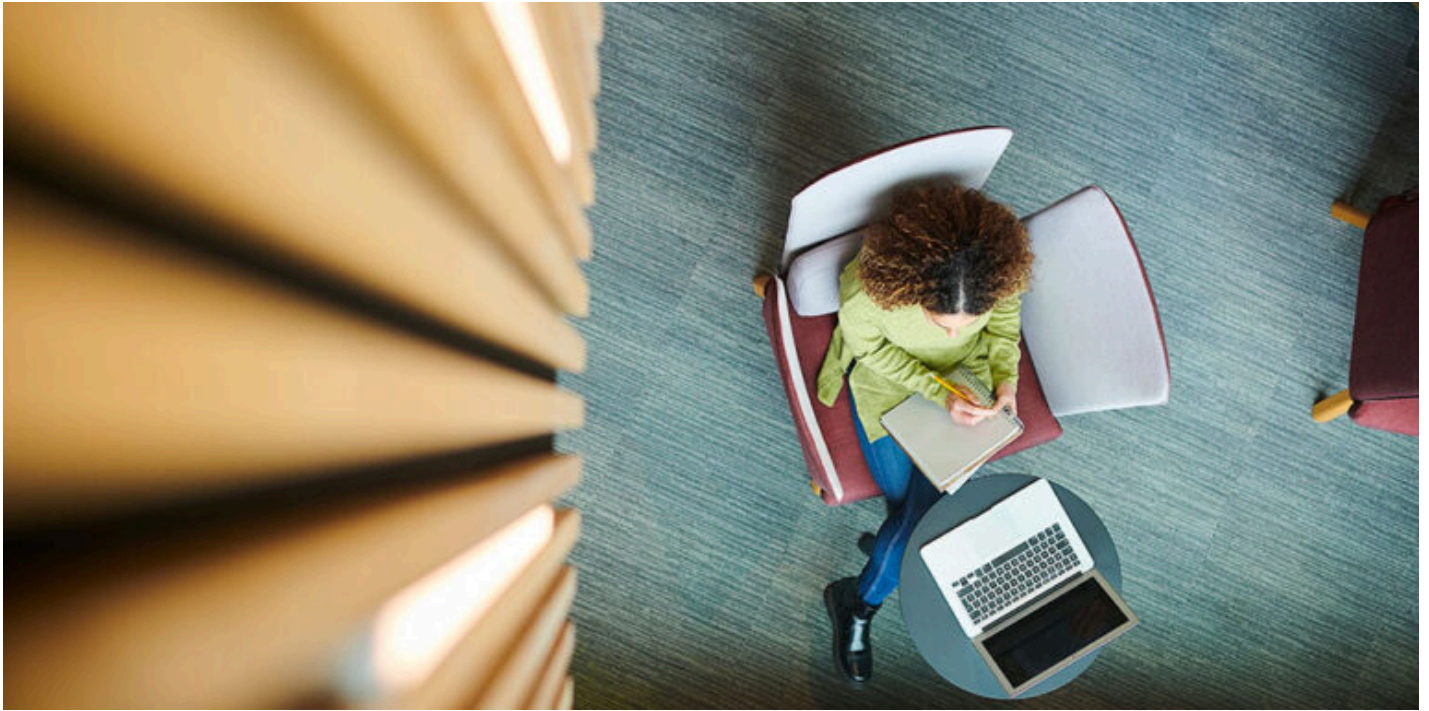




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# Strengthening California's Transfer Pathway

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# Key Takeaways

California's higher education system depends heavily on community colleges. California enrolls a much larger share of recent high school graduates in community colleges than other states—but is near the bottom when it comes to enrolling in four-year colleges and universities. Transferring to four-year institutions thus plays a vital role in boosting the number of bachelor's degree holders in the state and strengthening the economic security of California workers. In this study, we analyze current transfer trends and identify opportunities for improving transfer rates. Among our findings:

- **Most students who wish to transfer never do, with large variation across racial and ethnic groups.** About 19 percent of transfer-intending students transfer within four years of initial enrollment and 10 percent do so within two years. About one in four Asian and white transfer-intending students transfer within four years, compared to 13 percent of Black and 16 percent of Latino students.
- **Racial disparities in transfer are persistent, despite dramatic gains that have been made among students from underrepresented racial/ethnic groups.** Transfers from underrepresented racial/ethnic groups (i.e., Latino, Black, Native American, and Pacific Islander students) have grown dramatically at the University of California (UC) and California State University (CSU). Even so, these groups remain underrepresented among transfer cohorts compared to their proportion of all transfer-intending community college students. For example, Latinos made up half of first-time transfer-intending California community colleges students in fall 2019, but only 26 percent of transfer enrollees at UC in fall 2022.
- **Regional disparities also persist.** For example, the share of transfers to UC from the San Joaquin Valley (3%) and Inland Empire (6%) fall significantly below their share of the community college population (10% each).
- **Substantial increases in transfer enrollment were stifled by the pandemic.** From 2000 to 2020, the number of new transfer enrollees from California community colleges more than doubled at UC campuses and increased by more than 50 percent at CSU campuses. As a result of the pandemic, transfer enrollment declined markedly, dropping 7.6 percent between the two systems from 2021 to 2022.
- **Positive trends are emerging among students who successfully transfer.** Students who successfully transfer are increasingly likely to do so within two years of initial enrollment. While only 21 percent of students who transferred in 2015–16 did so within two years of initial enrollment, this percentage jumped to 31 percent in 2021–22. This trend is driven by increases in the shares of students (1) earning and transferring with an associate degree, specifically an Associate Degree for Transfer (up 11 percentage points between 2015–16 and 2021–22), (2) starting community college while still attending high school, known as dual enrollment (up 4 percentage points), and (3) completing transfer-level math and English courses in their first year of community college (up 14 and 17 percentage points, respectively).
- **Students who transfer to UC stand out.** Students who transfer to UC are more likely to start as dual enrollment students, take higher unit loads in their first year of community college, complete transfer-level math and English in their first year, and have a higher GPA than their peers who transfer to other institutions. Consequently, these students took less time to transfer. Compared to CSU transfers, students who transfer to UC are less likely to be Latino, Black, or low income.

In recent years, statewide, regional, and local initiatives by the California Community College, CSU, and UC systems have helped to expand transfer programs, increase access to and completion of transfer-level courses, streamline transfer pathways, and broaden dual enrollment opportunities. These efforts have

yielded notable progress. Ongoing work to develop a single transfer pathway and establish dual admission options is also promising. Still, persistent equity gaps and recent declines in transfer enrollment will necessitate continued reform and collaboration among all higher education institutions to ensure that more students can reach their goal of attaining a bachelor's degree.

## Introduction

California's 115 physical community colleges provide access to affordable higher education for students who wish to earn a degree or certificate or transfer to a four-year college or university. Community colleges play an outsized role in California as they are the primary point of access for students who may not have the opportunity to attend a four-year institution immediately after high school. As such, the community colleges reflect the full diversity of the state's population, enrolling proportionate shares of students from groups historically underrepresented among college graduates—including Latino, Black, and low-income students.

With 1.8 million students, the California community college system is the largest higher education institution in the country. According to the California Department of Education, 54 percent of the state's public high school students who enrolled in college in 2019–20 attended a California community college. As a result, California ranks among the top states in the country in the share of recent high school graduates who attend a community college and among the bottom in the share who attend a four-year college or university, making transfer an especially important pathway to a bachelor's degree. Indeed, about six in ten entering community college students have the goal of transferring to a four-year college to earn a bachelor's degree.<sup>1</sup>

Improving transfer rates from community colleges to four-year colleges has become an increasingly important policy goal in California, as policymakers, educators, and advocates recognize the role community colleges play in creating a diverse pipeline of students to four-year colleges and universities. And yet transfer students continue to face numerous challenges in transitioning to a four-year institution ([Bustillos 2017](#); [Cooper et al. 2020](#); [Fink 2021](#)). These challenges include inadequate transfer advising; insufficient transparency about whether community college credits transfer to a four-year institution (i.e., credit mobility); differing requirements for UC, CSU, and private institutions; lack of financial aid alignment between community colleges and four-year institutions; lack of progress in students' first year of community college (i.e., early momentum); and limited access to resources and support services.

In recent years, transfer rates have improved, but they remain far too low. Our previous research found that only 19 percent of students with a stated goal of transferring or attaining a degree transfer within four years; 28 percent do so within six years ([Johnson and Cuellar Mejia 2020](#)). Racial inequities in the composition of transfer students are particularly concerning. While Latino students account for 51 percent of students who

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1. Entering community college students are those who enrolled for the first time in a credit course and who were not part of dual enrollment programs in a California community college in the fall of the selected year. To identify degree/transfer-intending students, we use the informed goal that students declare in their first term of enrollment after having reviewed assessment results, gone through orientation, or received other services that help them understand what it would take to achieve the goal (SS01 in the MIS data). The proportion increases to seven of every ten entering community college students once we include those whose goal is to obtain a two-year associate degree without transfer. These figures are the average for entering cohorts between fall 2015 and 2021.

declare a degree/transfer goal, they make up 35 percent of those who transfer within four years; African American students represent 7 and 5 percent, respectively.

Considering that community colleges are the primary access point to higher education for most in our state, improving transfer rates is of critical importance for the state's economy and workforce. The benefits of obtaining a bachelor's degree are well-documented, including higher lifetime earnings, greater job stability, and improved social mobility (Cuellar Mejia et al. 2023). Once students succeed in transferring, they have high rates of earning a bachelor's degree, especially if they go to one of the state's public universities. For example, 89 percent of transfer students graduate within four years at UC and 77 percent do so at CSU.<sup>2</sup>

We are at a critical juncture for transfers. In 2021, Governor Newsom signed into law Assembly Bill (AB) 928, the Student Transfer Achievement Reform Act, to streamline the process by which California community college students may transfer to a four-year university. Importantly, this legislation created the Intersegmental Implementation Committee, a space for key actors—segment leaders, faculty, students, and educational equity and social justice experts—to work together and recommend practical solutions to improve the transfer pathway. This committee should help facilitate proactive, intentional collaboration among postsecondary institutions.

AB 928 has two other important provisions. First, in a direct effort to strengthen the Associate Degree for Transfer (ADT)—two-year associate degrees that are fully transferable and guarantee admission to the CSU system—AB 928 requires the community colleges to place transfer-intending students on an ADT pathway.<sup>3</sup> Second, the law also establishes a single lower-division general education transfer pathway of no more than 34 units, Cal-GETC, to clarify the academic requirements for transfer eligibility into both CSU and UC, which should make it easier for students to apply to both systems. Likewise, Assembly Bill 1111 (2021) requires implementation of a student-facing common course numbering (CCN) system across the community colleges on or before July 1, 2024, to create consistency across schools and maximize credit mobility for students. As such, AB 928 and AB 1111 address some of the issues that have historically prevented students from transferring.

In conjunction with recent reforms, continued improvements will require ongoing collaboration from all higher education institutions (i.e., community colleges, UC, CSU, and the state's private nonprofit colleges) to make the transfer process less onerous for students. With this in mind, this report is divided into four sections:

- In the first part of the report, we focus on four-year institutions, which are on the receiving side of the transfer equation. We start by describing the critical role of transfers in the production of bachelor's degrees in our state. Next, we review recent trends in transfer enrollment, including racial equity gaps and regional disparities, at UC and CSU before and after the pandemic (because of data limitations, most of our analysis centers on the state's public institutions).
- In the second part of the report, we focus on the sending side, namely, community college students who

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2. Four-year graduation rates for transfer students entering in 2013–14 were 62 percent at private nonprofit colleges in California and only 23 percent at private for-profit colleges (based on IPEDS data; contact authors for details). By the same data source, the rate at UC was 89 percent and the rate at CSU was 78 percent. Note that transfers according to the IPEDS definition could be from any postsecondary institution.

3. This is determined by whether students declare a transfer intention on their mandatory education plan and also depends on whether an ADT exists for the student's major.

were able to successfully transfer. Using student-level data from the California Community College (CCC) Chancellor's Office, we examine trends in transfer rates over time as well as the academic journeys and characteristics of students who transferred to a four-year institution. This analysis sheds light on how the Associate Degree for Transfer, AB 705 implementation, and dual enrollment may have helped improve the transfer pathway.

- In the third part of the report, we summarize the policies, programs, and initiatives that both community colleges and four-year institutions are undertaking to streamline the transfer pathway and increase the number and diversity of transfer students in their institutions. For this section, we incorporate information gleaned from interviews with admissions officials at six UC campuses and one CSU campus (see Technical Appendix A for details).
- Finally, we conclude by offering recommendations for colleges to consider as they move forward with efforts to improve the transfer pathway and increase the number of community college transfers.

## The Role of the State's Universities in Transfer

Transfer is a two-way street, requiring both sending and receiving institutions to work together. Community colleges prepare students to be eligible for transfer, and four-year colleges and universities admit transfer students so that they can earn a bachelor's degree. This role was enshrined in 1960 in the state's Master Plan for Higher Education. According to that plan, the state's community colleges "shall offer instruction through but not beyond the fourteenth-grade level" with one of the primary purposes to provide courses for "standard collegiate transfer to higher institutions." As part of this plan, the state's public universities were charged with increasing transfer from 1960 levels by limiting enrollment of first-time freshmen and even encouraging eligible students to start at a community college rather than at a university.

The California Master Plan also calls for UC to accommodate all qualified resident California community college transfer students. In particular, it specifies that UC maintain at least a 60:40 ratio of junior and senior students to freshman and sophomore students to ensure adequate upper-division spaces for CCC transfers. To do so, UC aims to enroll one new California resident transfer student for every two new California resident freshmen.

## Transfers Account for a Sizable Share of Enrollment in California

Today, largely because of the Master Plan, California depends on transfer more than almost any other state. First-time enrollees at California's public universities are more likely to be transfer students than at public universities in all but two other states (Figure 1). Indeed, transfer students are a critical component of enrollment at UC and CSU, where more than one-third of bachelor's degree recipients start at a community college.

