not physically need to be on campus.

> **Opportunities for Continuous Improvement:**
> Earlier Transfer Advising
>
> *Timely transfer and graduation hinge on supporting students in selecting and following a pathway early in their journeys. The Blueprint Partners have an opportunity to begin outreach in high schools, especially through dual enrollment programs, and earlier in community college. The Transfer Playbook highlights Holyoke Community College's (HCC) approach to dual enrollment: HCC uses its dedicated dual enrollment advisor to encourage high school dual enrollment students to identify a program of study (as opposed to a mix of general education courses). This strengthens the advisor's ability to support dual enrollment students in navigating transfer opportunities.*

As of Fall 2022, the KSU specialist returned to spending one day a week at EGCC. But KSU expects to maintain access to virtual pre-transfer advising, and some of the community college partners made investments to facilitate that continued access: for example, EGCC invested in kiosks and computers for students to set up appointments and/or have their virtual appointments with the KSU specialist, even if the specialist is not on campus that day.

While the pre-transfer advising appointments are successful overall, they have several limitations. First, these appointments may not be early enough in the student's transfer journey, as the transfer enrollment specialists are currently limited to meeting with students who express an interest in meeting with them. This means that they typically don't meet with students until they are very close to transferring—often too late to ensure they're taking the right courses. Additionally, given the size of

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KSU's eight campus system and its decentralized structure, the transfer enrollment specialists tend to focus on Kent campus recruitment initiatives.

Sustain Student Support Through the Transition with Digitized Transfer Orientation Modules

The Transfer Playbook recommends customizing elements of the first-year experience for transfer students once they arrive at the four-year institution, including transfer-specific orientation programming. One crucial aspect of this recommendation is ensuring that transfer orientations are not just created but fully accessible to transfer students, who often have additional work or family responsibilities beyond school.[1] [2]

KSU used the grant support from Ascendium to create a digital transfer orientation, debuted in March 2022, so that all transfer students, regardless of which of the eight KSU campuses they attend, will have access to Transfer Kent State orientation modules. (These modules mirror the existing "Destination Kent State" orientation for first-time students.) Using a "flipped" model, students can access prerecorded modules on topics like advising, financial aid, and how to get a job on campus. Students can access the modules throughout their first semester.

The orientation modules ensure that all students have the same access to important information about KSU, while still allowing for some customization that meet the needs of students who transfer to the regional campuses. Each campus's leader filmed a welcome video specific to their campus, and the modules on financial aid will vary to account for price differences at the Kent campus and regional campuses.

While the Playbook identifies transfer orientation as a transfer advising strategy for four-year institutions, embedding transfer conversations into community college orientations can be another way to provide early transfer advisement. LCCC launched an online pre-transfer orientation session at new student orientation in the Fall of 2022.

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[1] U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, 2015–16 National Postsecondary Student Aid Study (NPSAS:16). https://nces.ed.gov/datalab/table/library/detail/13212.
[2] U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, 2015–16 National Postsecondary Student Aid Study (NPSAS:16). https://nces.ed.gov/datalab/table/library/detail/13188.

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Update Websites to Ensure Student Access to Information and Strengthen the Transfer Student Journey

From Aspen's research and fieldwork, we know that a seemingly small but essential aspect of transfer students' journeys is their experience with institutions' transfer webpages. Websites are often the first place students look for information about transfer, and these sites can set the tone for their transfer experience. Unfortunately, websites of many community colleges and four-year institutions are process- or compliance-oriented rather than student-oriented. At worst, students will find conflicting or confusing information across partner institution websites, or information they seek is not available— at best, the information is organized and framed with the goal of clearly and simply communicating the information transfer students need most: who to call, how to get started, what's possible.

Previously at KSU, only the Kent campus had a website for transfer students. While the website contained helpful information (details on pathways, how to apply for admissions, and financial aid) it did not share information about the seven regional campuses.

