TO: Chief Instructional Officers
Chief Student Services Officers
Chief Business Officers

FROM: James Todd, Vice Chancellor of Academic Affairs
Terrence Willet, Assistant Vice Chancellor of Research, Analytics and Data

RE: Promising Practices in Support of Transfer Students

In alignment with Vision 2030 and in response to the Transfer Audit for California's Systems of Public Higher Education ([2023-123](#)), the Chancellor's Office conducted a qualitative study to identify promising, evidence-based practices that support student transfer to the University of California and California State University systems. This guidance memo aims to support your college's transfer improvement efforts by sharing several key practitioner-informed approaches and actionable insights from that study.

The central takeaway is this: while there is no "single solution" for improving transfer, what works is an intentional, campuswide transfer-centered culture of collaboration, support, and equity-minded practice. Colleges with high transfer rates share a commitment to institution-wide alignment, strategic resource allocation, and proactive support systems—all contributing to a culture of transfer success.

Background

Intersegmental transfer in California begins with the Master Plan for Higher Education in California (Master Plan), which emphasized transfer from community colleges to the state's four-year systems. As noted in the audit: "By 2023 the proportion of undergraduate students enrolled in community colleges had risen to about 75 percent, with the remaining 16 percent attending CSU and 9 percent attending UC." Previously, Governor Newsom and the three public post-secondary education systems—University of California (UC), California State University (CSU), and California Community Colleges (CCC)—announced new segmental multi-year compacts in May 2022. These agreements combined shared priorities that are designed to advance multiple

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student-focused goals (i.e., close equity gaps and expand transfer student access) through intersegmental collaboration and in conjunction with predictable State support for the systems. Further intersegmental collaborative efforts directed at student transfer extend through agreements and program collaborations.

- Cradle to Career
- Dual Admission/Transfer Success Pathway (AB 132, 2021)
- Single General Education Pattern/Cal-GETC (AB 928, 2021)

Vision 2030: A Roadmap for California Community Colleges explicitly drives support for the state's credit mobility and credential attainment goals through meeting the unique needs of current and prospective learners regardless of age, race, and socioeconomic status. Moreover, in partnership with community colleges, the Chancellor's Office is supporting Vision 2030 demonstration projects related to the improvement of transfer outcomes.

Our systemwide efforts embrace a substantial body of state and national research around transfer from a community college to a four-year university. The Chancellor's Office distilled these findings in an interactive website, Five Barriers to Transfer for California Students: *Why Coordination Is the Path Forward*. Inclusive of data-informed support materials, this call specifically elevated the need of California's higher education partners to "do more to work across systems, campuses, and disciplines to better standardize, simplify, and streamline the student transfer process."

Correspondingly, the community colleges have operationalized the system's Guided Pathways Initiative and equitable expansion of the Dual Enrollment program. Furthermore, the community college system continues to implement multiple legislated requirements to address the state's complicated intersegmental transfer ecosystem.

- Associate Degree for Transfer (ADT) (SB 1440, 2010 and AB 2057, 2024)
- Equitable Placement, Support, and Completion (AB 705, 2017 and AB 1705, 2022)
- Automatic ADT Placement (AB 928, 2021)
- Common Course Numbering (AB 1111, 2020)

While transfer initiatives and programs continue to influence transfer rates, "underlying low transfer rates are several fundamental barriers that transfer-intending students face...Although

some barriers involve factors largely outside of the higher education systems' control, the systems can still take important steps to facilitate and simplify the transfer process" (Parks, 2024).

Community colleges play a critical role in helping students navigate the complexities of the transfer environment. However, identified weaknesses in such supports, consistently applied, were elevated by the auditor. Thus, a recommendation was made to help community colleges improve their transfer rates by having the Chancellor's Office identify "any specific best practices … and share these practices with all colleges."

It Takes a Whole College Report

While this guidance memo serves to highlight many important transfer practices and approaches, the full report can provide practitioners with a deeper understanding of the larger study that was conducted in response to the audit recommendation.