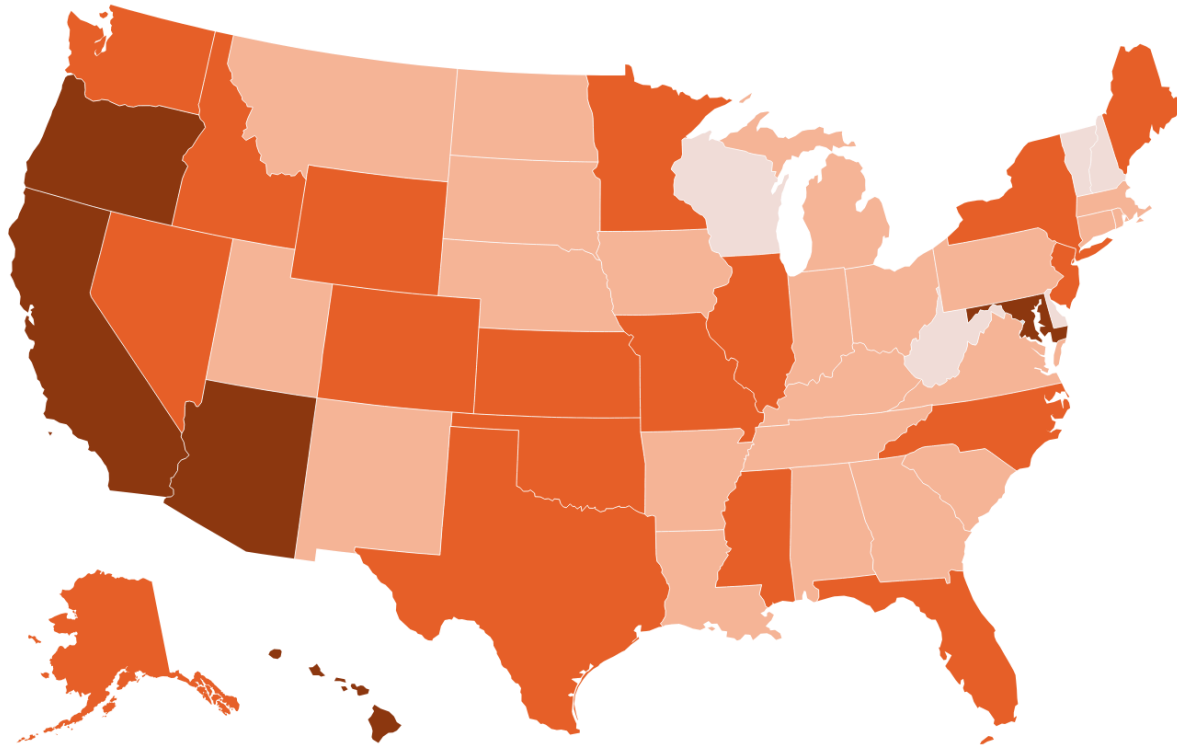


**Figure 1**

## California public universities enroll relatively high shares of transfer students

Share of transfer students among new enrollees at public universities

< 20%  20%–30%  30%–40%  ≥ 40%



**SOURCE:** Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS)

**NOTES:** Fall 2021 enrollment of new undergraduate students.

There is considerable variation across and within the two university systems. The share of California community college transfer students among newly enrolled fall undergraduates is much higher at CSU (40%) than at UC (27%).<sup>4</sup> However, within the CSU system, only 14 percent of newly enrolled undergraduates at Cal Poly San Luis Obispo were transfer students from CCC in fall 2022, compared to 59 percent at Cal State East Bay. Within the UC system, UCLA had the highest share of transfer students from CCC among newly enrolled undergraduates (33%), while UC Merced had the lowest share (8%).

Private nonprofit colleges also play an important role in transfer. In fall 2021, 15 percent of newly enrolled transfer students in California attended private nonprofit colleges, according to IPEDS. Again, the range in transfers varies widely, from transfers making up 99 percent of newly enrolled undergraduate students at National University to very few transfer students at Stanford (3%) or Cal Tech (1%). In general, highly selective

4. Fall 2022 shares according to the [UC Information Center Undergraduate Admissions Summary](#) and CSU Self-Enrollment Dashboard Enrollment Summary.

private colleges accept few transfers. One notable exception is the University of Southern California, where 27 percent of newly enrolled undergraduates were transfer students.<sup>5</sup>

These differences across campuses reflect selectivity, enrollment goals, student demand, outreach, and transfer agreements with local community colleges. For example, some CSU campuses are “impacted” (not able to accommodate all eligible applicants) for freshmen but not for transfers. Meanwhile, most, but not all, UC campuses have transfer articulation agreements with local community colleges, which can affect how easy or difficult it is for students to transfer. Geography also matters, with some regions having a greater share of community college students than others.

## Transfer Enrollment Declined in 2022 after Previous Growth

After many years of strong increases, recent declines in community college transfer enrollment in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic have raised concerns about the future direction of transfer in the state. About 87,500 community college students transferred to the state’s public universities in 2021–22, a 7.6 percent drop from the prior year. This decline in new transfer enrollment was at least partially a consequence of enrollment losses at the community colleges during the pandemic. Between fall 2019 and fall 2021, enrollment among transfer-intending community college students declined by 20 percent ([Perez et al. 2022](#)).<sup>6</sup>

Enrollment losses, especially as they continue beyond the pandemic, will inevitably affect the size of future transfer cohorts. However, recent changes in remediation policies have also led to increases in the number of students reaching key milestones (such as completing math and English requirements) on the way to transfer, which could help limit declines in transfer enrollment.

## University of California

Over the long term, the number of transfer enrollees at the University of California has risen substantially. Between fall 2000 and fall 2020, the number of newly enrolled transfer students from California community colleges more than doubled, with an average annual growth of 4.2 percent. Several policies, including state funding, played a large role in the growth. However, the number of new community college transfer students declined in the fall of 2021 and 2022 (1.4% and 9.5%, respectively), increasing the systemwide new California resident freshmen-to-transfers ratio from 2.0 in fall 2020 to 2.2 in fall 2022.<sup>7</sup>

As shown in Figure 2, large increases in the number of transfer enrollees occurred at two points in time. First, in fall 2009 and 2010, UC agreed to enroll many more California resident transfer students as part of a compact with then-Governor Brown. The number of transfer enrollees increased 28 percent (3,400

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5. [According to USC](#), 47 percent of the institution’s transfer students are from California community colleges.

6. For context, over the same time period the number of fall freshmen applications and enrollees continued to increase at UC (15% and 13%, respectively) but decreased at CSU (-13% and -9%).

7. Notably, freshman enrollees increased by 10.7 percent in fall 2021 due to the elimination of the SAT/ACT in UC admissions. It should also be noted that UC [calculates new California resident freshmen-to-transfers ratios](#) using all California resident transfers, including those that transferred from schools other than California community colleges. However, UC notes that nearly all (96%) of California resident transfer students in 2020–21 came from CCCs. Additionally, UC uses school-year transfer counts since some transfers do enroll for the first time in the winter or spring terms. Full-year transfer counts are not yet available for the 2022–23 school year. The full-year ratio for 2020–21 was 1.9.



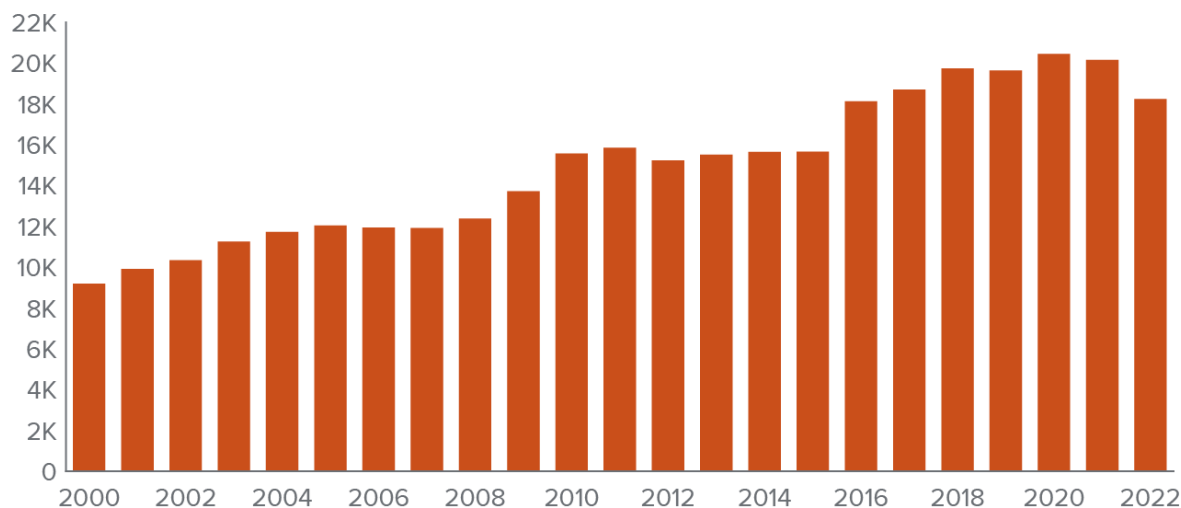
students) between fall 2008 and fall 2011. Second, in fall 2016 UC enrolled almost 2,500 more transfer students, a 16 percent annual increase. This increase reflects an historic agreement made during the 2015 budget process with state lawmakers that provided UC with the fiscal stability it needed to expand access. Because freshmen enrollment also increased (14.3%), the share of California community college transfer students among all newly enrolled students did not change much. In fact, this share has hovered around 28 percent over the last 10 years.

UC has made significant progress in enrolling more transfers, moving from a systemwide new California resident freshmen-to-transfers ratio of 2.7:1 in fall 2008 to 2.0:1 in fall 2019, meeting the 2:1 target ratio outlined in the Master Plan. However, many UC campuses do not meet this ratio; only UCLA, UC Davis, UC Irvine, and UC San Diego met this goal in fall 2022 (see Technical Appendix B, Figure B1).<sup>8</sup>

**Figure 2**

## Recent declines in community college transfers at UC came after many years of sustained growth

Number of transfer enrollees at UC



**SOURCE:** University of California - Information Center.

**NOTES:** Fall of each year. California community colleges transfers; fall enrollees make up on average 97 percent of CCC transfer enrollment in a given academic year.

Will the pandemic-induced decline in transfer enrollees persist? The latest applications data suggest that it might: applications for transfer from California community college students fell by almost 4 percent from fall 2022 to fall 2023. In response to this decline, five UC campuses (San Diego, Santa Barbara, Santa Cruz, Merced, and Riverside) extended their deadlines for transfer applications. These efforts helped limit the decline, but additional efforts are needed to improve application rates from eligible students.

8. Using full-year transfer counts, the ratios are 2.4 for 2008–09 and 1.9 for 2019–20.

## California State University

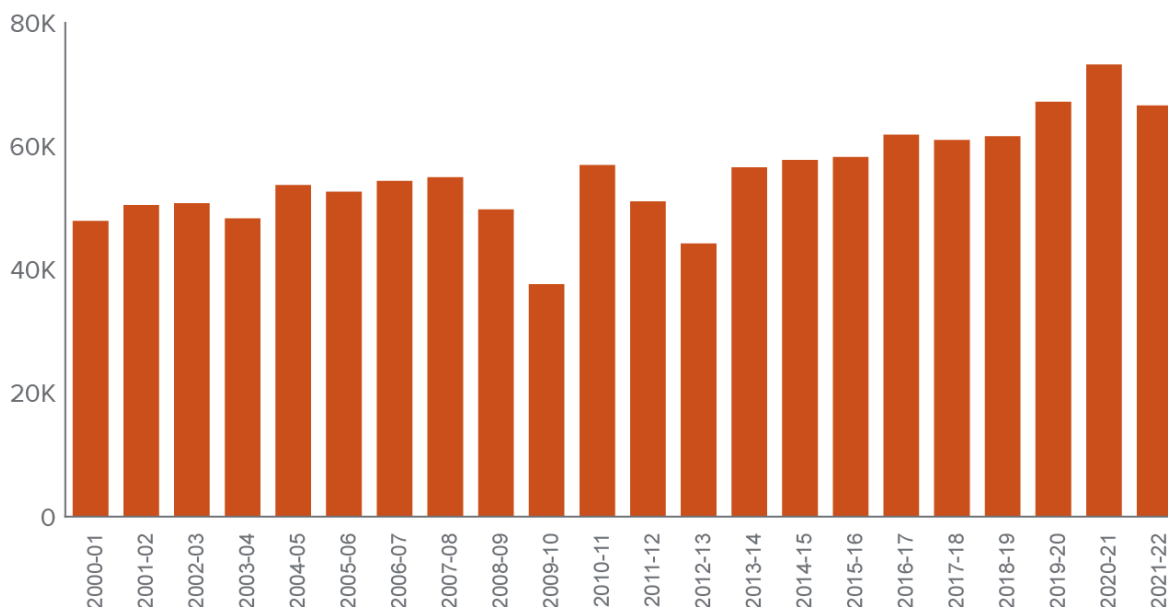
Transfer has been an even more important source of students at CSU. As outlined in the Master Plan, CSU is the state's broad-access undergraduate institution for both first-time freshmen and community college transfers. While 40 percent of new fall undergraduates at CSU are transfer students, this share increases to about half of students when taking into account enrollment over the entire school year. Compared to UC, transfer enrollment at CSU has been more volatile over the last two decades, especially between 2007–08 and 2013–14, when we saw large annual declines and increases. This variation was partly related to volatile state budgets during this time period, which affected transfer enrollment more than freshmen enrollment.

Recently, after two years of 9 percent annual increases and reaching a record high of over 73,000 new transfer enrollees in 2020–21, CSU saw a 9 percent decline to less than 67,000 in 2021–22 (Figure 3). Fall 2022 data suggest the decline continued, with the total number of newly enrolled transfer students dropping 21 percent to only 49,500 from fall 2020 to fall 2022. These losses occurred even as the number of first-time freshmen increased 5.2 percent to over 65,100, leading to the largest difference in freshmen and transfer numbers in several years.<sup>9</sup> Many CSU campuses extended the deadline for transfer applications to try to stem the losses.

**Figure 3**

### The number of new transfer enrollees at CSU was growing prior to the 2021–22 decline

Number of transfer enrollees at CSU



**SOURCE:** California State University - Statistical Reports.

**NOTES:** School-year California community college transfers.

9. [CSU Enrollment Dashboard](#) numbers. For reference, 83 percent of transfers in fall 2022 were juniors.

From 2013–14 to 2020–21, the number of transfer enrollees increased at every campus except Humboldt, Chico, San Francisco, and Sonoma (Figure 4).<sup>10</sup> And even at these campuses, the declines were fairly modest. At the other extreme, five campuses (Bakersfield, Pomona, San Bernardino, San Marcos, and Stanislaus) saw increases in transfer enrollees of 50 percent or more. To some extent, these differences mirror population growth; the pace of growth in the Inland Empire and San Joaquin Valley outstrips that of San Francisco and the far north of the state.