KSU used the grant support from Ascendium to help each regional campus build a section of its website dedicated to transfer students. The new pages display contact information for the campus's transfer enrollment specialist and link to more information about degree options, applying to KSU and for financial aid, and transferring credits. In addition to being strong resources for students, advisors and transfer enrollment specialists use the webpages as a reliable source of information.

Future Outlook:

Recognizing the importance of translating enrollment into student success, inclusion, and belonging, KSU has moved responsibility for transfer student orientation to within the enrollment management division. This organizational shift, which replicates the first-year structure, aims to create a more seamless experience for transfer students during the critical transition period and ensures a closer connection between KSU's enrollment and student success goals.

Lesson 3:

Investment from Senior Leadership is Required to Shift from Practice Reform to Systemic Reform

The Transfer Playbook makes clear that prioritizing transfer is essential to transfer student success. To improve transfer student outcomes, transfer must be prioritized by leadership at all levels—and in partnerships, data, communications, and investments. The Blueprint Partners achieved some aspects of this essential prioritization, but not all. Ultimately, for the partners, this component of the Transfer Playbook was the hardest to apply. What prioritization makes possible is scale: The Blueprint Partners were able to take quick action on transfer pathway development and orientation reform but are still in the exploration phase of major efforts like dual admissions agreements. In the next section we list the places where the partners were able to make the greatest headway within the "prioritization" practice. In the "Next Frontiers" section, we discuss where there is continued opportunity to advance.

Blueprint Partners Priorities & Next Frontiers

Reflection: What did the Blueprint Partners prioritize?

Developing a Regular Meeting Cadence to Support Stronger Collaboration

As a result of the grant, staff members from the Blueprint Partners have regular cross-institutional meetings and have built supportive, collaborative working relationships. For example, the transfer coordinators from the community colleges and enrollment specialists at KSU meet at least once a month, and the project staff meet quarterly to discuss progress. The partners prepare meeting agendas designed to share critical information, explore solutions to challenges, and identify clear next steps. This allows them to be more strategic with their time together and mirrors the meeting structures of some of the nation's strongest transfer partnerships, such as the partners involved in DirectConnect to UCF®. The vice presidents and provosts of the University of Central Florida (UCF) and Valencia College (UCF's main transfer partner) meet quarterly to examine data and identify

> **Opportunities for Continuous Improvement:**
> Inform Partnership Strategy Using Aggregate Data
>
> *About half of KSU's community college transfer students enter as sophomores or first years (based on credits) and the top major for transfers is "exploratory." Both data points indicate possible challenges for students: increased time to and cost of a degree due to premature transfer and a lack of a clear program of study. This aggregate data should point Blueprint Partners to look at data specific to their institutions and determine what new strategies are needed—or how they can use program maps and virtual pre-advising—to help students transfer with a junior standing and a declared major aligned to a pathway.*

opportunities for continuous improvement. [3] Too often, community colleges and universities rely on informal personal relationships between partner organizations and convene partners only on an ad hoc basis. The result: problems only get addressed when parties happen to see each other, raise issues, and have time to commit to resolving them. And when key staff depart, structures are not in place to readily replicate even those informal relationships. The Blueprint Partners have developed a

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[3] Carroll, William, and Tania LaViolet. *Evaluating Transfer Student Success and Equity: A Primer on Quantitative Data for Two- and Four-Year Institutions.* HCM Strategists; The Aspen Institute's College Excellence Program; SOVA, 2021. https://tacklingtransfer.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/09/Evaluating-Transfer-Student-Success-and-Equity.pdf.

structure that, if continued, will make their partnership truly sustainable. At the time of this publication, all four schools aimed to maintain their partnership meetings and build or strengthen additional transfer partnerships.

