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Teachers College, Columbia University

National Student Clearinghouse™ Research Center™

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TRANSFER TURNAROUND:

Rebounding Enrollments and Recommendations
From the Updated Transfer Playbook
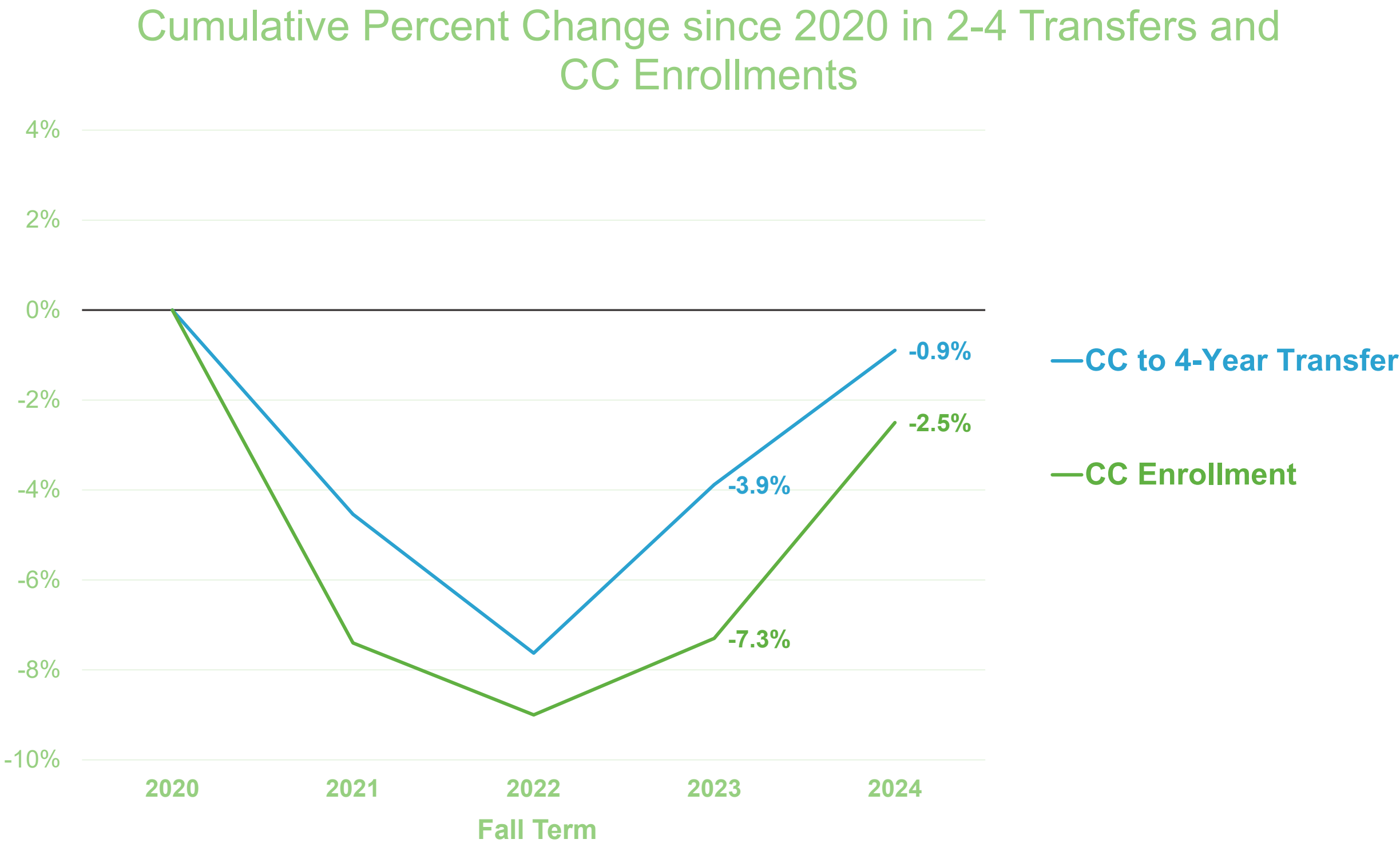
▶ **WEBINAR** | MAY 7, 2025 | 3-4PM ET