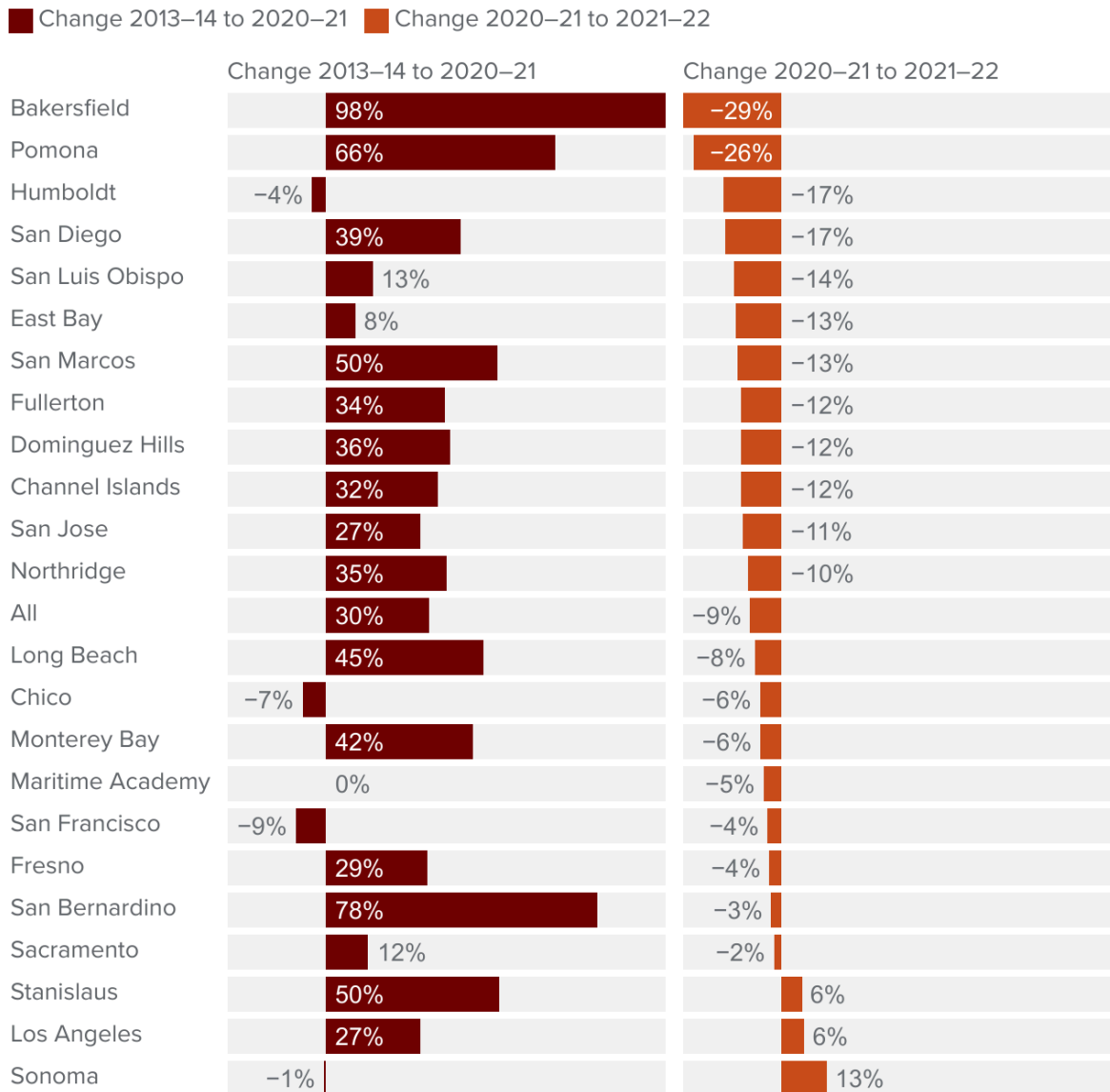
But the pandemic and declines in community college enrollment contributed to a widespread and dramatic reversal from 2020–21 to 2021–22, with 20 of the 23 campuses of the CSU system showing declines in the number of transfer students. The long-term effects of declines in community college enrollment are likely to affect future transfer numbers as well.

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10. The pandemic's effects were felt more strongly in fall 2021 than fall 2020 because students had been admitted to the fall 2020 term largely before the scale of the pandemic was known.

**Figure 4**

## Pandemic-related declines in transfer enrollment were felt across the CSU system



**SOURCE:** Authors' calculations using California State University - Statistical Reports.

**NOTES:** School-year California community college transfers.

## Racial and Ethnic Representation Has Improved but Disparities Remain

The share of newly enrolled transfer students from underrepresented racial/ethnic groups (i.e., Latino, Black, Native American, and Pacific Islander students) has grown dramatically over time at UC and CSU.

At UC, the share of students from underrepresented groups almost doubled from fall 2000 to fall 2022 for both freshmen and transfers (Figure 5).<sup>11</sup> Notably, the proportion of transfer enrollees who are white has

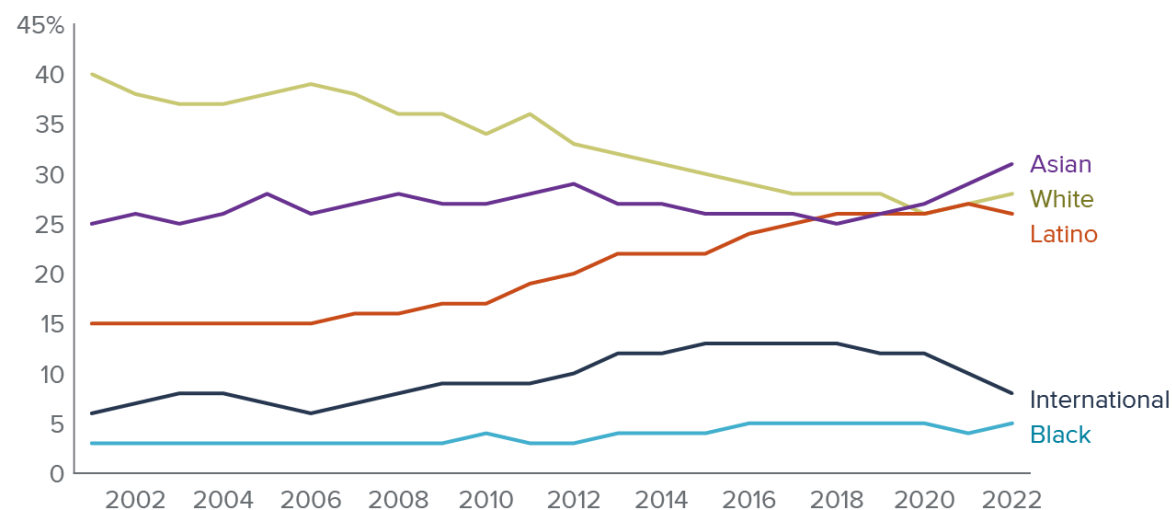
11. In fall 2022, 32 percent of both new transfer enrollees and freshmen were from underrepresented groups. Compared to freshman, community college transfer enrollees are less likely to be Asian (31% vs. 38%) and more likely to be white (28% vs. 18%).

fallen while the proportion who are Latino has increased, reflecting statewide demographic trends. Even so, Latino, Black, Pacific Islander, and Native American students remain underrepresented among transfer enrollees in comparison to their share of transfer-intending community college students. For example, Latinos are particularly underrepresented considering that they made up half of first-time transfer-intending California community colleges students in fall 2019, but only 26 percent of transfer enrollees in fall 2022.<sup>12</sup>

The 9.5 percent decline that we observed between fall 2021 and fall 2022 in CCC transfer enrollees at UC was driven largely by a 34 percent decline in international transfer students. Indeed, this was the fourth decline in a row in this group. Over the last few years, the share of international students among the transfer population at UC has declined, while the share of Asian domestic students has risen. The share of international students went from 12 percent in 2019 to 8 percent in 2022. Meanwhile, Asian domestic students now represent 31 percent of all CCC transfer enrollees, up from 26 percent in fall 2019. The pandemic, which affected international travel, and new policies that restricted institutional aid to in-state residents only are key factors in the decline of international students.

**Figure 5**  
**The share of transfer enrollees at UC from underrepresented groups has grown**

Racial/ethnic breakdown of California community colleges transfer enrollees



**SOURCE:** University of California - Information Center.

**NOTES:** Fall of each year. Native American and Pacific Islander students represented 0.7 and 0.3 percent, respectively, of transfer enrollees in fall 2022 and their representation has remained around those levels during this period.

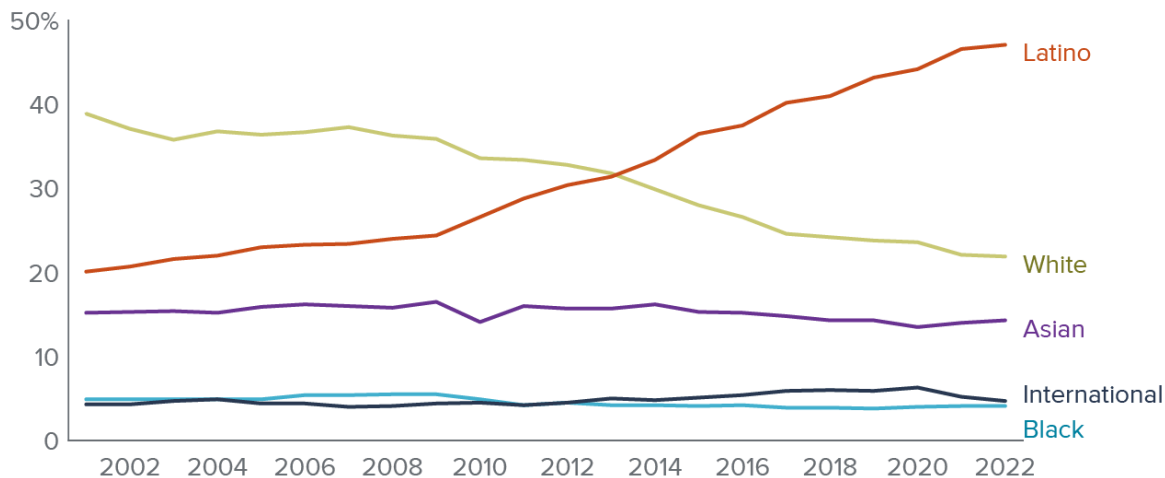
At CSU, the share of newly enrolled transfer students from underrepresented groups increased from 36 percent in 2012–13 to 52 percent in 2021–22. This increase was mainly driven by growth in Latino transfer students, whose share increased from 31.4 percent to 47.1 percent (Figure 6). For all other underrepresented

12. The comparison between racial/ethnic composition of these two cohorts is imperfect because UC has international students as a separate category while the CCC does not.

groups, shares have been relatively flat. To a large extent, these patterns reflect the changing demographics of the state. Transfer students at CSU are about as likely to come from underrepresented groups as first-time freshmen. Even so, Latinos remain underrepresented among transfer students in comparison with their share of all entering transfer-intending community college students.

**Figure 6**  
**Latino students have made important gains among CSU transfer enrollees**

Racial/ethnic breakdown of transfer enrollees at CSU



**SOURCE:** California State University, Reports and Analytics.

**NOTES:** Native American and Pacific Islander students represented 0.2 and 0.3 percent, respectively, of transfer enrollees in academic year 2021–22 and their representation has remained around those levels during these period. Academic years in the x-axis; 2022 corresponds to academic year 2021–22.

## Regional Disparities Persist in Transfer Enrollment

Transfer outcomes also vary widely across the state. This suggests that where students attend community college may significantly affect their chances of ultimately attending a four-year university, especially a UC campus, and that there is potentially an untapped supply of transfer-intending and eligible students in certain parts of the state.<sup>13</sup>

Variation in transfer may be influenced by disparities in geographic access to the state’s four-year public institutions. For instance, limited campus availability in certain regions restricts student choice and narrows opportunities for potential transfers, who are more likely to live at home compared to first-time freshmen. Financial barriers and insufficient aid make it hard for students who are willing to move across the state to do so. Moreover, uneven outreach from four-year institutions, especially in regions with fewer campuses,

13. To some degree, this regional variation in outcomes reflects geographic disparities in academic preparation among community college students and in the strength of the transfer pipeline, including the level of access to transfer-level courses. Such factors are mostly out of the hands of the state’s four-year institutions and instead are the current concern of policy reform at the community colleges; bills like AB 705 and AB 1705 aim to address these issues.



may also constrain students' awareness of potential transfer destinations, making them less likely to apply. Taken together, these geographic-related obstacles may inhibit growth in transfer enrollment.

### Transfers tend to come from nearby community colleges

For individual UC and CSU campuses, transfer applicants are disproportionately likely to come from within the campus region (see Technical Appendix B, Figure B2). As a result, transfer admissions and enrollment are also regionally concentrated. In fact, while the regional distribution of admitted students largely reflects the distribution of applicants at UC and CSU campuses, the distribution of enrollees is even more concentrated.

At Fresno State University and CSU Stanislaus, for example, more than eight in ten transfer enrollees come from the San Joaquin Valley. Such patterns are similar at UC. While the Bay Area accounts for 34.7 and 37.6 percent of UC Berkeley's transfer applicants and admits, respectively, the region accounts for nearly half of UC Berkeley's eventual enrollees. Even at UCLA, the UC campus that receives the most transfer applicants, Los Angeles County accounts for a majority of its transfer enrollment.

Additionally, transfer students tend to enroll in campuses closer to home even when admitted to campuses further away (see Technical Appendix B, Table B1). At all the state's institutions, the average distance between students' community colleges of origin and four-year campuses is significantly lower among transfer enrollees compared to transfer applicants and admits. These outcomes support the hypothesis that a combination of place-bound constraints and students' preferences for staying local influence transfer destinations in the state.<sup>14</sup>

### Regional disparities are most stark in UC transfer enrollment

At CSU, systemwide transfer enrollment closely matches the regional distribution of the state's community college population, likely a result of the fact that students in all regions have relatively close access to a nearby campus. On the other hand, shares of UC transfers from several regions—including the Inland Empire and San Joaquin Valley—lag behind their shares of the community college population (Figure 7). While a little over 10 percent of community college students attend school in each of these regions, only 6 percent (Inland Empire) and 3 percent (San Joaquin Valley) of all students who transfer to UC come from these two regions. In contrast, transfers from the Bay Area are greatly overrepresented: about 18 percent of community college students are in the Bay Area, but 29 percent of UC transfers come from this region. Other coastal regions, including Los Angeles County, Orange County, and the Central Coast are also overrepresented among UC transfers.

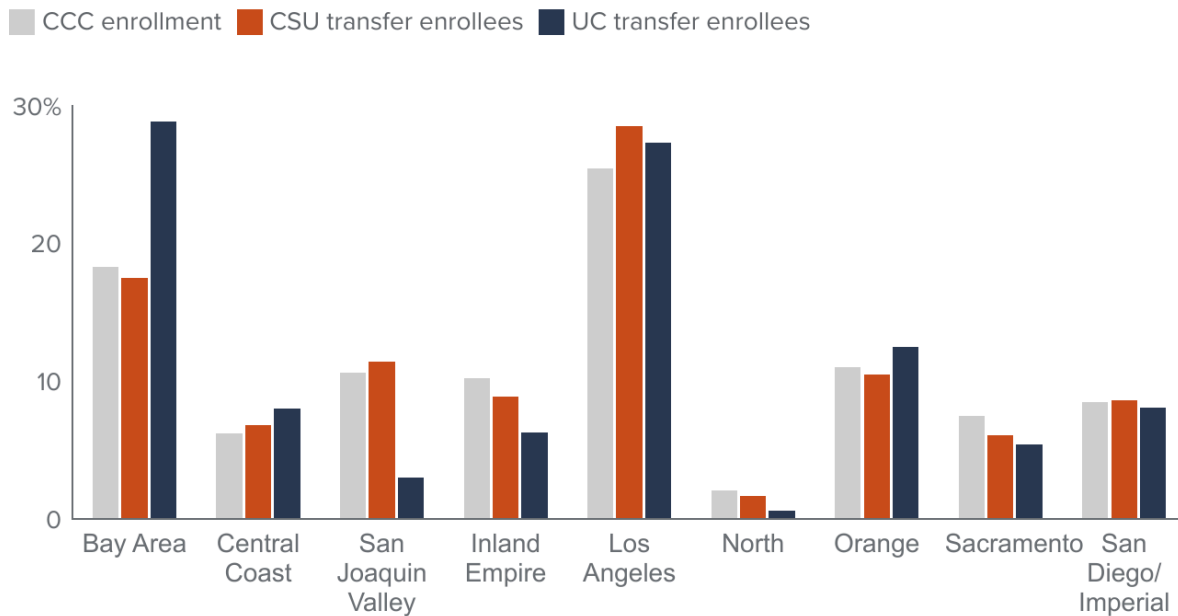
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14. "Place-bound" students are defined as those with a perceived difficulty in leaving their immediate geographic area to attend school.