Building Departmental Awareness of Transfer Using Internal Data

At the outset of the grant, some KSU faculty and administrators did not know how many transfer students their college or the university overall enrolls, let alone what those students might need, or how they might differ from the rest of the student body. So KSU Academic Affairs staff worked with the institutional research office to create "transfer student profile" infographics (at right is   a version with Fall 2019 data specific to community college transfers) and customized data one-pagers for each college, which they shared with the respective deans. These overviews included stats like "Over 70 percent of transfers live off-campus," which helped faculty and administrators better understand the transfer student population's needs.
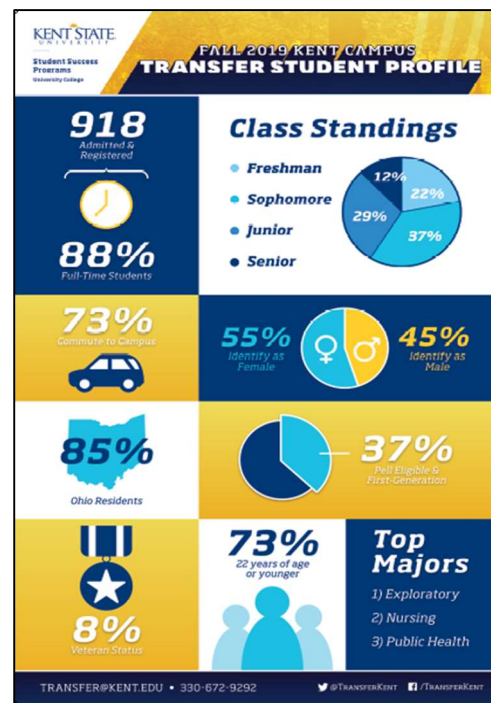
Recognizing Transfer as an Enrollment Priority

Historically, only a few staff members prioritized transfer at KSU. Declining enrollment rates changed that. As KSU developed its new strategic enrollment division and plan, more staff came to realize the severity of enrollment declines across Ohio and the rest of the Great Lakes region, and the necessity of looking beyond high school graduates. The pandemic deepened this realization, as some KSU campuses and community college partners struggled to maintain enrollment.

KSU staff report that transfer is more prioritized than it was a decade or so ago—perhaps influenced by the enrollment pinch. Evidence of this prioritization includes KSU's increased investment in transfer scholarships, allocating over $1.2 million new dollars. Transfer students at KSU will also benefit from the new Flashes Go Further policy, in which the university will fully cover tuition and fees for all students with an expected family contribution (EFC) under $10K. KSU is funding the $20 million budget of Flashes Go Further through reductions in administrative spending—everything from centralizing printing and copying to offering faculty early retirement.

This shift in priorities is led by KSU's president Todd Diacon, who acknowledges that transfer students will be important to maintaining KSU's enrollment—and that KSU must serve those transfer students to fulfill the university's mission of providing access to students from diverse backgrounds and helping them complete their degrees. Transfer student enrollment is now discussed regularly with KSU's board and cabinet, and President Diacon credits the Ascendium grant with prompting this increased focus on transfer with the board.

Next Frontier: What would it take to further improve transfer outcomes in Ohio?

Shifting Transfer to a Student Success & Equity Priority

Some of the most effective transfer partnerships in the country frame transfer as a way to advance regional talent development and social mobility—with increased enrollment and access components of this larger goal. This difference in perspective can drastically shift transfer reform strategy. For example, the focus on increasing bachelor's attainment in Lorain County and closing equity gaps led LCCC to found the [University Partnership](#) 25 years ago. The University Partnership allows LCCC students to transfer up to three years of coursework and complete a bachelor's degree through partner institutions delivered on the LCCC campus and/or online. LCCC's original vision continues to drive new transfer options, including deepening the relationship with KSU. LCCC leaders have set a goal to get all students on paths to jobs that provide family-sustaining wages; in many cases, that means encouraging students to transfer and earn a bachelor's degree. LCCC also pays attention to representation of underserved communities in programs that lead to strong post-graduate wages (and likewise, whether those communities are overrepresented in programs with lower wages, like social work and early childhood education).