Executive Summary

Participants from high-transfer colleges unanimously agree that transfer is complicated, and that no single practice was behind their high transfer rates. However, institutional collaboration was identified as the most important principle in supporting students with successful transfer. This collaborative spirit begins with enthusiastic support from executive and administrative leaders in the form of championing the issue and allocating resources and personnel to engage in effective transfer practices. The collective practices, approaches, and transfer culture all contribute to a framework the report calls "Transfer Identity Development"—or guiding and supporting students into being transfer-intending students.

Methodology

The Chancellor's Office research team and academic affairs unit have already been collaboratively investigating quantitative transfer metrics (See DataVista and DataMart). However, for the task at hand—identifying specific practices at community colleges that had a measurable impact on colleges' transfer rates—the Chancellor's Office research team designed a qualitative assessment. The study identified and included: (1) community colleges that have successfully implemented transfer practices (based on the US Department of Education *Raise the Bar: College Excellence and*

Equity: Postsecondary Success Recognition Program) and (2) colleges whose transfer data indicate growth potential. See the report for the full methodology.

Transfer Support: Practices, Approaches, and Procedures

Prior to proceeding, it is necessary to acknowledge that there is not a singular transfer pipeline that all community college students leverage. Due to the non-standardized transfer pathways presented across California's higher education systems, each community college presents multiple transfer pipeline options to students which are dependent upon varying programs, policies, and resources. As such this necessitates individualized support through the implementation of selected data-informed practices. Consequently, the transfer supports discussed here are offered in relationship to the needed attention to a college's own transfer pipelines, specific loss points, and application of potential solutions that can be standardized within the college culture and operations.

The study revealed that while promising transfer supports and procedures are strategically important, implementing them requires a "whole campus approach" that relies on several key elements. While all four of these elements and their recommendations are examined in-depth in the report; this guidance memo will highlight three: Promising Practices, Institutional Buy-in, and Campus Procedures with the inclusion of selected high-level practices and approaches currently employed by community college practitioners. Nevertheless, it is extremely important to note that all elements work closely with each other. Also note that for the remainder of this memo, any words in quotation marks are taken from participants' responses.

1. PROMISING PRACTICES

Several administrators and Transfer Center Directors[1] at high-transfer colleges emphasize that there is no single practice that drives successful student transfer to four-year institutions. Rather, the promising practices identified below should be implemented in concert with each other and with intentional, culturally competent, cross-campus collaboration. The known "what to do" is now being linked with information around the "how to do" it. From this lens, here are brief

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[1] Although most colleges have a Transfer Center Director, some do not. For the purposes of this memo, personnel responsible for coordinating transfers at their college will collectively be referred to as Transfer Center Directors, even if that is not their title.

descriptions of promising practices that have proven impacts on transfer outcomes for your consideration.

Collaboration. This process, across campus including faculty, administrators, classified professionals, and directors of learning communities or cultural programs, is a highly effective strategy at high-transfer colleges. Coordinating efforts between intervention programs, braiding funding to maximize impacts, and collaborating on impactful practical actions relevant to the student population are opportunities to support the college's vision of its transfer responsibilities.

Co-location. High-transfer colleges maximize the spaces allotted to specific programs to allow for transfer conversations and counseling to occur in multiple sites beyond the Transfer Center. Sites include Disability Services, EOPS, MESA STEM, Umoja, Puente, and more. Even the Basic Needs center can be a site for transfer interventions.

Programs such as those listed here lend themselves to this practice easily, since students are typically in a cohort structure. When students participate in a cohorted program, they have an additional, built-in layer of support from program personnel. Cohorted students are more easily guided into enrolling in transfer-level English and math in their first year and receive more individualized support at their cohort site through math workshops, study and tutoring groups, or individual counseling, for example.

Transfer Identity Development. Transfer Identity Development cultivates an identity shift in students which impels community college students to visualize themselves in a trajectory that includes transferring to a four-year institution. The strategies for Transfer Identity Development include classroom assignments regarding their career plans, casual conversations early and often at multiple sites across campus regarding their transfer plans, promoting transfer culture on campus (i.e. telling employees' transfer journeys), and celebrating successful transfers in a visible way to the rest of the campus.