**Figure 7**

## The Bay Area, LA, Orange County, and the Central Coast account for a disproportionately large share of transfers to UC

Share of California community college students



**SOURCE:** Authors' calculations using publicly available data from CCC, UC, and CSU. Segment-level fall 2022 transfer data from UC Information Center: Admissions by Source School and CSU Data Center Institutional Research & Analyses: New Undergraduate Transfers from California Community Colleges or Other Institutions (Institution of Origin and CSU Destinations). Fall 2022 California community college data from the CCCCO Management Information Systems Data Mart: Enrollment Status Summary Report.

**NOTES:** Estimates reflect the share of community college students that attended college in a given region and the share of CSU and UC transfer enrollees in each campus from community colleges in that region for the fall 2022 term. Community colleges are grouped into nine distinct regions based on their location within the state.

Such outcomes compound other regional disparities, as students in the Inland Empire and San Joaquin Valley already face relatively low rates of [college readiness](#) in high school and [freshmen enrollment](#) at UC. These regions disproportionately rely on the community college system as an initial access point to higher education, making transfer a critical pathway to bachelor's degree completion for recent high school graduates.

### UC campuses are less geographically accessible than CSU

With 23 locations spread across all regions of the state, CSU sees greater regional concentration of transfer applications and enrollment than UC, which has nine undergraduate campuses (see Technical Appendix B, Figure B2). Among fall 2022 transfers, the average distance between a student's community college and eventual four-year campus was 52.3 miles for CSU transfers, compared to 122.8 miles for UC transfers. This gap in average distance is larger among transfers from the San Joaquin Valley—53.9 miles for CSU transfers, and 137.7 miles for UC transfers (see Technical Appendix B, Table B1).

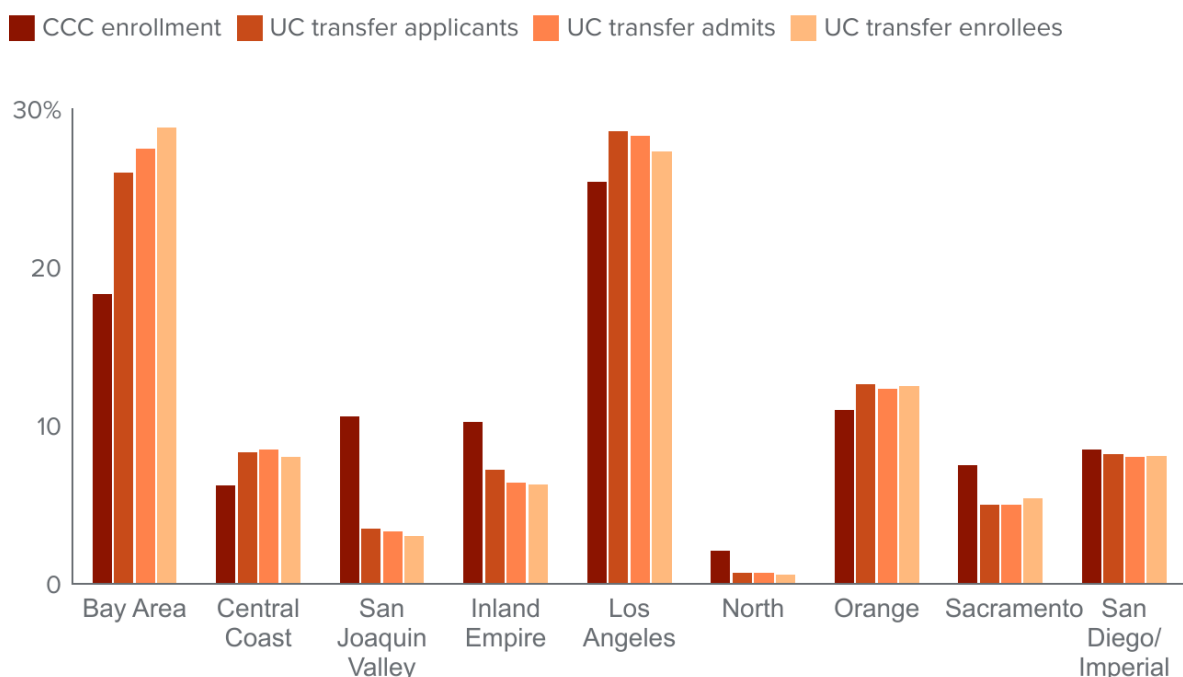
## Applications appear to drive regional patterns in enrollment at UC

The difference between the share of UC transfers from the Inland Empire and San Joaquin Valley and the share of the state's community college students in these regions is largely accounted for by a disproportionately low share of applicants (Figure 8). Comparatively, CSU receives a relatively proportionate distribution of applicants from all regions and admissions rates are relatively similar across all parts of the state (see Technical Appendix B, Figure B3 and Table B2).

**Figure 8**

### Regional disparities in transfer enrollment at UC can be mostly explained by disparities in applications

Share of students



**SOURCE:** Authors' calculations using publicly available data from CCC and UC. Segment-level fall 2022 transfer data from UC Information Center: Admissions by Source School. Fall 2022 California community college data from the CCCCO Management Information Systems Data Mart: Enrollment Status Summary Report.

**NOTES:** Estimates reflect the share of community college students who attended college in a given region and the share of UC transfer applicants, admits, and enrollees in each campus from community colleges in that region for the fall 2022 term. Community colleges are grouped into nine distinct regions based on their location within the state.

In particular, UC Riverside and UC Merced—the only two UCs located in these underrepresented regions—have relatively low transfer enrollment despite high transfer admission rates. Both campuses have consistently had relatively high new California resident freshmen-to-transfer ratios and do not meet the 2:1 goal laid out in the Master Plan. These ratios increased during the pandemic, especially from fall 2021 to fall 2022, as applications for transfers declined significantly (see Technical Appendix B, Figure B1). Among the

nine UC campuses, UC Riverside receives the third-lowest number of transfer applications while UC Merced receives the lowest number (representing only 3% of all UC transfer applications received in fall 2022).<sup>15</sup>

More broadly, the underrepresentation of the San Joaquin Valley and Inland Empire among UC transfers is longstanding and consistently correlated with a disproportionately low share of applicants from these regions (see Technical Appendix B, Figure B3). In contrast, these regions have historically been equitably represented among CSU transfers. There are many possible explanations for why transfer applications from these regions are disproportionately low at UC, including the possibility that students there have a relatively lower likelihood of being transfer-intending or UC-eligible.<sup>16</sup> In fact, admission rates among all UC transfer applicants from the Inland Empire and San Joaquin Valley are somewhat lower (70.9% and 67.8%, respectively) than they are among applicants from other regions in the state (76.3%). Such outcomes suggest that regional disparities in academic preparation and transfer eligibility, likely due to differences in the quality of schooling and the strength of the transfer pipeline, may play a role in widening regional differences in transfer.<sup>17</sup>

At the same time, limited availability of campuses, including limited access in underrepresented regions, may be inhibiting the growth of transfers at UC. On the one hand, students from underrepresented regions may not be applying to UC campuses because they are geographically inaccessible. Alternatively, limited campus availability may cause students from other regions to apply to UC Merced and UC Riverside, crowding out regional students.<sup>18</sup> However, considering admission rates among transfer applicants to UC Merced from the San Joaquin Valley and to UC Riverside from the Inland Empire are in line with state averages, this explanation seems less plausible.

Increasing overall applications to UC from students in the San Joaquin Valley and Inland Empire, and enrollment at UC among admitted applicants at regional UC campuses, will be crucial.<sup>19</sup> Since limited campus availability across the state is currently a fixed challenge, increasing transfer students will likely necessitate a regional approach to outreach and recruitment that encourages more students to apply and removes the barriers to transfer that may uniquely inhibit students from underrepresented regions.

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15. It is possible that local CSU campuses and out-of-region UC campuses are chosen in lieu of local UC campuses for students in these regions. Because our data do not include information on applications and admission decisions for individual students, we are unable to assess how students are making decisions across regions and campuses.

16. It should be noted that slight regional disparities in rates of transfer intention do exist. In fall 2019, 57 percent of credit-enrolled students in the San Joaquin Valley had a goal to transfer compared to 62 percent of all students in the state. In the Inland Empire, a higher-than-average share of students were transfer-intending (65%). Nevertheless, despite these disparities, the share of enrollment accounted for by these regions is nearly identical when examining all students or only transfer-intending students as the population of interest. Thus, disparities in rates of transfer intention do not seem to explain the disparities we see in transfer outcomes.

17. A critical question is how many students might be eligible to transfer but never apply. Answering that question requires intersegmental data that is not yet available.

18. The regional concentration of applicants to UC Merced is much less pronounced than it is for CSU campuses in the San Joaquin Valley. Similarly, the concentration of applicants to CSU Bakersfield from the Inland Empire, relative to the share of community college students who attend school there, is more than two times greater than it is at UC Riverside (see Technical Appendix B, Figure B2).

19. Northern California and Sacramento are also underrepresented among transfers to UC, though disparities are much smaller than they are for students from the San Joaquin Valley and Inland Empire. Nevertheless, regional efforts to increase transfer should also ensure that students from these regions have equitable access to a UC.

# Academic Journeys of Successful Transfer Students

In this section, we examine the characteristics of students who successfully transferred to a four-year institution and their academic journeys through community college. We also assess how student characteristics and students' academic journeys vary by the type of four-year institution that students eventually attend.

For this analysis, we rely on student-level administrative data from the Chancellor's Office Management Information System (MIS) together with its "Transfer Bucket," which contains data reported by CSU, UC, and the National Student Clearinghouse. We focus on community college students who transferred to a four-year institution between academic years 2015–16 and 2021–22. It is important to note that we only account for the first academic year that a transfer student attends a four-year institution, and we do not account for students who "swirl" (i.e., students who move back and forth between multiple institutions).

We restrict our sample to students who earned at least 12 units as a non-special admit student (i.e., students concurrently enrolled in high school are excluded) at any community college (and at any time) and who were enrolled in community college the year prior to transferring. We are able to observe these students' course-taking behavior, unit accumulation, and degree attainment through their community college journey up to the point of transfer. In addition, the MIS data provides detailed information on student demographics, financial aid, and participation in special programs for underrepresented student groups, such as Mesa, Umoja, or Puente.<sup>20</sup>

In our previous research on transfers ([Johnson and Cuellar Mejia 2020](#)), we examined four-year transfer rates, which required looking at the cohort of students who began community college four years prior to the most recent transfer data available. The advantage of the approach taken in this report is that we examine students who transferred as recently as academic year 2021–22 and trace back their academic trajectory in the community college system. Therefore, this approach provides a better assessment of whether recent reforms and efforts are streamlining the transfer process and making transfer more accessible to a more racially diverse group of students.

It is important to keep in mind that in this section we are focusing on students with a successful transfer outcome, which is still a relatively small fraction of all community students with the goal of transferring. Figure 9 shows that only about 19 percent of transfer-intending students transfer within four years of initial

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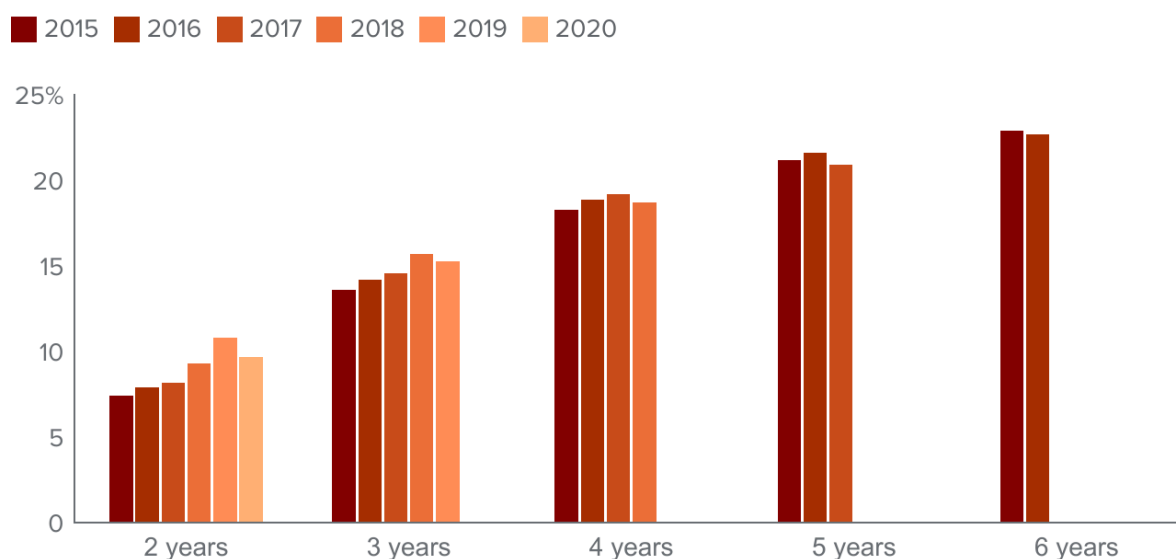
20. [The Puente Project](#) is an intersegmental program that is co-sponsored by the University of California and the California Community College Chancellor's Office. The program is headquartered at UC Berkeley, where Puente leadership staff work closely with the site team partners (English instructors and counselors) to implement the program at middle schools, high schools, and community colleges across the states of California and Texas. Its mission is to increase the number of educationally underrepresented students who enroll in four-year colleges and universities, earn college degrees, and return to the community as mentors and leaders to future generations. The program is interdisciplinary in approach, with writing, counseling, and mentoring components. [Umoja](#) is a community and critical resource dedicated to enhancing the cultural and educational experiences of African American and other students. Umoja actively serves and promotes student success for all students through a curriculum and pedagogy responsive to the legacy of the African and African American Diasporas. [MESA](#) (Mathematics, Engineering, Science Achievement) Programs provide academic support, resources, and career exploration to underserved and underrepresented students majoring in calculus-based STEM fields who seek to transfer to a four-year institution.

enrollment and 10 percent do so within two years.<sup>21</sup> Moreover, racial/ethnic gaps in transfer rates are large, and variation across colleges is wide. About one in four Asian and white transfer-intending students transfer within four years, compared to less than 16 percent of Latino students and 13 percent of Black students. Transfer rates have changed little over time, though two-year rates have increased more substantially, and equity gaps have remained consistently large since 2015.<sup>22</sup>

**Figure 9**

## Transfer rates are very low

Share of transfer-intending students who successfully transfer within different time frames, by CCC entering cohort



**SOURCE:** Authors' calculations using MIS data and the CCC National Student Clearinghouse data match.

**NOTES:** Transfer counts are restricted to students who successfully completed at least 12 units as a non-special admit student in any college in the system and who were enrolled in the system in the year prior to transferring to a four-year institution.

## Changes over Time

We start by providing an overview of how academic trajectories have changed across cohorts of transferring students. This section focuses on changes in the composition of students transferring rather than on the absolute number of transfers. For reference, the number of students who successfully transferred in our sample grew on average by 4 percent annually between 2015–16 and 2020–21, and then declined 7 percent in 2021–22 (from 99,700 students in 2020–21 to 92,700 in 2021–22). Most of the growth between 2015–16 and 2020–21 was driven by an 8 percent increase in the number of Latino students transferring, while the decline between 2020–21 and 2021–22 was felt across racial/ethnic groups.