KSU's transfer strategy primarily grew from its goal of increasing enrollment and access. Moving forward, KSU can work with the Blueprint Partners to align future reforms to the success of the partners' students and their respective regions. They can more closely align transfer pathways to regional talent needs, develop scaled outreach and advising strategies that support historically underserved student populations, emphasize affordability by simultaneously promoting associate degree completion and eliminating excess credit in transfer pathways, and evaluate their work in line with their high-level goals. Transfer partnership models that bring together all of these reforms include guaranteed admission agreements like DirectConnect to UCF® and dual admissions

agreements like George Mason University and Northern Virginia Community College's ADVANCE program.

Yet moving transfer from an enrollment to a success and equity priority is not as simple as declaring a shift in strategy. Our research indicates that these large-scale reforms require financial and human capital investment and can sometimes necessitate deferring short-term gain. For example, reducing excess credit at a community college or promoting transfer to a university only after associate degree completion can reduce tuition revenues at both institutions. But our research also shows that if transfer partners increase the value and efficiency of their transfer pathways to appeal to a greater market share of students, decisions that lead to short-term declines in revenue or enrollment can lead to long-term increases. Navigating both the short- and long-term implications of major transfer reform needs the support and attention of the presidency and cross-functional senior leadership across partner institutions.

Evaluating Transfer Student Experiences on an Ongoing Basis

In addition to tracking and sharing quantitative data, effective transfer partnerships collect and share qualitative information about transfer student experiences. Past focus groups and surveys of transfer students at the Kent campus have prompted programming changes: transfer students reported that they wanted to connect more with faculty, were concerned about making friends and getting involved, and didn't know how to navigate the bureaucratic systems of KSU. These findings informed how staff changed and built the new Transfer Kent State orientation modules.

Funding from the Ascendium grant enabled the Transfer Blueprint Project partners to conduct focus groups and individual interviews with students at various stages of their transfer journeys, including current community college students who intended to transfer to KSU to complete a bachelor's degree and students who had already successfully transferred.

The KSU researchers on this grant aim to publish the findings of the focus groups in academic journals to inform future institutional changes to better support transfer students at KSU and across the nation. An area of opportunity for the partners is to commit to expanding these qualitative studies and conducting them regularly. Annual focus groups and individual interviews with students across the partnership campuses, or surveys of prospective and current transfer students, could help evaluate

whether engagement with transfer enrollment specialists or transfer orientation modules are having their intended impact.

Distinguishing Between Aggregate-Level and Student-Level Data Sharing

While the partners started the grant expecting to find a way to share transfer data, collecting data about transfer students and sharing these data with one another has been challenging. By the end of the grant, the partners were still discussing how they could effectively share data and had not arrived at a solution. Part of the challenge is navigating how to share data without violating the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA) law.[4]

Sharing student-level directory information (e.g., name, email address, telephone number) between institutions is allowed, but anything beyond that (e.g., student identification numbers, transfer intent, and possible destinations) requires either student consent or a data-sharing agreement between institutions. Some institutions have found success with asking students to opt-in to sharing data with four-year institutions through the community college's application or intake surveys or "expressions of transfer intent" on four-year university websites. Those methods offer a good workaround solution, but without consistent training among advisors to promote use among students, they will inevitably miss students and inadvertently introduce inequities when those less familiar with higher education are not encouraged to fill out the forms.

Even when partners can develop data-sharing agreements, their success hinges on the institutions collecting and reporting data aligned with the transfer partnership needs. For instance, the community colleges in the Blueprint Partnership do not have a consistent way to identify and track the pool of prospective transfer students, and building the systems and processes to share actionable student-level data is both time- and resource-intensive.

Our observation from our broader fieldwork is that partnerships get stalled in the bureaucracy required for student-level data sharing. While that data is important and essential to making real-time decisions that support students, aggregate-level data should be sufficient to make longer-term strategic decisions. Sharing overall outcomes disaggregated by different student groups (e.g., race-

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[4] "Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA)." Ed.gov. US Department of Education, August 25, 2021. https://www2.ed.gov/policy/gen/guid/fpco/ferpa/index.html.

ethnicity, income, dual enrollment population) and programs should not require data-sharing agreements. That said, even when using aggregate data, effective partnerships agree to a regular data-sharing schedule and develop opportunities to discuss the findings and their implications on policy, practice, and pathways.[5] By disentangling the goals, discussion, and processes related to student- and aggregate-level data sharing, partnerships could more quickly advance their data-informed transfer strategies.