CCRC**WEBINAR**

Trends in Community College Enrollments and 2-4 Transfers

Doug Shapiro, PhD
VP Research & Executive Director, Research Center
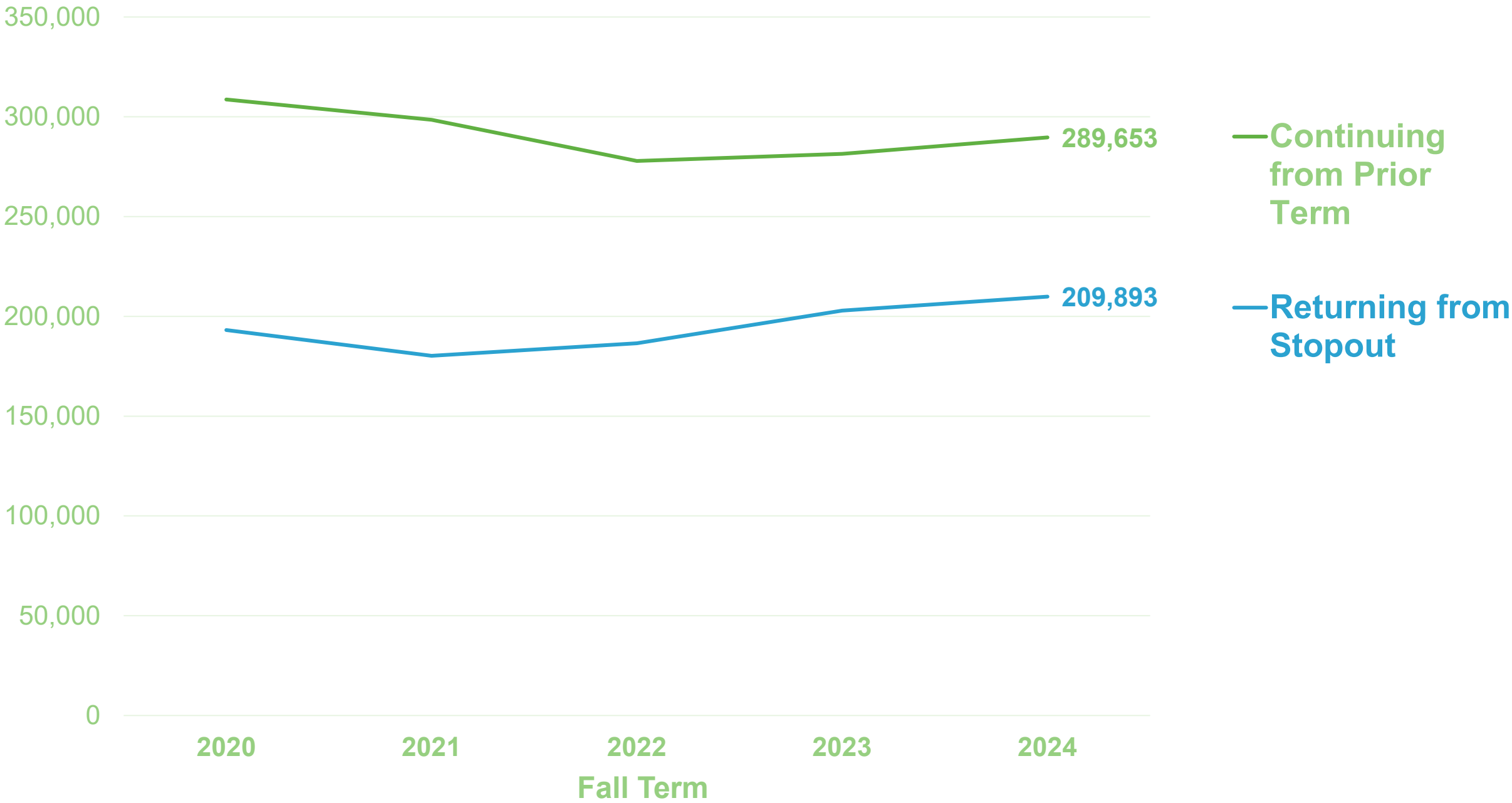National Student Clearinghouse