Professional development for cultural competency. Because instructional faculty are the most impactful presence for students at any college, it is imperative that they engage students with culturally competent Transfer Identity Development practices. Faculty at high-transfer colleges

participate in equity-centered learning communities dedicated to sharing pedagogical strategies and materials that allow Transfer Identity Development to be implemented through understanding students' unique positionalities. The Vision Resource Center also offers several general and discipline-specific equity courses.

Intrusive Efforts. Practitioners note that intrusive efforts such as embedded tutoring build capacity for Transfer Identity Development through increased touchpoints with students. High-transfer colleges with "an army of [embedded] tutors," report that embedded tutors help present course material to students in a culturally competent manner and share their own transfer experience.

2. INSTITUTIONAL BUY-IN

Enthusiasm, Strong Support, and Innovative Spirit. Fostering a transfer culture at an institution begins with institutional buy-in and enthusiastic support from all levels of leadership. Practitioners overwhelmingly credit strong, enthusiastic leaders who "lead with a yes, then figure it out." Administrative leaders who participated in this study highlight the mindset that "failure has to be an option" when designing new approaches. Regardless of the successes or failures of new initiatives, the colleges report learning valuable information in the process through collaborating with the Data and Research office.

Resources. Beyond enthusiastic support, leaders emphasize that institutions must be willing to allot the resources necessary to ensure that initiatives are not just implemented but carried out with quality. Quality implementation of transfer efforts requires colleges to invest in evidence-based practices and includes an assessment method to track the effectiveness of these efforts.

Transfer Centers. Colleges benefit from having a physical transfer center with a dedicated, full-time director. Transfer Centers were originally established (title 5, Section 51027) to strengthen the college's transfer function and with the implementation of the Student Equity and Achievement (SEA) Program in 2018, Transfer Centers also take part in creating equal opportunity for all students to succeed in their educational goals. While Transfer Centers clearly serve as the focal point of community college transfer activities, the work of improving transfer is the responsibility of the entire institution.

Leveraging Data and Research. This is a critical practice that ensures transfer programs and services are focused on transfer-intending students that need support from the institution, are rooted in evidence-based practices, and are regularly assessed. Participants at high-transfer colleges report that data usage to target selected student clusters for just-in-time, proactive engagement supports their efforts to impact enrollment, persistence, completion, and transfer.

Student Management Systems and Automation. A critically important resource is a student management system that seamlessly integrates with communications strategies to automate as many processes as possible so that practitioners can concentrate on serving students. Automated processes noted in the study include organizing students with an educational goal of "transfer" into a cohort list and enrolling students into a Transfer Canvas shell after they earn a certain number of degree-applicable units.

3. CAMPUS PROCEDURES

Part of collaboration is ensuring the college's campus procedures—such as orientation, early alerts, academic notice (probation), and completion efforts—promote course success and transfer. Effective teams assess existing procedures for their effect on transfer-intending and transferring students, their ability to maximize the exposure of transfer messaging, and their inter-procedural alignment. This memo will address only one campus procedure.

Early Alerts. Universally, study participants regard Early Alerts as difficult to implement and difficult to follow-up on, as they require faculty to add this administrative task to their course obligations. Following up on Early Alerts requires establishing contact with and gaining the trust of a student and then working with them on an individualized plan to stay on track. Taken together, the use of Promising Practices may serve as pre-emptive interventions which can make students feel cared for, keep them engaged, and empower them to more easily prioritize their academic success.

The transfer practices identified by the qualitative study reinforce the findings of previous research combining them into a framework of Transfer Identity Development. Additional promising practices and other factors that affect transfer success can be found in the full report. While feedback from practitioners and leaders is valuable, as this memo demonstrates, equally

valuable is feedback from students who are navigating the transfer process. The Chancellor's Office research team plans to engage students and illuminate their voices to deepen our understanding of transfer barriers in a longitudinal qualitative study beginning Fall 2025.

The Chancellor's Office is committed to providing systemwide support and guidance. Colleges are encouraged to share innovations and challenges with the Chancellor's Office to support statewide learning and continuous improvement. Your continued effort in improving equitable student transfer is highly appreciated. Inquiries may be sent to Transfer@CCCCO.edu.

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