Utilizing Pathway Data to Support and Strengthen Advising

A major opportunity for the Blueprint Partnership community colleges is to develop systems that track and report whether their students have selected and are following a transfer pathway. Research demonstrates that when students select a program of study that is aligned to their interests, they are more likely to complete their degrees in a timely manner.[6] Unfortunately, data from KSU suggests that many transfer students are enrolling with undeclared majors. Tracking pathway selection and progression in real time could help advisors intervene to connect students with information about pathways and the importance of choosing early.

LCCC has recently coded their data system to collect this information and monitor student enrollment and progression on specific pathways. The institutional research office built unique codes for each of the pathways to KSU, and once an advisor learns a student wants to be on a specific path to KSU, they submit a form to add the code to that student's record. Other LCCC staff can then pull lists of students on different pathways. In the future, they'll be able to use these lists to send tailored messages to that group of students, and, ideally, to create pathway-specific cohorts of students planning to transfer to KSU. There is real promise here, but LCCC will depend on advisors entering the codes to keep the data accurate. LCCC will need to make sure advisors know and use the new coding system for reporting to be accurate; advisors will need to be vigilant about updating codes if students switch pathways.

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[5] Carroll, William, and Tania LaViolet. *Evaluating Transfer Student Success and Equity: A Primer on Quantitative Data for Two-and Four-Year Institutions.* HCM Strategists; The Aspen Institute's College Excellence Program; SOVA, 2021. https://tacklingtransfer.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/09/Evaluating-Transfer-Student-Success-and-Equity.pdf.

[6] Allen, Jeff, and Steve Robbins. "Effects of Interest–Major Congruence, Motivation, and Academic Performance on Timely Degree Attainment." *Journal of Counseling Psychology* 57, no. 1 (January 2010): 23–35. https://doi.org/10.1037/a0017267.

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Senior leaders across all partners can invest in building out similar data and tracking systems to LCCC, as well as training advisors in those new systems, to strengthen transfer advising and the use of transfer pathways.

In closing:

The Ascendium grant has prompted greater focus and investment in transfer at Kent State University and each of its partners: Columbus State Community College, Eastern Gateway Community College, and Lorain County Community College—and strengthened relationships across this partnership.

Some of this work is still in progress and will continue after the grant. Several project components were not fully implemented by the end of the grant, namely data sharing, dual admissions and initiatives directed at increasing success for underrepresented students. And the partners will need to continue to make it clear that transfer is a priority via visible commitment and communication from leaders, continued investments in staff and financial aid, and strengthening of data collection and sharing. Though they've made major progress in building pathways and adding support staff, they still have some work to do to ensure students take advantage of those pathways and to track those who are.

Nevertheless, the grant enabled the partners to make progress that will serve future transfer students much better than in the past. The core accomplishments include the 49 (and counting) transfer pathways; stronger relationships across all the institutions; investments in transfer-specific advisors, transfer centers and marketing of the new pathways; efforts to build a streamlined student experience across all KSU campuses; and greater knowledge and motivation around transfer success at all the campuses.

The Blueprint Partners' transfer pathway and map production process is highly efficient,   replicable, and sustainable. The entire process takes one semester from initial pathway brainstorming to publishing the final program map. We hope other practitioners and leaders can learn from their method and find similar success on their campuses.