21. These transfer rates are lower than the ones we reported in our 2020 report mainly because here we are only counting as transfer those students who successfully completed at least 12 units as a non-special admit student in any college in the system prior to transferring and who were enrolled in the system in the year prior transferring.

22. Contact authors for systemwide and college-level transfer rates over time by demographic and student groups.

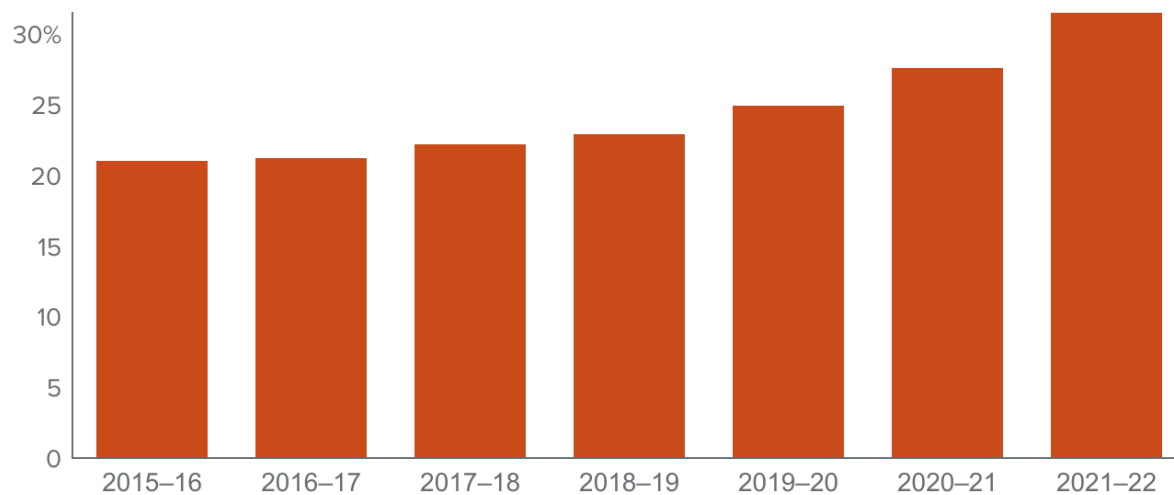


## Students are transferring faster

While only 21 percent of students who transferred in 2015–16 did so within two years of initial enrollment, this percentage jumped to 31 percent in academic year 2021–22 (Figure 10). Three factors could be contributing to this trend: first, more students starting in ADT paths; second, more students starting their college journey while still in high school; and third, placement changes in the community college system that have allowed more students to bypass remediation and start directly in transfer-level math and English courses.

**Figure 10**

### An increasing share of successful transfer students took two years or less to transfer



**SOURCE:** Authors' calculations using MIS data and the CCC National Student Clearinghouse data match.

**NOTES:** Restricted to students who successfully completed at least 12 units as a non-special admit student in any college in the system and who were enrolled in the system in the year prior transferring to a four-year institution.

It is important to keep in mind that for this analysis we are focusing only on the students with a successful outcome. Among all transfer-intending students who started in a community college in academic year 2019–20, only 10 percent transferred within two years of initial enrollment.<sup>23</sup>

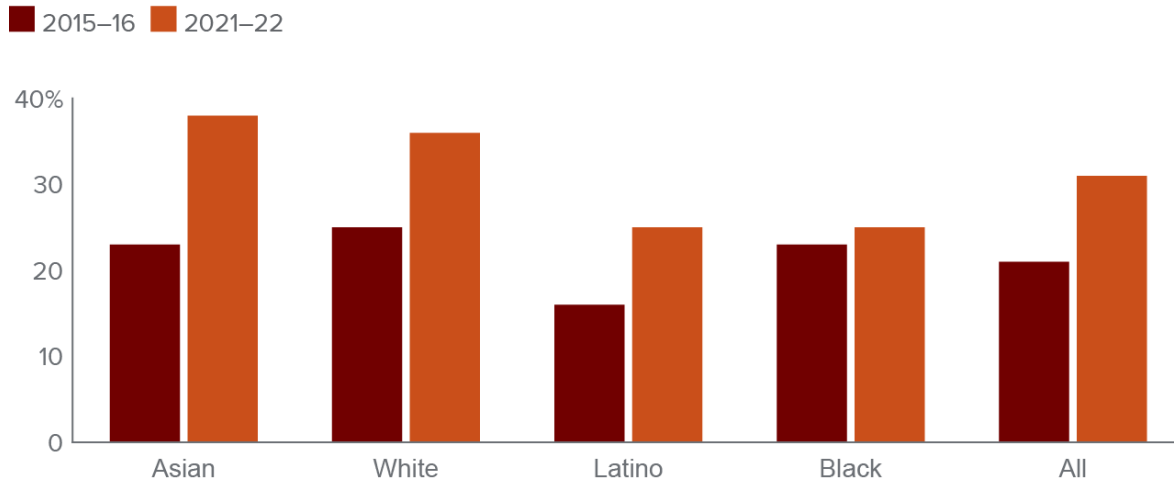
Not only are successful transfer students leaving the CCC system sooner, but the racial composition of this group of students is evolving. Figure 11 shows the share of successful transfer students who were able to transfer within two years of initial enrollment by race/ethnicity for two groups of students, those who transferred in 2015–16 and those who transferred in 2021–22. Among all the Asian students who successfully transferred, the share transferring within two years increased from 23 percent to 38 percent. In contrast, among Black students the share increased only 2 percentage points from 23 percent to 25 percent. Among white and Latino students, the increase was 12 and 9 percentage points, respectively.

23. This share is 4 percentage points higher than the two-year transfer rate among students in the 2015–16 entering cohort.

**Figure 11**

## The improvement in time to transfer has been larger among Asian students

Share of successful transfer students transferring within two years, by race/ethnicity



**SOURCE:** Authors' calculations using MIS data and the CCC National Student Clearinghouse data match.

**NOTES:** Restricted to students who successfully completed at least 12 units as a non-special admit student in any college in the system and who were enrolled in the system in the year prior transferring to a four-year institution.

These changes suggest that the racial composition of the students who transferred within two years changed. Of all students who transferred within two years, Latino and Asian students gained participation relative to white and Black students. Latinos represented 28 percent of those who transferred in 2015–16 and 36 percent of those who transferred in 2021–22. Meanwhile, Asian students' representation increased from 18 percent to 20 percent.

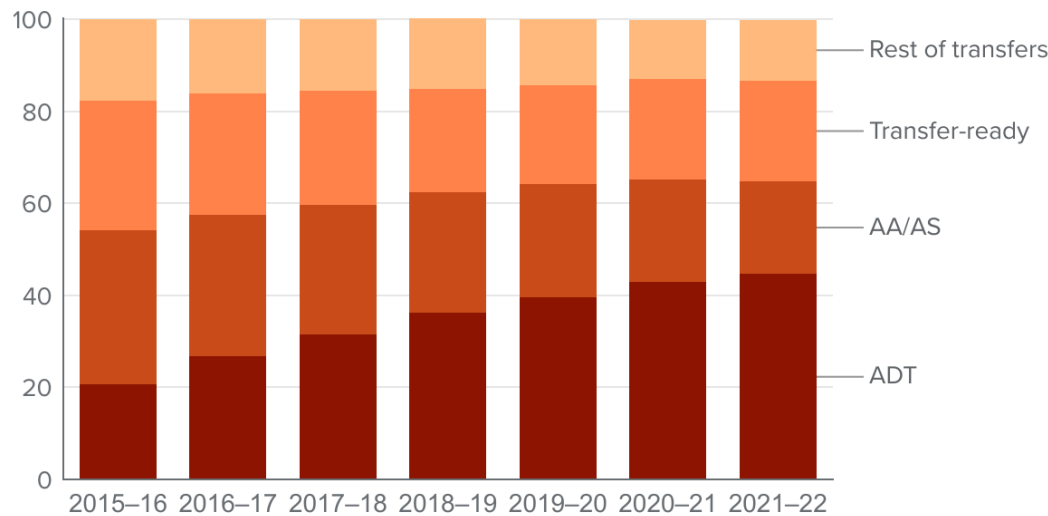
### A larger share of transfer students are earning a degree before transferring

Around two-thirds of successful transfer students in 2021–22 (65%) attained an associate degree before leaving the community college system, 11 percentage points higher than students who transferred in academic year 2015–16 (Figure 12). Moreover, there has been a complete shift in the distribution of students holding an ADT versus a regular AA/AS (associate of art or associate of science degree). In 2015–16, about two-thirds of associate-earning transfer students earned a traditional AA/AS, and one-third earned an ADT. However, in 2021–22, almost seven out of ten associate-earning transfer students earned an ADT.<sup>24</sup>

24. The ADT population differs from the AA/AS population in some respects. For example, successful transfer students who earn an ADT before transferring are consistently more likely to be Latino than those who earn a local AA/AS (52% vs. 45%). They are also more likely to be younger (60% of successful transfer ADT earners are 21 and younger vs. 49% of local AA/AS earners).

**Figure 12**

## More students are transferring with an ADT



**SOURCE:** Authors' calculations using MIS data and the CCC National Student Clearinghouse data match.

**NOTES:** The denominator is the number of students who transferred in a given year. Restricted to students who successfully completed at least 12 units as a non-special admit student in any college in the system and who were enrolled in the system in the year prior transferring to a four-year institution. As a reference, our sample includes 94,000 students who transferred in academic year 2019-20, which is about 70 percent of the 134,000 transfers reported in the CCC Student Success metrics that year. Students are considered "transfer-ready" if they have completed at least 60 transfer-level units including transfer-level math and English with a GPA of at least 2.0. ADT stands for Associate Degree for Transfers and AA/AS for a local Associate degree.

The fact that the ADT has become the preferred path is not by chance. First, the number of ADT majors offered has increased significantly since its inception and now the ADT pathway includes 40 majors. Second, earning an ADT has multiple advantages over earning a traditional AA/AS (Baker, Friedmann, and Kurlaender 2023). The curricula for ADTs are similar across all community colleges. Moreover, an ADT fulfills the lower-division requirements at all CSU campuses that accept it. ADT earners are guaranteed admission to at least one CSU campus with junior standing, albeit not necessarily their preferred campus or even a campus to which they applied. ADT earners also receive a GPA bump in the admissions process. Furthermore, students who earn an ADT and enter a CSU in their ADT major are guaranteed that they will need no more than 60 additional units at the CSU to earn a bachelor's degree in that field. Conversely, each community college campus can create its curriculum and course requirements for traditional AA/AS degrees. Additionally, traditional AA/AS requirements in each field do not always overlap entirely with lower-division requirements at CSU.

Successfully transferring with an ADT is a good sign for students' future academic trajectories. Recent research shows that students who earn an ADT before transferring are about 10 percentage points more likely to earn a bachelor's degree than students who transfer with no degree or transfer with a traditional AA/AS (Baker, Friedmann, and Kurlaender 2023). Notably, this result does not appear to be due to differences in ADTs across majors, across CSUs, or across cohorts. These researchers find that among transfer students who earn a bachelor's degree, students who enter with an ADT are also more efficient in

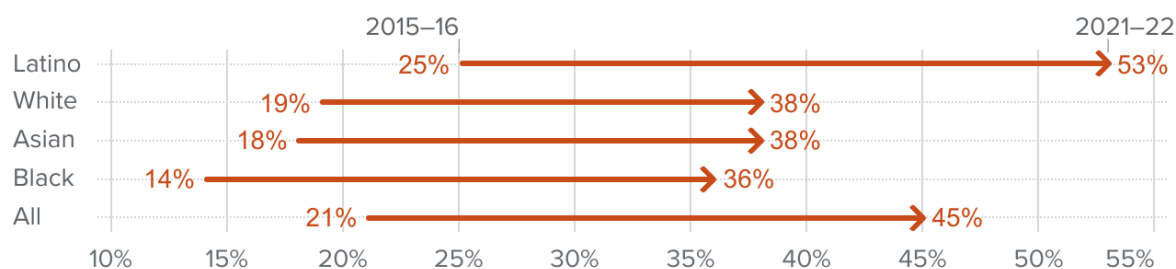
terms of the number of semesters needed to graduate and the number of upper-division CSU units earned at graduation.

The percentage of successful transfer students who earned an ADT before transferring doubled for all racial groups when comparing those who transferred in 2021–22 to those who transferred in 2015–16. The increase was particularly significant among Latino students, with the percentage of successful transfers with an ADT rising from 25 to 53 percent.<sup>25</sup> For Black students, the percentage of successful transfers with an ADT increased from 14 to 36 percent (Figure 13).

**Figure 13**

### The growth in ADT attainment has been particularly large among Latino students

Share of successful transfer students earning an ADT before transferring



**SOURCE:** Authors' calculations using MIS data and the CCC National Student Clearinghouse data match.

**NOTES:** Restricted to students who earned at least 12 units as a non-special admit student in any community college in the system and who were enrolled in a CCC the year prior to transferring.

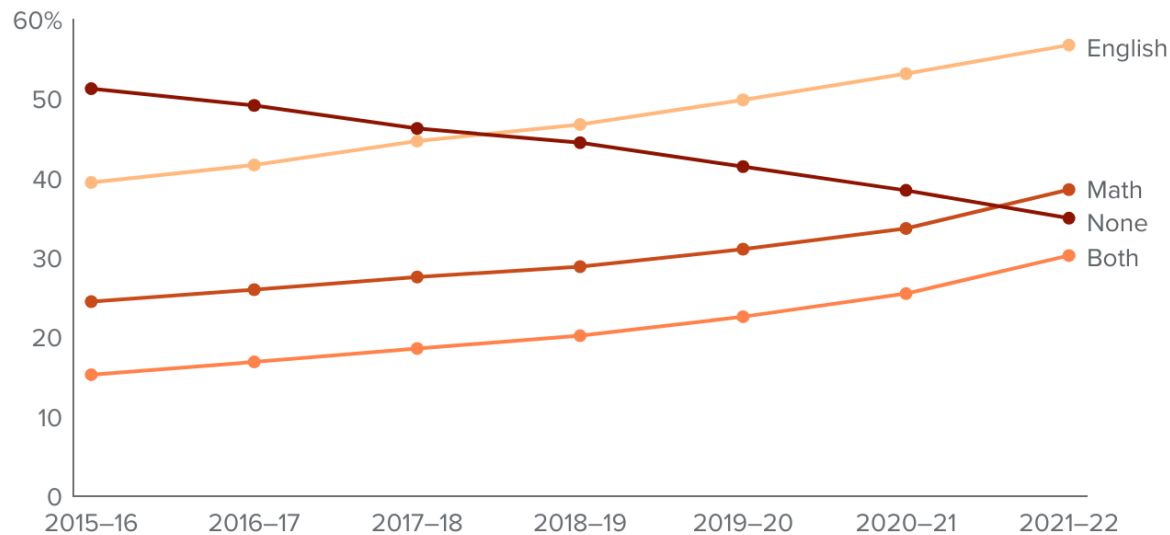
### Successful transfer students are increasingly more likely to complete transfer-level math and English in their first year in community college

Among the students who successfully transferred in 2021–22, 57 percent completed transfer-level English at some point during their first year in community college and 39 percent completed transfer-level math. This is 17 and 14 percentage points higher, respectively, than the corresponding shares among students who transferred in 2015–16 (Figure 14). Even though we see increases across the board, racial equity gaps remain, especially in math. Asian students are significantly more likely to complete a transfer-level math course in their first year than their peers. The gap with Black students is the greatest, as less than a quarter of Black students achieve this important milestone (Figure 15).

