

## Results in Brief: Higher Education Articulation Agreements: A Study of State Policies Covering the Early Care and Education Workforce

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A barrier that students and mid-career professionals often face in attempts to advance their education level is that the coursework completed and credits earned in one institution of higher education (IHE) may not transfer to another. To address this issue, states have developed a variety of articulation policies and agreements to facilitate the transfer of credits and coursework between degree programs. Articulation policies are particularly important for individuals who begin their higher education coursework in a two-year college and later seek to transfer their credits to obtain a bachelor's degree, which often is the case for teachers and caregivers in the early care and education (ECE) workforce. This study provides an in-depth examination of how six states and their IHEs have implemented articulation policies that include provisions specific to the ECE field, including approaches to articulation, governance structures, roles played by various stakeholders, and supports provided to transfer students.

### Research Questions

1. In the six states examined in this study, what higher education articulation policies and practices have been implemented to support students seeking a degree in ECE?
2. What governance structures do these states have in place to oversee ECE articulation policy? How do the states involve stakeholders in policy development and oversight?
3. How do IHEs in these states implement ECE articulation policies?
4. What supports do these states and IHEs provide for the transfer and articulation process?

### Study Design

This report is based on case studies of six states with statewide articulation policies that address ECE degree pathways: California, Florida, Indiana, Massachusetts, New Mexico, and Pennsylvania. The study also included 20 IHEs (10 two-year IHEs and 10 four-year IHEs) within those states.

Study findings are based on telephone interviews and focus groups with (1) state-level higher education administrators, policy staff, and representatives from articulation oversight committees; (2) senior academic administrators from IHEs, faculty, and staff, such as registrars, student advisors, and financial aid officers; and (3) students who had transferred or were planning to transfer between a two-year and four-year IHE within the state.

Readers should note that the six states are not nationally representative, and these case study data should not be generalized to other states. In addition, the selected IHEs and individual respondents may not be representative of all IHEs in each state.

### Highlights

- All six states used transfer associate's degrees and general education block transfers, which allow students to transfer courses as a set rather than on a course-by-course basis, to facilitate course and credit transfer for ECE students; half of the states also used guaranteed admission or common course numbering.
- Four states established at least one statewide committee to oversee articulation, while the remaining two states oversaw articulation through a state higher education agency or system office.
- Most IHEs (17 of 20) supplemented state-level articulation policies with intrastate and interstate regional articulation agreements formed between IHEs.
- Most two-year IHEs (nine of 10) offered separate ECE degree pathways for students who planned to transfer and earn a bachelor's degree versus students who planned to end their education with the associate's degree.
- In nearly all the IHEs (19 of 20), ECE faculty played several key roles in implementing articulation policies, such as evaluating course transferability (15 IHEs) and designing courses that reflect agreed-upon competencies (12 IHEs).
- IHEs supported transfer students by providing online information about transfer (12 IHEs), outreach programs (seven IHEs), transfer centers (six IHEs), and transfer student orientations (five IHEs).
- Faculty and staff reported advising students on topics including career paths (16 IHEs) and financial aid (15 IHEs), referring students to degree planning tools (14 IHEs), and referring students to transfer advisors (three IHEs).

## Statewide Articulation and Transfer Policies

**All six states in the study used transfer associate's degrees and general education block transfers to facilitate course and credit transfer for ECE students; half of the states also used guaranteed admission or common course numbering.**

All six states instituted transfer associate's degrees in ECE that allowed students to block transfer lower division coursework and enroll in their four-year degree program with junior status.

All six states had common general education requirements that allowed for block transfer of 30–35 credits. These common requirements reflected a shared understanding regarding the content, competencies, and learning outcomes to be expected of all first- and second-year students.

Three states offered guaranteed or priority admission into a public four-year institution for students who earned transfer associate's degrees. Requirements for guaranteed admission included a minimum grade point average, minimum grades for specified courses, and passing scores on teacher licensure exams prior to admission.

Three states implemented common course numbering for equivalent courses at participating IHEs. These systems allowed faculty, staff, and students to track which courses would transfer and how they would fulfill degree requirements.

## State-Level Governance and Oversight

**Four states established at least one statewide committee to oversee articulation, while the remaining two states oversaw articulation through a state higher education agency or system office.**

In three of the four states with oversight committees, the committee had an ongoing role in monitoring, updating, and enforcing statewide policies after the policy was developed. Another mechanism that three of the six states used to facilitate IHEs' cooperation was performance-based funding tied to degree completion rates or adoption of common course numbering.

## IHE-Level Implementation of Articulation Policies

**Most IHEs (17 of 20) supplemented state-level articulation policies with intrastate and interstate regional articulation agreements formed between IHEs.**

Regional agreements formed between four-year IHEs and their two-year feeder institutions served to clarify how courses from a two-year IHE would transfer, offer additional transfer benefits beyond those required under state-level policies, or extend transfer benefits to students not covered under state-level policies.

**Most of the two-year IHEs (nine of 10) offered separate ECE degree pathways for students who planned to transfer and students who planned to end their education with the associate's degree.**

Having a separate terminal degree pathway allowed IHEs to meet the needs of students who planned to work in the ECE field in positions that do not require a bachelor's degree or teacher licensure. However, students who earn terminal degrees and later decide to pursue a four-year degree were reported to encounter a loss of credits upon enrollment because not all terminal degree coursework is aligned with or transferable to the bachelor's degree program requirements.

**In nearly all IHEs (19 of 20), ECE faculty played several key roles in implementing articulation policies, such as evaluating course transferability (15 IHEs) and designing courses that reflect agreed-on competencies (12 IHEs).**

ECE faculty members — by virtue of their expertise in both the content and structure of their school's ECE coursework — were largely responsible for determining whether and how courses from other IHEs would transfer. To evaluate a course's transferability, faculty members reviewed syllabi, examples of student work from the course, and/or the qualifications of the instructors.

## Transfer Supports for Students

**IHEs supported transfer students by providing online information about transfer (12 IHEs), outreach programs (seven IHEs), transfer centers (six IHEs), and transfer student orientations (five IHEs).**

More than half of IHEs provided transfer information on their websites or through referral to statewide transfer websites. Four-year IHEs sent representatives to community colleges to meet with faculty, staff, and prospective transfer students. Through transfer centers, several IHEs provided prospective transfer students with information regarding coursework, degree requirements, scholarship information, and transfer timelines. In addition, several four-year IHEs offered orientations to help transfer students acclimate to their new campus and plan upper division course sequences.

**Faculty and staff advised students on topics including career paths (16 IHEs) and financial aid (15 IHEs), referred students to degree planning tools (14 IHEs), and referred students to transfer advisors (three IHEs).**

Faculty and staff at most IHEs advised students on career paths, degree options, and financial aid. Less frequently, they advised students on the transfer process. They also referred prospective transfer students to degree planning tools, such as degree maps and transfer guides, or to transfer-specific advisors. Despite the provision of these resources, students reported receiving inaccurate or insufficient guidance from advisors about the transfer process and about financial aid.

## Additional Information

The complete report is available at [www2.ed.gov/about/offices/list/oepd/ppss/reports.html](http://www2.ed.gov/about/offices/list/oepd/ppss/reports.html).