Appendices

Appendix A | Institutional information and context

Kent State University (KSU) is a multi-campus institution in northeast Ohio. The largest campus in Kent primarily serves a first-time in college, full-time student body (meaning students who enroll in KSU directly from high school), but around twenty percent of undergraduates at KSU are transfer students from community colleges and other four-year institutions.[7]

In addition to the Kent campus, there are seven regional campuses largely serving students in their respective counties and offering a different mix of programs. Students at regional campuses tend to be a mix of both younger students and older working adults who commute to class. Most of these students can complete their degree at their original campus, although a small number do transition to the Kent campus prior to graduation. The Kent campus enrolls approximately 64 percent of all community college transfer students across KSU, according to an Aspen Institute analysis of 2018-2019 data from the Ohio Department of Higher Education.[8]

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[7] The last three years (fall 2020-2018) hovered around 18-19% transfer according to IPEDS. This includes transfers from other 4-year schools.

[8] "Transfer Demographic Profile." Transfer Credit Ohio. The Ohio Department of Higher Education. Accessed October 31, 2022. https://transfercredit.ohio.gov/educational-partners/educational-partner-resources/transfer-demographics-profile.

[9] *Ibid*

There are three community colleges in the Blueprint Partnership:

	About the College	Transfer Students at the College	Historical Relationship with KSU[9]
Columbus State Community College (CSCC)	CSCC serves over 25,000 students across two campuses and multiple regional learning centers in Columbus and the surrounding communities.	Approximately 2,000 students transfer from CSCC each year. CSCC's largest investment in transfer success is through Preferred Pathways, partnerships with nine Ohio colleges and universities. Some of these partnerships incorporate dual admissions and enrollment, joint advisor and program coordinator, and shared housing and other facilities.	KSU is not a Preferred Pathways partner, so the grant allowed CSCC to expand transfer options for their students. CSCC is also the most geographically distant from KSU of the three community colleges involved in the grant. Prior to the grant, CSCC transferred over 40 students to KSU a year.
Eastern Gateway Community College (EGCC)	EGCC has two campuses in eastern Ohio—one in Steubenville and one in Youngstown. Historically, EGCC was a small college, but due to a union partnership that began in 2015, EGCC now enrolls over 40,000 students from across the country, largely in online programs.	According to the Ohio Department of Higher Education, EGCC transferred 173 students to Ohio public four-year universities in 2018-19.	Both campuses have a history of working closely with a couple of the KSU regional campuses (East Liverpool and Trumbull) that are physically near the two EGCC campuses and offer online programs. Otherwise, relationships were nascent, and the grant helped create more options for students to transfer from EGCC to the Kent campus.
Lorain County Community College (LCCC)	Located outside of Cleveland, LCCC serves over 9,000 students at its main campus in Elyria and four learning centers in other parts of the county.	Over 700 students transfer from LCCC each year. LCCC recently celebrated the 25th anniversary of University Partnership (UP), a program that offers various degrees through multiple four-year partners. The program was founded to increase bachelor's attainment in Lorain County, which at the time had the lowest bachelor's attainment rate in Ohio. There is no public four-year institution located within the county, so these programs are often offered on-site at LCCC.	LCCC has a long-standing UP program with KSU, an online bachelor's degree in business administration. LCCC also sends a fair number of transfer students to KSU. According to an internal document provided by LCCC, KSU is LCCC's third largest transfer partner, in terms of the number of former LCCC students who go on to earn a bachelor's degree from a four-year institution. [10]

[10] KSU awarded bachelor's degrees to 184 former LCCC students in the 18-19 calendar year. LCCC's other two largest transfer partners are Ohio University with 192 and Cleveland State University with 229.