25. Altogether, 14,100 additional Latino students transferred with an ADT in 2021–22 than in 2015–16. In the same period, 11,000 additional Latino students successfully transferred, which explains why there was such a big increase in the percentage of successful transfer students who earned an ADT.

**Figure 14**

## An increasing number of successful transfer students are completing transfer-level math and English in their first year



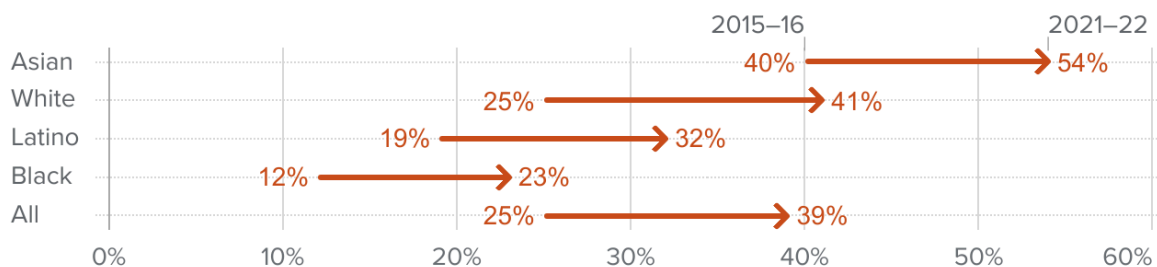
**SOURCE:** Authors' calculations using MIS data and the CCC National Student Clearinghouse data match.

**NOTES:** Restricted to students who successfully completed at least 12 units as a non-special admit student in any college in the system and who were enrolled in the system in the year prior transferring to a four-year institution.

**Figure 15**

## All racial/ethnic groups saw progress in completing transfer-level math, but gaps remain

Share of successful transfer students who completed math in their first year



**SOURCE:** Authors' calculations using MIS data and the CCC National Student Clearinghouse data match.

**NOTES:** Restricted to students who successfully completed at least 12 units as a non-special admit student in any college in the system and who were enrolled in the system in the year prior transferring to a four-year institution.

Completion of transfer-level math and English courses is an important early milestone in a student's career (Belfield, Jenkins, and Fink 2019). Community college students hoping to transfer must complete one transfer-level course in mathematical concepts and quantitative reasoning and two transfer-level courses in English composition with a letter grade of C or better. In addition, taking these courses early on makes students eligible for other transferable courses in their major for which math or English are prerequisites.

Until recently, completion of transfer-level math and English courses was one of the largest obstacles preventing students from achieving their academic goals in a timely manner ([Cuellar Mejia, Rodriguez, and Johnson 2016](#)). The majority of entering students were placed in long sequences of remedial courses before they could get into transfer-level courses. Attrition in these sequences was very high, particularly for Latino and Black students, which meant that few students went on to complete transfer-level courses.

After considerable research and advocacy, in fall 2019 the system underwent a dramatic transformation of its assessment and placement policies and practices with the implementation of [AB 705](#). As a result of this important legislation, the number of students bypassing remediation and starting directly in transfer-level courses increased significantly, as did the number of students successfully completing these courses ([Cuellar Mejia, Rodriguez, and Johnson 2020](#)).

## Successful transfer students are now more likely to have started community college while still in high school

Seeking ways to improve intersegmental alignment and increase college access and equity, state leaders and legislators have passed a number of recent initiatives to expand dual enrollment programs in California ([Rodriguez and Gao 2021](#); [Rodriguez et al. 2023](#)). Students in dual enrollment programs take college-level courses while still in high school, which allows them to get a head start on their higher education goals.

Among students who successfully transferred in 2021–22, 18 percent started their community college journey while still in high school. This share has grown 4 percentage points (or by 4,800 students) since 2015–16 (Figure 16).<sup>26</sup> There are differences in the use of dual enrollment across racial groups: while 21 percent of white students who successfully transferred in 2021–22 started as dual enrollment students, only 12 percent of Black students took college courses while still in high school.

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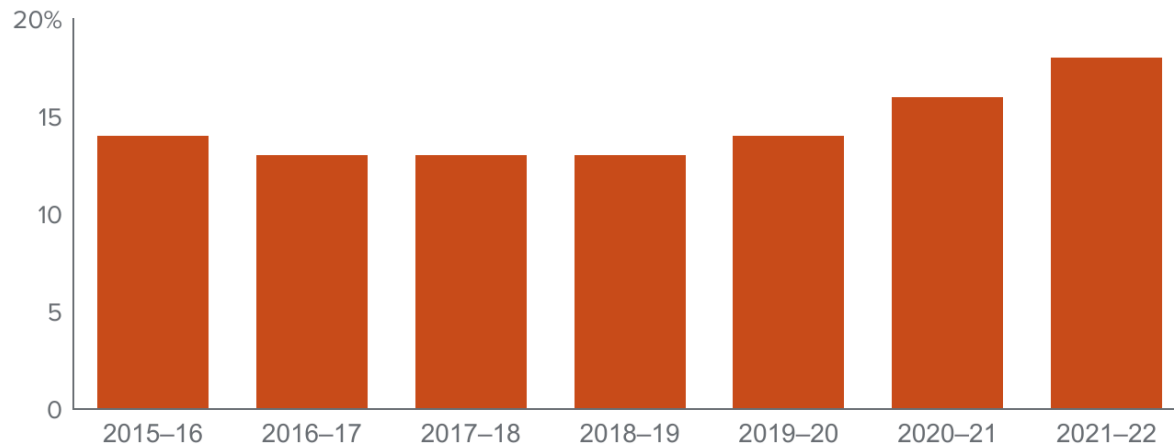
26. Most of the growth happened starting in 2020–21.



**Figure 16**

## Successful transfers are more likely than ever to have started in dual enrollment

Share of successful transfer students who started their community college journey while in high school



**SOURCE:** Authors' calculations using MIS data and the CCC National Student Clearinghouse data match.

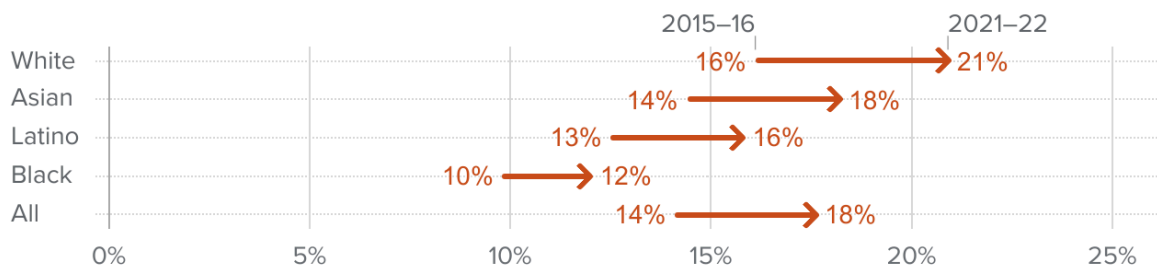
**NOTES:** Restricted to students who successfully completed at least 12 units as a non-special admit student in any college in the system and who were enrolled in the system in the year prior transferring to a four-year institution.

In terms of shares, white students saw the biggest increase between academic years 2015–16 and 2021–22, from 16 percent to 21 percent (Figure 17). This increase was driven by both a 19 percent increase in the number of successful transfer students taking dual enrollment courses (a bigger numerator) and an 8 percent decline in the total number of white students transferring (a smaller denominator). However, the largest increase in number happened among Latino students; 72 percent (or 2,700) more Latino successful transfer students started as dual enrollment students among those who transferred in 2021–22 than among those who transferred in 2015–16. In contrast, the increase in the number of Black successful transfer students taking dual enrollment courses was only 11 percent (or 44 students).

**Figure 17**

## White students saw the largest increase in the share of successful transfers with prior dual enrollment

Share of successful transfer students who started as dual enrollment students



**SOURCE:** Authors' calculations using MIS data and the CCC National Student Clearinghouse data match.

**NOTES:** Restricted to students who successfully completed at least 12 units as a non-special admit student in any college in the system and who were enrolled in the system in the year prior transferring to a four-year institution.

## Academic Journeys Vary Depending on Where Students Transfer

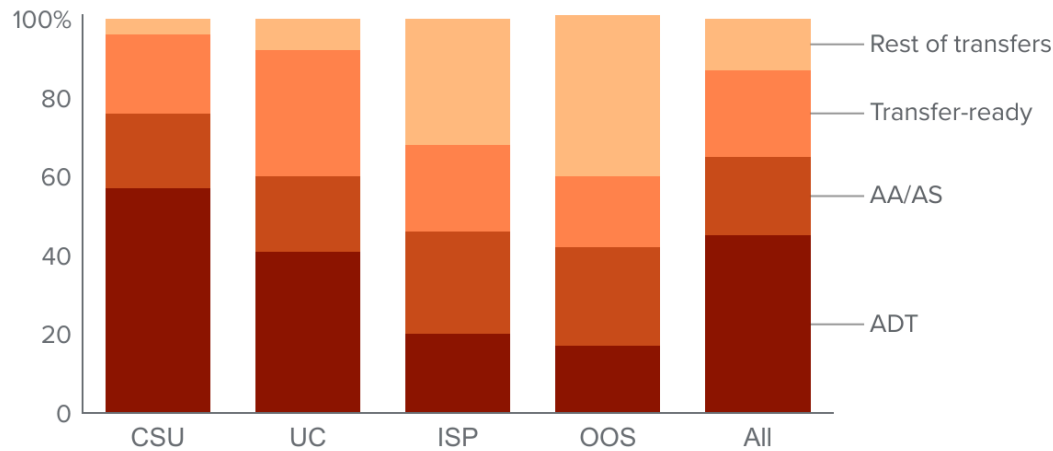
In this section, we show that there are important differences in community college students' academic journeys depending on the type of receiving institution to which the students transfer. In particular, the academic journeys of students who transfer to a University of California campus differ markedly from those of students who transfer to other four-year institutions.

About 92 percent of the students who transferred to a UC in academic year 2021-22 did so after having earned an associate degree or being "transfer ready," namely, having successfully completed enough units to potentially start with junior-level standing (Figure 18).<sup>27</sup> This share is slightly lower than the share among students who transferred to a CSU campus (96%) but significantly higher than the share among students who transferred to an in-state private institution (68%) or an out-of-state institution (59%).

27. We say potentially because we only account partially for the transfer requirements. We identified students who completed 60 transferable units with a GPA of at least 2.0, including one transfer-level course in mathematical concepts and quantitative reasoning and two transfer-level courses in English composition. However, to be eligible for junior standing students must also complete four transferable college courses chosen from at least two of the following subject areas: arts and humanities, social and behavioral sciences, and physical and biological sciences. In addition, students must complete the required/recommended courses needed for their intended major with the minimum grades.

**Figure 18**

**Students who transfer to the state's public universities are more likely to have earned a degree before transferring**



**SOURCE:** Authors' calculations using MIS data.

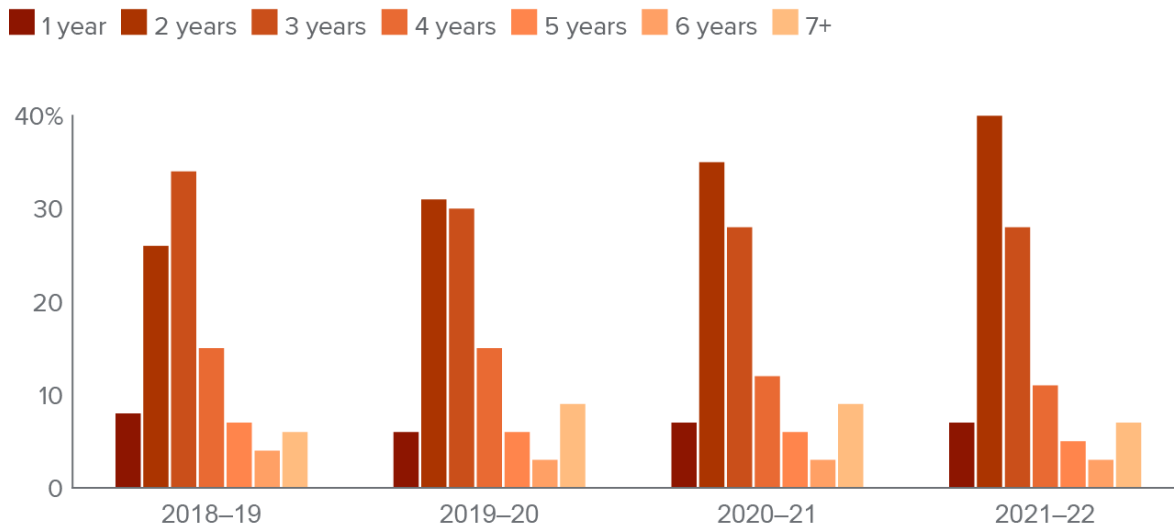
**NOTES:** Restricted to students who successfully completed at least 12 units as a non-special admit student in any college in the system and who were enrolled in the system in the year prior transferring to a four-year institution. Students are considered "transfer-ready" if they have completed at least 60 transfer-level units including transfer-level math and English with a GPA of at least 2.0. The figure displays data for students who transferred in academic year 2021–22. Our sample include 54,000 students who transferred to a California State University campus (or 58% of the total sample), 15,700 students who transferred to a University of California campus (17%), 8,400 to an in-state private institution or ISP (9%), and 14,500 to out-of-state institutions or OOS (16%). ADT stands for Associate Degree for transfer and AA/AS for associate degree. Please refer to Technical Appendix A for more details.

Remarkably, 74 percent of students who transferred with junior-level status to a UC campus did so within three years of their initial enrollment, which is significantly higher compared to what we see among students who transferred to other types of institutions (Figure 19).

Relatedly, Figure 19 also shows that successful transfer students are transferring faster regardless of their receiving institution. For example, while 34 percent of students who transferred to a UC campus in 2018–19 did so after two years of initial enrollment, this percentage jumped to 46 percent among those who transferred in 2021–22. The increase was also significant among students who transferred to a CSU campus (from 13% to 22%). However, as we mentioned earlier, it is important to keep in mind that for this analysis we are focusing only on the students with a successful outcome.

**Figure 19**

## Most community college students who transfer to UC do so within two or three years of initial enrollment



**SOURCE:** Authors' calculations using MIS data and the CCC National Student Clearinghouse data match.

**NOTES:** Sample restricted to students who transferred to a UC campus after having attained an ADT, AA/AS or successfully completed 60 transferable units including transfer-level English and math. For example, our sample includes 14,400 students who transferred in academic year 2021-22, according to the National Student Clearinghouse data match that we are using, which is about 69 percent of the 20,931 new transfer students reported by UC for that year. ISP shows transfers to in-state private institutions. OOS shows transfers to out-of-state institutions. See Technical Appendix A for more details.

