



UNC-NCCCS 2+2 E-Learning Initiative

Report to the Joint Legislative Education Oversight Committee

June 15, 2021

**The University of North Carolina System
Chapel Hill, North Carolina**

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The Need

Community colleges serve as the gateway to postsecondary education for many low-income and first-generation college students, who arrive with great talent and aspiration but with multiple academic, financial, and personal challenges. To reach these students, the University of North Carolina System must continue to build stronger pathways with community college partners.

Approximately 10,500 North Carolina community colleges students transferred into the UNC System in Fall 2020, a 46 percent increase over the past ten years. Among those North Carolina students who do transfer, about 40 percent graduate with a bachelor's degree, a rate within close range to the nation's average among transfer students of 46 percent. These data are critical, since students who transfer from community colleges to universities are more likely to be from lower-income families than are students who enter higher education through four-year institutions.¹

National research and UNC System data show that students who graduate with an associate degree before transferring have higher persistence and completion rates than those who transfer before completing their degrees. Working with our two-year college peers, the System has worked to develop strategies that help students understand the importance of finishing what they start.

Background

In 2005, the General Assembly of North Carolina created the 2 + 2 E-Learning Initiative to address the critical shortage of teachers in our state. The North Carolina Community College System (NCCCS) and the University of North Carolina System Office were the recipients of the initiative. This collaborative project focused on the development of online course content as a means to educate additional teachers in North Carolina.

NCCCS creates online course content through its Virtual Learning Community (VLC), <http://vlc.nccommunitycolleges.edu>, which provides quality online courses to the 58 community colleges. Online courses and degrees provide access to students who may not be able to attend college in a traditional face to face method. Currently, the VLC provides access to several education courses:

- Advanced Issues in Early Childhood Education (EDU 288)
- Educational Technology (EDU 271)
- Effective Teacher Training (EDU 275)
- Teaching and Learning for All (EDU 187)*
- Foundations of Education (EDU 216)*
- Literacy Development and Instruction(EDU 279)*
- Introduction to Early Childhood Education (EDU 119)
- Issues in Early Childhood Education (EDU 188)
- Teacher Licensure Preparation (EDU 250)*

**Courses incorporated into the new Associate of Arts and Associate of Science in Teacher Education degrees*

In 2005, the two systems identified five pre-education programs under the North Carolina Comprehensive Articulation Agreement (CAA), which allows for students to begin their education by earning an associate degree at a community college before transferring to a university to complete a bachelor's degree. The five identified associate degree programs were completed by NCCCS in June 2009 through the efforts of VLC course development centers: Associate in Arts/Elementary Education, Associate in Arts/Middle

¹ Bowen, W., Chingos, M., & McPherson, M. (2009). Crossing the Finish Line: Completing College at America's Public Universities. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.

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Grades Education and Special Education, Associate in Science/Chemistry and Chemistry Education, Associate in Science/Biology and Biology Education, and Associate in Science/Mathematics Education.

Transfer Pathways

With the subsequent revision of the Comprehensive Articulation Agreement (CAA) in 2014, transfer pathways into education programs were developed at each of the sixteen UNC System universities. The associate degree programs that were developed as part of this initiative in 2009 were consolidated with the revision to the CAA into two pathways to all educator preparation programs in the UNC System: Associate in Arts and Associate in Science degrees. The CAA revision mandated that all associate degrees have a baccalaureate degree plan (BDP) to designate a plan for transfer. All BDPs for each UNC institution can be found at: <https://myapps.northcarolina.edu/transfertools/advising-tools-nc-community-college-transfer-students>.

In addition, in 2020, the North Carolina Community College System created a new pathway with the Associate in Arts and Associate in Science in Teacher Education. At present, a uniform articulation agreement for the AATP and ASTP is being crafted by the UNC System in concert with NCCCS. All but 10 of the 58 community colleges are currently offering the new degrees, and it is anticipated that graduates from these community colleges will begin matriculating to UNC System institutions beginning in fall 2021. This new pathway will enhance opportunities for transfer students wishing to pursue a degree in teaching.

In 2019, the Transfer Toolbox website was created and made available to all 58 community colleges and UNC System institutions. The site is designed for transfer advisors to facilitate better communication about transfer requirements. Any advisor can search by the selected institution and find degree plans for any education degree the student wishes to pursue. In addition, advisors can investigate course equivalencies across institutions to assist students with effective transfer to the senior institution.

To further facilitate seamless transfer from North Carolina community colleges to UNC System institutions, a series of Transfer Talks are conducted on a regular basis to provide information and updates to community college and senior institution transfer personnel. The Transfer Talks serve as a collaborative platform between the two systems to improve the transfer student experience.