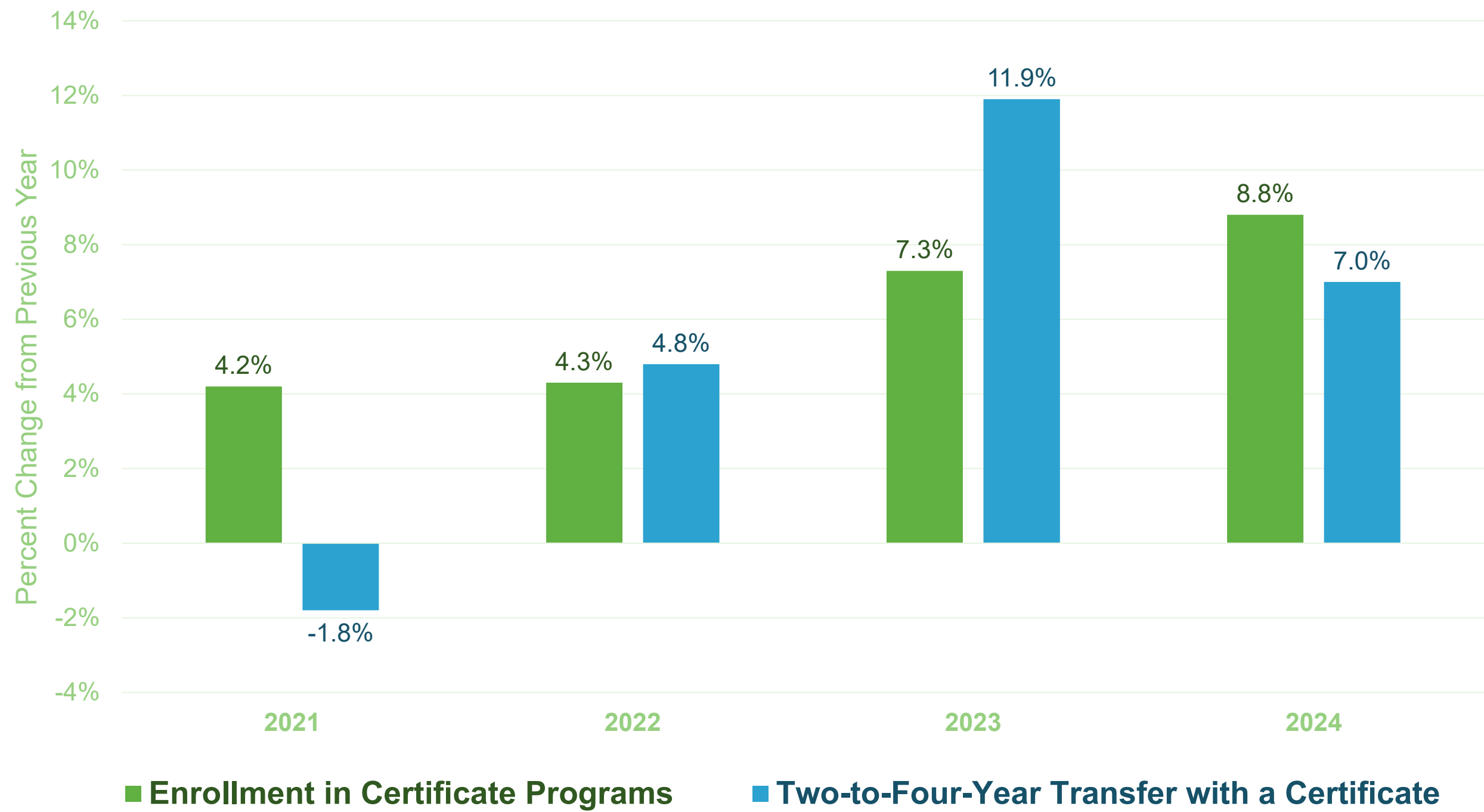# Community College to Four-Year Transfers are Approaching their Fall 2020 Level

Cumulative Percent Change since 2020 in 2-4 Transfers and CC Enrollments

— CC to 4-Year Transfer

— CC Enrollment

Fall Term

CC Students are Increasingly Stopping Out Before Transferring to a Four-Year

2-4 Transfers

Chart showing 2-4 Transfers by Fall Term (2020–2024). Continuing from Prior Term (green line) ends at 289,653. Returning from Stopout (blue line) ends at 209,893.