Examining the tail ends of the distributions (i.e., the leftmost and rightmost bars for each student cohort) reveals interesting findings. Let's zero in on the students who successfully transfer to a UC campus. On one hand, a small percentage (7%) of successful transfer students in 2021-22 (just under 1,000 students) were able to transfer to a UC campus within one year of initial enrollment. These students were able to transfer efficiently due to dual enrollment, with 73 percent of them taking at least 30 transfer-level units while still in high school. Notably, students transferring to UC were more likely than those transferring elsewhere to begin their community college journey as dual enrollment students. Additionally, the percentage of dual enrollment students among those who transferred to UC increased from 15 percent in 2018-19 to 21 percent in 2021-22. Thus, the trend of more students taking transfer-level courses while still in high school appears to be a contributing factor in facilitating faster transfers.

On the other hand, 7 percent transferred after seven or more years of initial enrollment. The typical student in this group was enrolled for 15 terms and earned 6.4 units per term. Two-thirds of these students had at least one break of two years or more between community college enrollments.

Something significant that sets apart the students who transferred to UC from those who transferred to other institutions is their completion of transfer-level math and English during their first year in community college. In particular, 60 percent of UC transfers completed transfer-level math by the end of their first year, while only around 31 to 35 percent of students who transferred elsewhere achieved this milestone. The gap is smaller but still present for English completion. It is worth noting that despite these differences, both

students who transferred to a UC campus and students who transferred to a CSU campus in 2021–22 earned an average of 73 transferable units (Table 1). Even though in past years there has been a reduction in the number of excess units accumulated, at 73 it is still 13 units (or 22%) above pace.

**Table 1**

**The academic path taken by students who transferred to UC is unique**

	Share of students who started as dual enrollment (%)	Median number of TL units earned by first year	Median number of TL units earned as dual enrollment student	Median GPA TL courses	Share successfully completing TL math in first year (%)	Share successfully completing TL English in first year (%)	Median number of TL units earned before transferring
UC	24	30	7	3.66	60	66	73
CSU	16	20	4	3.15	35	57	73
ISP	18	19	6	3.20	33	51	65
OOS	18	19	6	3.07	31	51	60
All	18	21	5	3.24	39	57	71

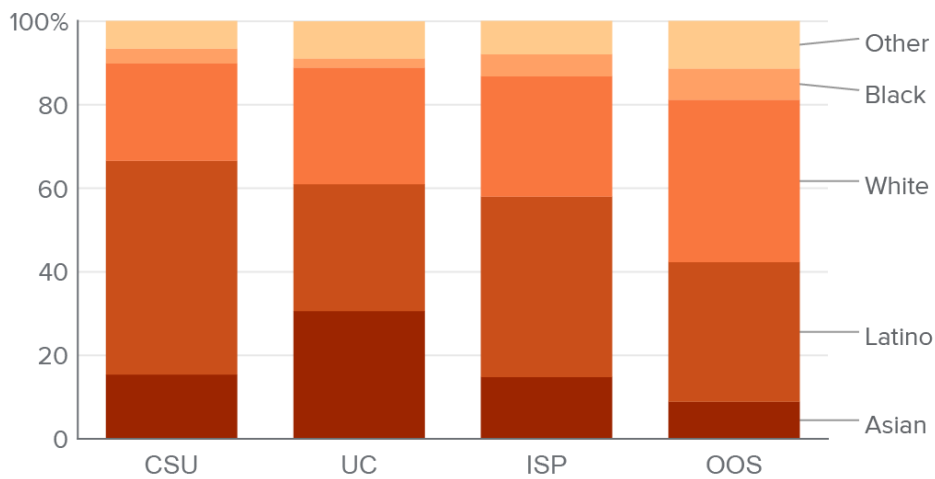
**SOURCE:** Authors' calculations using MIS data.

**NOTES:** Students who transferred in academic year 2021-22. Restricted to students who successfully completed at least 12 units as a non-special admit student in any college in the system and who were enrolled in the system in the year prior to transferring to a four-year institution. TL means transfer-level. ISP refers to in-state private institutions; OOS refers to out-of-state institutions.

Students who transfer to UC are also different in terms of their demographic characteristics (Figure 20). Compared to students who transfer to other institutions, students who transfer to UC are less likely to be Latino, less likely to be female, and less likely to be Pell recipients. On the other hand, they are significantly younger, more likely to be Asian, more likely to enter community college with a foreign secondary school diploma, and more likely to have participated in special programs like Mesa, Umoja, or Puente. Interestingly, students who transferred to UC were significantly more likely to have stated a transfer goal at the time they first enrolled in community college.

**Figure 20**

## Students who transferred to UC are more likely to be Asian and less likely to be Latino or Black



**SOURCE:** Authors' calculations using MIS data.

**NOTES:** Based on students who transferred in academic year 2021–22. Restricted to students who successfully completed at least 12 units as a non-special admit student in any college in the system and who were enrolled in the system in the year prior to transferring to a four-year institution. For reference there were 54,000 students who transferred to a CSU campus, 15,700 to a UC campus, 8,400 who transferred to an in-state private (ISP) institution, and 14,500 to an out-of-state (OOS) institution.

### Community college transfers to out-of-state institutions

About six in ten students who transfer to an out-of-state institution (OOS) do so after earning an AA/AS, an ADT, or enough units to be considered “transfer-ready.” Among those who transferred before achieving any of those milestones, the median number of transferable units earned before transferring was 34.

Relative to students transferring somewhere else, students who end up transferring to an out-of-state institution are more likely to be white (39% vs. 27% among all transfers) or Black (8% vs. 4%). Also, these students are less likely to have been Pell recipients while in community college (43% vs. 53%).

The top out-of-state destinations were Arizona State University (12.6%), Grand Canyon University (7%), Southern New Hampshire University (4.7%), Western Governors University (4.6%), University of Phoenix—Arizona (3%), University of Nevada—Reno (2%), and Boise State University (2%). These seven universities accounted for 36 percent of California community college transfers to out-of-state institutions in 2021–22. It is worth noting that the top five institutions in this list are all known for their large online programs, so students transferring to these out-of-state institutions are not necessarily leaving the state. Interestingly, this was the only segment where the number of students transferring grew between 2020–21 and 2021–22 (10% increase vs. 7% decline in the total number of students transferring across all institution types).



## Community college transfers to in-state private institutions

For the most part, students who transfer to an in-state private (ISP) institution resemble students who transfer to CSU or to an out-of-state institution. Perhaps the biggest difference is that students who transfer to an in-state private institution are significantly more likely to be female than students transferring anywhere else (65% vs. 58%).

In 2021–22, seven colleges enrolled half of the students who transferred to an in-state private university: West Coast University—Los Angeles (15%), University of Southern California (9.2%), National University (8.4%), California Baptist University (7.3%), Fresno Pacific University (4%), Azusa Pacific University (3.3%), and UMass Global, formerly Brandman University (2.9%).

## Transfers to UC stand out

The evidence presented so far suggests that students who transfer to UC campuses have different demographic characteristics and course-taking trajectories than students who transferred to CSU campuses or anywhere else. On that premise, it could be argued that many of these students were UC-bound at the start of their community college journey. It is possible that they had met the minimum requirements for admission to UC when they graduated from high school but decided to start their higher education journey at a community college in search of a more cost-effective path to a bachelor's degree. We cannot know for sure, but it seems a reasonable hypothesis considering that 45 percent of students who transferred to UC in 2021–22 were Pell recipients (in our sample of students), compared to 35 percent of UC freshmen students (according to UC Infocenter). Considering that thousands of students are placed each year in the UC “referral pool,” it is also possible that some of these students who did not get into their preferred UC campus are taking a chance that they could get in via the transfer route instead.<sup>28</sup>

More research is needed to explain why students who transfer to UC campuses look so different than students who transferred anywhere else. Once the state's cradle-to-career data system is up and running we will have information on the academic preparation of these students and whether they applied and were accepted to UC prior to entering the community college system.

## Over a Quarter of ADT Earners Do Not End Up Transferring

One of the recommendations in our previous report, *Increasing Community College Transfers: Progress and Barriers*, was to identify and help students who are close to transfer. This continues to be a relevant recommendation, as thousands of students whose goal was to transfer to a four-year institution and who made significant progress along the transfer pathway do not transfer. Indeed, we find that about 28,000 students who started their community college journey between academic years 2014–15 and 2019–20 earned an ADT but did not transfer as of fall 2022. These students represent 27 percent of all the students in these cohorts who earned an ADT.<sup>29</sup> In terms of the racial/ethnic composition of this group, a higher

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28. Eligible students who are denied admission to the University of California campuses to which they applied are placed in a referral pool for UC Merced.

29. Unfortunately, we do not have data on how many of these students applied to a four-year institution or whether they were admitted or not.

proportion of Asian and Black students were ADT earners who did not transfer compared to the proportion of Latino and white students (28% and 33% vs. 25% and 26%, respectively).

However, this systemwide rate of 27 percent masks wide variation across colleges.<sup>30</sup> For community colleges like Ohlone, Allan Hancock, Glendale, Moorpark, and San Joaquin Delta, a significantly lower proportion of ADT earners end up not transferring (about 18%). In contrast, at community colleges in the San Diego district, most of the colleges in the Los Angeles district, Berkeley City, San Jose City, Taft, and some of the small and rural colleges, more than 36 percent of ADT earners in this period had not transferred as of fall 2022.

The fact that students who earned an ADT and transferred were more likely to be Pell recipients (54% vs. 42%) than students who earned an ADT but did not transfer could be an indication that for many students tuition and room-and-board costs associated with four-year colleges are an impediment. Pell grants are reserved for undergraduate students who display exceptional financial need, which means that many middle-income students cannot rely on this type of aid. Most CCC students know little about available assistance and the necessary steps to secure that assistance (Cooper et al. 2020). So, financial aid counseling—including assistance with applications—can help those students successfully transfer. Other ADT earners who did not transfer might have not found a spot at their campus of preference; this could be especially the case for place-bound students.

Similarly, about 40,500 students achieved “transfer-ready” status (and are no longer enrolled in a CCC) but did not transfer or earn an ADT as of fall 2022. These students might still need to complete required courses for a specific transfer major.

This is another area where more research is needed to better understand this group of students and identify the best supports and interventions needed to help them to achieve their transfer goal.

## Efforts to Streamline the Transfer Pathway

California’s community colleges and four-year institutions have launched initiatives to streamline the transfer pathway and increase the number and diversity of transfer students. These efforts range from increasing outreach, to guaranteeing future transfer admission for eligible students, to expanding existing transfer programs to more colleges. In this section we highlight some of the ways that institutions are working to improve transfer in the state.

### California State University Transfer Programs

Students can become eligible to transfer to a California State University (CSU) in two main ways. In general, upper-division transfers must have 60 semester units (or 90 quarter units) and an overall GPA of at least 2.0. Students must complete a set of general education courses outlined by the CSU General Education Requirements—Breadth guidelines, or the Intersegmental General Education Transfer Curriculum (IGETC), the latter of which also satisfies lower-division requirements for transfer to a UC.

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30. We assign students to the community college where they earned the most units.

However, students can receive guaranteed admission to a CSU by obtaining an Associate Degree for Transfer (ADT).<sup>31</sup> While it is generally not a requirement to earn an associate degree prior to transferring, the ADT pathway provides students with an opportunity to earn a credential on their path to a bachelor's degree. The ADT also guarantees a spot at a CSU with only 60 units (about two years of full-time coursework) remaining to complete a bachelor's degree in a major similar to students' community college program of study. Currently, the ADT pathway contains 40 majors, including associate of arts degrees for transfer (AA-T) and associate of science degrees for transfer (AS-T), and requires 60 units (or 90 units in the quarter system), including an approved set of general education courses and at least 18 units in an approved set of major courses.

Although students are guaranteed a spot at a CSU, they are not necessarily guaranteed a spot at their choice of campus and may instead be redirected to a different CSU. For example, six campuses are fully impacted for 2023–24, which means they will likely have to turn away some applicants. Those eligible applicants would be admitted at other CSU campuses that are not impacted. Recent program changes have expanded the pool of ADT options to include nine private four-year institutions in California, as well as 37 Historically Black Colleges and Universities and four fully online universities across the nation.

Since the ADT program's inception over 10 years ago, the number of ADT degrees awarded has grown dramatically, reaching over 74,000 in 2020–21 before declining to just over 70,000 in 2021–22. The ADT has become the premier pathway for transfer to a CSU, with over half of all transfer students entering with an ADT. Even so, a substantial share (about half) of ADT students do not enroll in CSU.<sup>32</sup>

## University of California Transfer Programs

The University of California has three major pathways for students attempting to transfer from California Community Colleges: Transfer Admission Guarantee, Transfer Pathways, and Pathways+.

The Transfer Admission Guarantee (TAG) is for students who know which UC they would like to attend. Students must take a campus-specific set of 30 (for the semester system) or 45 (quarter system) UC-transferable units that align with their intended program of study at a community college. Students must also maintain a minimum GPA, which can vary by campus and program.<sup>33</sup> However, not all majors accept Transfer Admission Guarantees; for example, the popular computer science major does not accept TAG at Davis, Santa Cruz, and Irvine. In addition, UC Berkeley, UCLA, and UC San Diego do not accept TAG at all. About one-third of all transfer admits are via TAG, which means a majority of admits transfer without guaranteeing their spot at a UC.

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31. In 2010, California Senate Bill 1440 established a statewide framework for a more seamless transfer pathway between the CCCs and CSUs. The Student Transfer Achievement Reform Act stipulates that a student who earns a designated ADT with a grade point average of at least 2.0 shall be granted admission for transfer with junior status into at least one CSU. The aim of Senate Bill 1440 was to establish statewide consistency and to simplify transfer from any community college to any CSU campus. To meet this goal, a statewide curricular framework for the major components of a community college degree was developed for each major jointly by community college and CSU faculty.

32. In 2019–20, 55 percent of transfer students to CSU had an ADT, compared to only 20 percent in 2012–13, according to the ADT Fact Sheet.

33. For example, UC Davis requires students to maintain a 3.20 for all majors in the College of Biological Sciences, but a 3.50 for all majors in the College of Engineering. At UC Riverside, minimum GPAs for engineering majors GPA vary between 3.10 and 3.60.

Transfer Pathways do not guarantee admission but are a set of coursework that makes students eligible to be admitted into a program of study at any UC campus. Students can use an online tool to find the specific courses that make them eligible for entry into their major. Minimum GPAs again vary by campus, major, and how many students apply for transfer at each campus.

Finally, Pathways+ combines coursework aimed at specific majors with a TAG at a specific campus. This program allows students to be guaranteed entry at one campus while becoming eligible, and perhaps more competitive, for admission at other UC campuses.

The UC provides tools to ensure that students interested in transferring are able to determine whether courses at their community colleges will satisfy transfer requirements. The UC Transfer Admissions Planner is an online tool that helps students plan and track their coursework toward meeting the UC requirements for transfer. The CCC, CSU, and UC systems also provide a list of course articulation between each community college and each CSU or UC campus so students can determine if a prospective course would fulfill a requirement for transfer.

## Improving Transfer at the Campus and Regional Levels

Individual campuses are also engaging in a number of efforts to improve the recruitment, enrollment, and success of transfer students. Here we highlight some campus and regional efforts and report on interviews with six representatives from four-year universities that have had success in recruiting and enrolling transfer students.<sup>34</sup>

For example, UC Berkeley—among the most selective UC campuses for transfer—has launched a Transfer Student Center, which provides resources and support to transfer students. CSU Long Beach—a selective CSU—has implemented the Student Transfer Achievement Reform Act (STAR) program, which guarantees admission to California community college students who complete certain requirements.