The UNC System acknowledges that providing clear information about course credit equivalencies is a critical part of the transfer process. To that end, the system is developing a common number system that will allow transfer students to be able to look up their community college courses and determine what courses will transfer into any UNC System institution. The equivalency information will be housed in a central and searchable location to alleviate students having to look up the information on a campus by campus basis. The common numbering system will be operational beginning fall 2022.

Teacher Quality Research

The UNC System engages in teacher quality research to provide information and data to inform strategic initiatives in educator preparation for transfer, traditional, and non-traditional pipelines. Funds were used to develop systems to track student progress in teacher education programs at UNC System institutions. As a result, the funding has helped to support ongoing educator quality research,

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build interactive data dashboards for teacher preparation program improvement, and build greater capacity and accessibility within teacher education.

The UNC Educator Quality Research Initiative (EQRI) is an ongoing strategic research partnership among the UNC System, expert researchers, and subject matter experts focused on the development and implementation of an annual agenda of research on educator preparation and effectiveness. This initiative provides educator preparation programs in the UNC System with research evidence to inform program improvement efforts, enhance state-wide understanding of critical workforce needs, and support evidence-based education reform efforts. Much of this research is focused on critical pipeline issues (e.g., enrollment trends, time-to-degree, teacher productivity, academic credentials of students, employment rates, employment distribution, and retention in the field). In addition, several of these studies assess the effectiveness of the graduates of educator preparation programs, all of which enroll transfer students and many through 2+2 initiatives. In addition, the annual agenda of research includes the rigorous evaluation of the efficacy and efficiency of several P12 programs and initiatives, such as Laboratory Schools, Principal Fellows, and the North Carolina New Teacher Support Program.

In 2015, the UNC Educator Quality Dashboard was developed to share and disseminate key findings from the strategic research agenda. The dashboard was a public, interactive, web-based tool designed to ensure greater public accountability, increase transparency, and facilitate data for all education stakeholders. Built with SAS® data visualization software, the dashboard provides an easy-to-use interface that enables users—including educators, administrators, policymakers, parents, and students—to analyze and display data on educator quality within selected populations, geographic regions, or subject areas. In 2019, the North Carolina Department of Public Instruction launched their [Educator Preparation Program Dashboard](#) in alignment with the EPP accountability model (G.S. 115C-269.35). The EPP Dashboard houses much of the information that was incorporated into the UNC Educator Quality Dashboard. Thus, in 2020-2021, the UNC System embarked on the creation of a revised version of the system's dashboard to eliminate duplication with NCDPI's information, but also, to offer new information to drive EPP improvement across the system's 15 teacher preparation programs.

The System engaged with HelioCampus to archive information from the previous UNC Educator Quality Dashboard to capture the historical information that the EPPs may need for accreditation visits in the future. Focus groups were held with key data and research personnel within the EPPs to work with HelioCampus to ascertain those data points that were inaccessible in the NCDPI EPP Dashboard, and where there was a need for additional tools for disaggregating data by program area, pathway, and demographic characteristics. The focus of the redesigned UNC Educator Quality Dashboard 2.0 will hone in on metrics outlined by the four priorities from the Educator Preparation Advisory Group which include information on early literacy outcomes, recruitment/retention, clinical experiences, and "ready day one" for new teachers. As a part of the EQRI, baseline data for metrics for these priorities will be incorporated into the new dashboard along with system and program level goals for EPP improvement.

Within the EQRI, administration of a new teacher survey occurred to ascertain how recent teacher education graduates perceive their experience within their EPP. Within this year's survey, additional questions related to preparedness in teaching early literacy were incorporated to provide specific statistics on this focus area. This information will be utilized within the new dashboard to offer EPPs targeted information for improvement in preparedness in early literacy across elementary and special

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education general curriculum programs at UNC institutions.

With the advent of the Associate in Arts and Associate in Science in Teacher Education and the enhanced efforts for improving transfer, the UNC System developed a plan to incorporate data into the revised dashboard to specifically track enrollment, completion, and academic performance of transfer students who seek to be educators. These data points will assist the UNC System EPPs with informing future recruitment efforts of the transfer pipeline to address current teacher shortages across the state.

Conclusion

With new approaches and support for reform, the UNC System, in partnership with the North Carolina Community College System, continues to serve as a high-value collaboration to recruit and retain many more North Carolinians to begin careers in education. Student success can be boosted through the creation of highly structured transfer pathways that permit students to have better access to clear academic requirements and course equivalencies. Targeted metrics on priority areas will serve to advance strategic improvements within UNC System educator preparation programs to ensure that North Carolina's classrooms are filled with high quality and effective educators.