Appendix B | Current Blueprint Partner Program Pathways

CSCC Program	KSU Program
RN-to-BSN	BS, Nursing
Healthcare Management	BS, Public Health, Health Services Admin. Concentration
AS, Biology	BS, Public Health, Clinical Trials Concentration
AAS, Dental Hygiene	BS, Public Health, Allied Health Concentration
AAS, Medical Imaging	BS, Public Health, Allied Health Concentration
AAS, Respiratory Care	BS, Public Health, Allied Health Concentration
AAS, Paralegal Studies	BA, Paralegal Studies
Exercise Science Major Athletic Performance Track (AAS)	BS Exercise Science (Exercise Physiology Concentration)
Exercise Science Major Athletic Performance Track (AAS)	BS Exercise Science (Exercise Specialist Concentration)
Respiratory Care (AAS)	Respiratory Care (BS)
Interactive Media - Video Game Art and Animation Track	Bachelor of Science degree in Engineering Technology, Computer Design, Animation and Game Design concentration
Medical Imaging (AAS)	Radiologic Imaging Sciences (BRIT) (MRI)
Electronic Engineering Technology (AAS)	Engineering Technology, Integrated Engineering Technology
Electro-Mechanical Engineering Technology (AAS)	Engineering Technology, Integrated Engineering Technology
Mechanical Engineering Technology (AAS)	Engineering Technology, Integrated Engineering Technology
AAS Mobile App Development	BS Information Technology (All Tracks)
AAS Interpreter Education Program	BS, ASL/English Interpreting
AAS Restaurant and Food Service Management	BS Hospitality and Event Management
AA Health Communication	BS Public Health Community Outreach

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EGCC Program	KSU Program
AAS, Health Services	BS in Public Health, Health Services Administration Concentration
AAB, Business Management	BBA, General Business Major
AA	BS in Insurance Studies
AA	BSIT
AA	BTAS Applied Business with Insurance Minor
AA	BTAS Applied Business
AA	BTAS Nonprofit Human Services
AAB	BTAS Applied Business
Respiratory Therapy (AAS)	Respiratory Care (BS)
Associate Degree Nursing (ADN)	Bachelor of Science in Nursing (BSN), Nursing for Registered Nurses
Radiologic Technology (AAS)	Radiologic Imaging Sciences (BRIT) MRI Concentration
Radiologic Technology (AAS)	Radiologic Imaging Sciences (BRIT) Radiation Therapy Concentration
Radiologic Technology (AAS)	Radiologic Imaging Sciences (BRIT) Computer Tomography Concentration
Radiologic Technology (AAS)	Radiologic Imaging Sciences (BRIT) Diagnostic Medical Sonography Concentration
Criminal Justice (AAS)	Criminology and Justice Studies (BA)
Social Work (AAS)	Human Development and Family Studies (BS) (Case Management)

LCCC Program	KSU Program
RN-to-BSN	BS, Nursing
Clinical Lab Science Technology	BS, Public Health, Clinical Trials Concentration
AAS Occupational Therapy Assistant	BS, Public Health, Allied Health Concentration
Radiologic Technology	BS, Public Health, Allied Health Concentration
Sports and Fitness Management (AAS)	BS Exercise Science (Exercise Physiology Concentration)
Sports and Fitness Management (AAS)	BS Exercise Science (Exercise Specialist Concentration)
Radiologic Technology (AAS)	Radiologic Imaging Sciences (BRIT) (MRI?)

Social Work (AAS)	Human Development and Family Studies (BS), Case Management for Individuals and Family Study Concentration
Early Childhood Education (AAS)	Early Childhood Education (BSE)- Kent Campus
Associate of Applied Science (AAS), Electronics Engineering Technology - Computer Maintenance and Networking	Bachelor of Science in Information Technology (BSIT), Networking Concentration
Associate of Applied Science (AAS) degree in Computer Engineering Technology, Computer, and Digital Forensics Major	Bachelor of Science in Information Technology (BSIT) degree in Information Technology, Cybersecurity, and Forensics concentration
Associate of Applied Science in Cyber and Information Security	Bachelor of Science in Information Technology (BSIT) degree in Information Technology, Cybersecurity, and Forensics concentration
Associate of Arts (interdisciplinary, AA)	Bachelor of Arts in Paralegal Studies
Associate of Applied Business, Hospitality and Tourism Management - Hospitality	BS in Hospitality and Event Management
Associate of Science (AS) Environmental Studies	Bachelor of Arts in Environmental Studies