New regional efforts are also promising, especially those focused on improving representation of students from the San Joaquin Valley and Inland Empire. In its [2030 Capacity Plan](#), UC outlined goals to expand outreach efforts and increase transfer enrollment in these regions. With the help of state funding, UC Riverside has partnered with Growing Inland Achievement and the Riverside County Education Collaborative to improve educational outcomes in the Inland Empire, including through transfer. This includes plans to develop “a pilot transfer pipeline that would automatically matriculate students from 12th grade to a partner CCC and then to UCR through its Transfer Admission Guarantee program.” The Riverside Community College District is also working with UC Riverside to establish a dorm for Inland Empire transfers, an effort designed partly to address concerns about inclusion in the campus community.

The Central Valley Higher Education Consortium is working with multiple organizations and educational institutions to improve transfer, including leading an effort to adapt the CCC–CSU Associate Degree for Transfer, thereby allowing that guarantee to extend to UC Merced. The campus is also collaborating with Merced College through its Merced Promise program to develop and provide essential tools, resources, and opportunities for prospective transfer students and, as highlighted in UC’s 2030 Capacity Plan, is

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34. See Technical Appendix A for details on interviews.

creating 2+2 major (two years in community colleges and two years at the university) mapping with 14 community colleges in the Central Valley to streamline transfer pathways.

The university officials we interviewed are heavily engaged with their local community colleges, usually through work with community college transfer centers and advisors; they also work directly with local community college students. They see their scope as statewide, however, and some universities engage with all 116 community colleges; one reported receiving applications from every community college in the state. Many campus leaders relayed the importance of engaging their whole campus in successful recruitment and retention efforts, with events focused on prospective students and their families, peer-to-peer advising and support, as well as transfer access and transfer success.

Four-year universities also rely on engagement with prospective students through programs like Umoja, Puente, and MESA—educational programs that support historically underrepresented student groups as they make their way through community college and that in many cases continue programs students started in high school. At UC, these programs fit under Student Academic Preparation and Educational Partnerships (SAPEP), which aim to reduce disparities in college access across the state. UC notes that over 24,000 community college students were served by these three programs in 2020.

All universities mentioned the challenges brought on by the pandemic, which shrank the pool of community college students considerably and led to changes in how and where outreach and recruiting could happen. Many officials felt students who have had most or even all of their community college experience online have been harder to reach through traditional recruiting efforts. However, campuses also adopted new strategies and found virtually connecting with students to be beneficial. Beyond COVID, there are some longstanding challenges to the receiving end of transfer. In particular, course articulation between community colleges and university requirements, especially for new or online courses, can be a barrier for students trying to qualify for transfer at specific campuses or in specific majors.

## California Community College Initiatives

The implementation of AB 705 in fall 2019 transformed how students were placed into math and English courses and how remediation was administered at community colleges across the state; the law aimed to get students more efficiently to a certificate, degree, or transfer. Indeed, after implementing the policy, more students began enrolling in and completing transfer-level English and math, paving the way for quicker transfer for more students ([Cuellar Mejia, Rodriguez, and Johnson 2020](#)). Promisingly, even during COVID-19, access to transfer-level English and math courses remained high ([Cuellar Mejia et al. 2022](#); [Cuellar Mejia et al. 2021](#)).

Still, equity gaps in transfer-level course completion remained and implementation was uneven across the system. [Assembly Bill 1705](#) was signed into law by Governor Newsom in September 2022 to support a comprehensive and equitable implementation of AB 705. In short, this bill explicitly requires community colleges not only to place students directly into transfer-level English and math courses but also to ensure that students actually enroll and are supported in those courses. To support full implementation of AB 1705, the legislature appropriated \$64 million (one-time funding) in the 2022 Budget Act. These funds will assist colleges in developing corequisite support models, providing professional development and technical

assistance, aligning concurrent student support services, and developing innovative course sequences ([Lowe 2023](#)).

More broadly, the California Community Colleges Chancellor's Office launched its [Guided Pathways](#) initiative in 2017, a student-centered and equity-focused framework that allows colleges to “forge clear paths for students and remove systemic obstacles to their success.” In short, Guided Pathways focuses on helping students choose and enter programs of study, clarifying and mapping pathways to students' end goal, keeping students on their paths, and ensuring they are learning by removing barriers and providing necessary supports and resources. Currently, every college is implementing Guided Pathways, supported by systemwide resources and technical assistance partnerships. This framework has proven to be a foundational piece of the system's efforts to make transfer pathways more accessible.

Dual enrollment, which provides opportunities for high school students to take college courses, has been steadily increasing in California and can play an important role in Guided Pathways because it allows high school students to explore college degree programs early ([Rodriguez and Gao 2021](#); [Rodriguez et al. 2023](#)). Early results suggest that dual enrollment participants enroll in two- and four-year colleges at relatively high rates, though more work is needed to address current issues such as racial/ethnic equity gaps in access, non-transferrable course offerings despite the implementation of AB 705, and a lack of qualified and sufficient staffing. Nevertheless, dual enrollment provides an important pathway for students to access college-level courses early, and in turn, streamline opportunities to transfer once enrolled full time in community college.

## Creating a Single Transfer Pathway

As mentioned in the introduction, recent efforts to create a single pathway for transfer have come from the UC, CSU, and CCC working together to implement the Student Transfer Achievement Reform Act (AB 928), a 2021 law meant to align transfer requirements between UC and CSU. The act requires the Intersegmental Committee of Academic Senates to establish one lower-division general education pathway, of no more than 34 units, that meets admission requirements for both the California State University and University of California systems. This pathway, the Cal-GETC, should be the only pathway used to determine eligibility starting with the fall term of the 2025–26 academic year.

AB 928, also established an Intersegmental Implementation Committee to facilitate coordination for the Associate Degree for Transfer (ADT) and focus on improving student transfer outcomes. This committee includes representatives from the California Community Colleges system, public and private universities, as well as the academic senates and student associations of each segment. By December 31, 2023, the committee is required to provide the legislature with recommendations on how to improve the scale-up of the ADT and streamline transfer across segments for students. Where ADTs for major pathways exist, the law requires the community colleges to place students who declare a goal of transfer on their mandatory education plans on the ADT pathway (unless the student decides to opt out). Colleges should offer this route by August 1, 2024.

Promisingly, AB 1111 was also signed into law in 2021, requiring the implementation of a common-course numbering system across the California community colleges on or before July 1, 2024. The system will work



in conjunction with AB 928 to ensure clarity of necessary coursework, maximize credit mobility, and streamline transfer by assigning the same course number to comparable courses across all colleges.

UC does not participate in the ADT program but does consider it a supplemental factor that can positively affect a student in the transfer admissions process. Efforts to encourage UC to adopt the ADT program have been met with resistance by UC. In our interviews, UC representatives expressed concern that the lower-division courses of ADT degrees do not always align with UC major preparation requirements.<sup>35</sup> However, there has been some progress. For example, UC Merced has been working with the Central Valley Higher Education Consortium since 2018 to increase the effective use of ADTs by pre-approving them to fulfill lower-division requirements for transfer, identifying the specific upper-division courses required for students once admitted to UC Merced, and aligning these with the ADT to show a four-year sequence.

At a state budget hearing in March 2023, UC proposed a new transfer program guaranteeing admission to students who meet the new Cal-GETC requirements. Details on the plan are sparse, but the UC proposal included a guarantee of admission if students maintain a specified GPA and complete certain lower-division preparation courses. Students are not guaranteed their campus of choice, however, and may be redirected to UC Santa Cruz, UC Riverside, or UC Merced.

## Dual Admission

Dual admission is a promising approach for improving the transfer pathway. In a dual admission program, students who apply to and enroll in a community college would be conditionally accepted to a state university. The program could also be designed to include those who first apply to a state university but are not admitted; private colleges could participate as well.

A recent report by the Recovery with Equity Taskforce identified dual admission as one way to create “clear, easy-to-navigate pathways into and through postsecondary education.” Through dual admission, students would gain more certainty and clarity as they develop their academic plans, and the program could lower or eliminate application burdens. It also offers a less-costly route to a bachelor’s degree, given the lower costs of attending a community college for most students.

California already has a strong foundation for developing a dual admission program. Both the TAG (UC) and ADT (CSU) programs mentioned above reflect guarantees of admission, but neither admit at the time of enrollment in community college. In a dual admission program, UC or CSU would offer admission to entering, transfer-intending community college students with the stipulation that students complete their first two years at a community college and pending the completion of certain requirements.

UC has recently launched a three-year dual admission pilot program that would apply strictly to high school seniors who applied for freshman admission to a UC campus for the fall 2023, 2024, or 2025 terms, but were not admitted. Such students must be graduating from a California high school, have a UC GPA of at least 3.0, and have missed one or more A–G requirements. Those students would be offered conditional admission to a specific UC campus, contingent on enrolling at a California community college and completing specified transfer courses. Currently, the program is restricted to only campuses participating in

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35. Assembly Bill 1749 authored by Assemblymembers Kevin McCarty and Marc Berman, would guarantee graduates of California Community Colleges admission to at least one UC system campus if they earn an ADT.

the Transfer Admission Guarantee (TAG) program, effectively excluding UC Berkeley, UCLA, and UC San Diego. All California resident students and undocumented and DACA (Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals) students who have attended a California high school and qualify for AB 540 benefits (an exemption from nonresident tuition) are eligible for the program. The UC system expected that about 3,700 students would receive letters inviting them to participate in the program starting fall 2023.

CSU's dual admission program, the Transfer Success Pathway (TSP), is similarly being offered for the first time to California's high school graduating class of 2023. TSP is open to first-time, first-year state community college students who: (1) were not CSU-eligible at the time of high school graduation, (2) were CSU-eligible but chose not to attend due to personal or financial reasons, or (3) were CSU-eligible but the application to their campus of choice was redirected to another campus, and they did not enroll. Eligible students can enter into an agreement with a specific CSU campus, specifying an intended major, and must then complete an ADT or established set of transfer courses at a California community college within three years. All CSU campuses are participating in the program, with each campus determining which programs will offer TSP agreements.

The California State University has launched the CSU Transfer Planner, a digital portal that simplifies the transfer process and connects new California Community College students to their future CSU campus of choice early in their educational journey. The CSU Transfer Planner allows eligible students, CSU staff, and community college counselors to work jointly to support students on the transfer pathway. Within the planner, students will be able to determine their Transfer Success Pathway eligibility, research CSU campuses and degree programs, track transferable units, and enter into a Transfer Success Pathway enrollment agreement with the university of their choice.

Both UC and CSU's dual admission policies are in their early stages, so it remains to be seen how many students are affected and whether these students eventually enroll in a four-year college.

## Conclusion

Increasing the number of transfers and closing racial and ethnic equity gaps among those who transfer are vital for improving economic mobility and creating a diverse pipeline of educated and skilled workers. As it stands now, students who successfully transfer do not reflect the full diversity of the state's community colleges; this is particularly true for students transferring to UC. Helping more community college students reach their goal of transferring to a four-year institution will require continued, coordinated efforts between policymakers, administrators, educators, and advocates. Below, we divide our recommendations into those for four-year institutions and those for community colleges.

Four-year institutions must do more to reach out to transfer-eligible students and encourage more students to prepare for transfer. Approaches should include:

- **Creating a universal transfer pathway.** The Associate Degree for Transfer (ADT) has been a successful program that has helped more community college students transfer to CSU. If UC chose to participate in the ADT, with reasonable modifications, students would have an even clearer roadmap for transfer success. The intersegmental committee created as a result of AB 928 should work to develop a compromise that leads to UC adopting the ADT pathway. Even an ADT that includes additional



requirements from UC (calculus for physics majors, for example) would be a significant step in the right direction and would provide students with more options when transferring.

- **Evaluating existing approaches to streamlining transfer.** As outlined in this report, UC and CSU have undertaken several different initiatives to increase the number and diversity of transfer students. Some of these initiatives guarantee admission for students meeting certain conditions, while others designate a set of coursework that would make students eligible for specific campuses and majors. Assessing the reach and efficacy of these initiatives is key to identifying what works best and what should be replicated or scaled up. Ultimately, establishing systemwide approaches that prioritize students' experiences (i.e., broad, student-centered approaches; specific partnerships with student groups such as Umoja, Puente, and Mesa; and regional and local engagement aimed at addressing constraints that may be keeping students in their immediate geographic areas) should be the primary goal.
- **Extending dual admission to a wider set of community college students.** UC and CSU have developed pilot programs that guarantee admission to entering community college students; these programs currently apply to a subset of applicants. In the future, dual admission could eventually be made available to every transfer-intending student entering the community colleges. In some ways, the program would be similar to an enhanced ADT, but with admission to UC or CSU guaranteed at the start of community college enrollment, pending certain criteria being met.

Community colleges must focus on reducing the barriers that students face in completing the necessary requirements for transfer to their desired four-year institution and major. Solutions should include:

- **Continuing to address the challenges brought on by the pandemic.** Large enrollment declines in the community colleges will affect transfer volumes in the near term, and possibly the long term. Reaching out to students who have left requires concerted and persistent efforts to identify how best to bring them back to college. Focusing on former students who had reached key benchmarks—such as completion of college-level math and English courses—should be a top priority. Preventing students from leaving in the first place is also a critical component of addressing enrollment declines. Advising, counseling, academic support, and financial services should focus on both keeping students enrolled and bringing students who left back to college.
- **Using proven, student-centered course placement strategies.** Ongoing work to ensure that all students not only start directly in transfer-level math and English but successfully complete these courses could help many students transfer faster. Achieving more equitable results in this area would require implementing a broader set of student supports.
- **Ensuring that transfer-eligible students successfully transfer.** Some students who have earned ADTs or who have completed 60 units (including math and English) do not transfer. Those students should be targeted for additional counseling and support in completing financial aid documents and university applications. For example, the community colleges should work with CSU (and eventually UC) to auto-populate the applications of ADT earners to CSU or UC, requiring students only to select their preferred system and campus(es).
- **Working with university officials.** Articulation agreements can help students make the transition to a four-year college. In the San Joaquin Valley, for example, community colleges are working with UC Merced to adapt the ADT so that students who complete the degree can enroll either at CSU or UC Merced. Community colleges that are located far from four-year colleges should work to establish partnerships that allow students to earn a bachelor's degree by taking university courses at the community college. For example, students at Shasta College can earn a bachelor's degree in business management from Chico

State University by taking courses at the community college. Partnerships with UC and CSU campuses with space for transfer students can also increase interest in transfer. Moving forward, transitioning from these piecemeal agreements to a more systematic approach will also be beneficial.

While recent reforms have helped improve and streamline the transfer process, transfer rates remain too low, with most community college students who hope to continue at a four-year institution unable to reach this goal. Ongoing reforms and collaboration among all higher education institutions must continue to ensure that more students can attain a bachelor's degree—and all the benefits that it brings. By increasing the number of students who transfer to four-year institutions, California can preserve higher education's critical role as a ladder of economic mobility and ensure that college graduates fully reflect the racial and ethnic diversity of the state's youth.

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