Following Enrollments, More CC Students are Earning Certificates Before Transferring

Percent Change from Previous Year

2021
- Enrollment in Certificate Programs: 4.2%
- Two-to-Four-Year Transfer with a Certificate: -1.8%

2022
- Enrollment in Certificate Programs: 4.3%
- Two-to-Four-Year Transfer with a Certificate: 4.8%

2023
- Enrollment in Certificate Programs: 7.3%
- Two-to-Four-Year Transfer with a Certificate: 11.9%

2024
- Enrollment in Certificate Programs: 8.8%
- Two-to-Four-Year Transfer with a Certificate: 7.0%

■ Enrollment in Certificate Programs   ■ Two-to-Four-Year Transfer with a Certificate

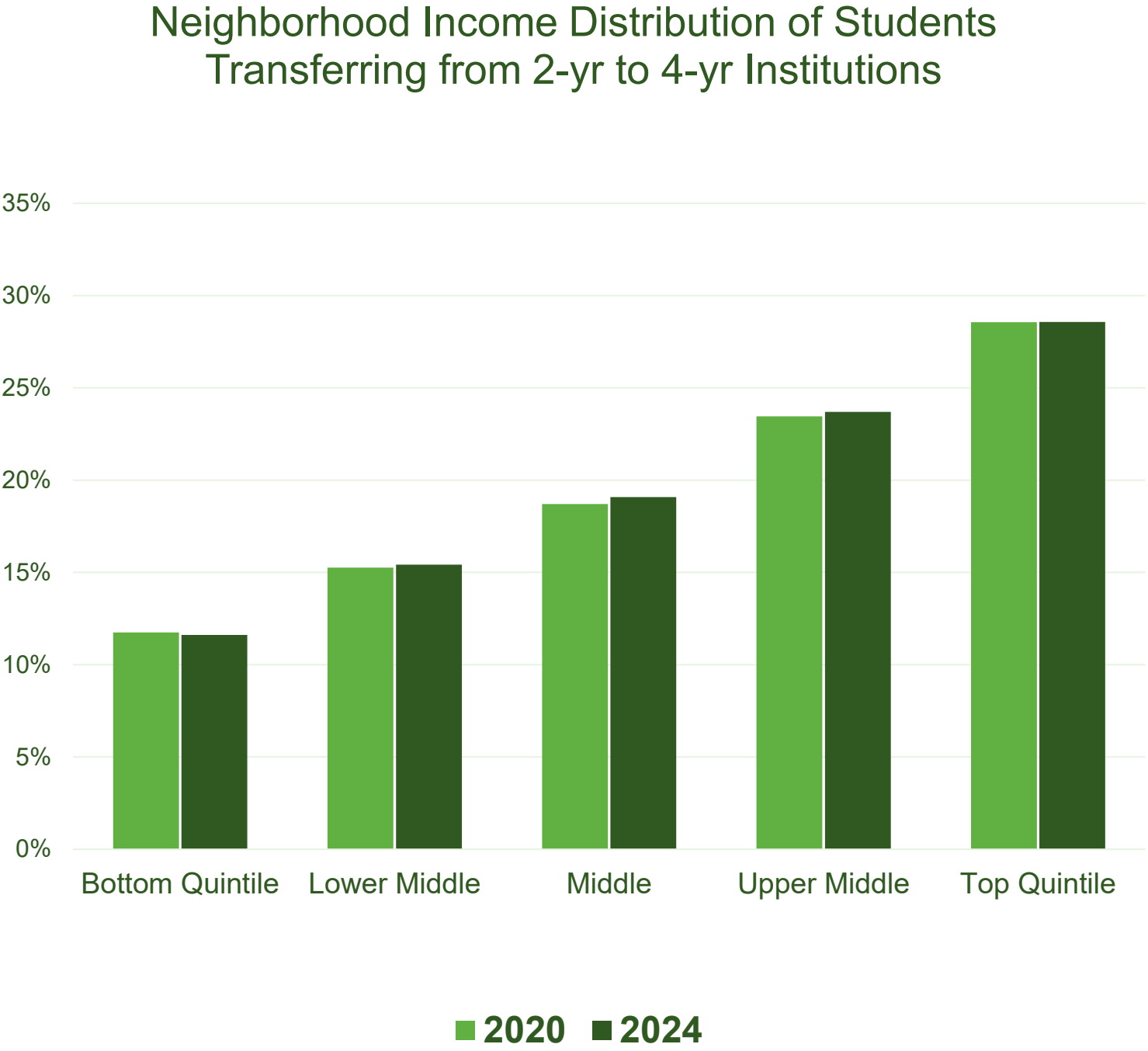National Student Clearinghouse
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Certificate Earners are a Small but Growing Share of 2-to-4-Year Transfers, While Associate Earners' Share is Shrinking

Percent of 2-4 Transfers by Highest Credential Earned Prior to Transfer

— With Associate

— With Certificate
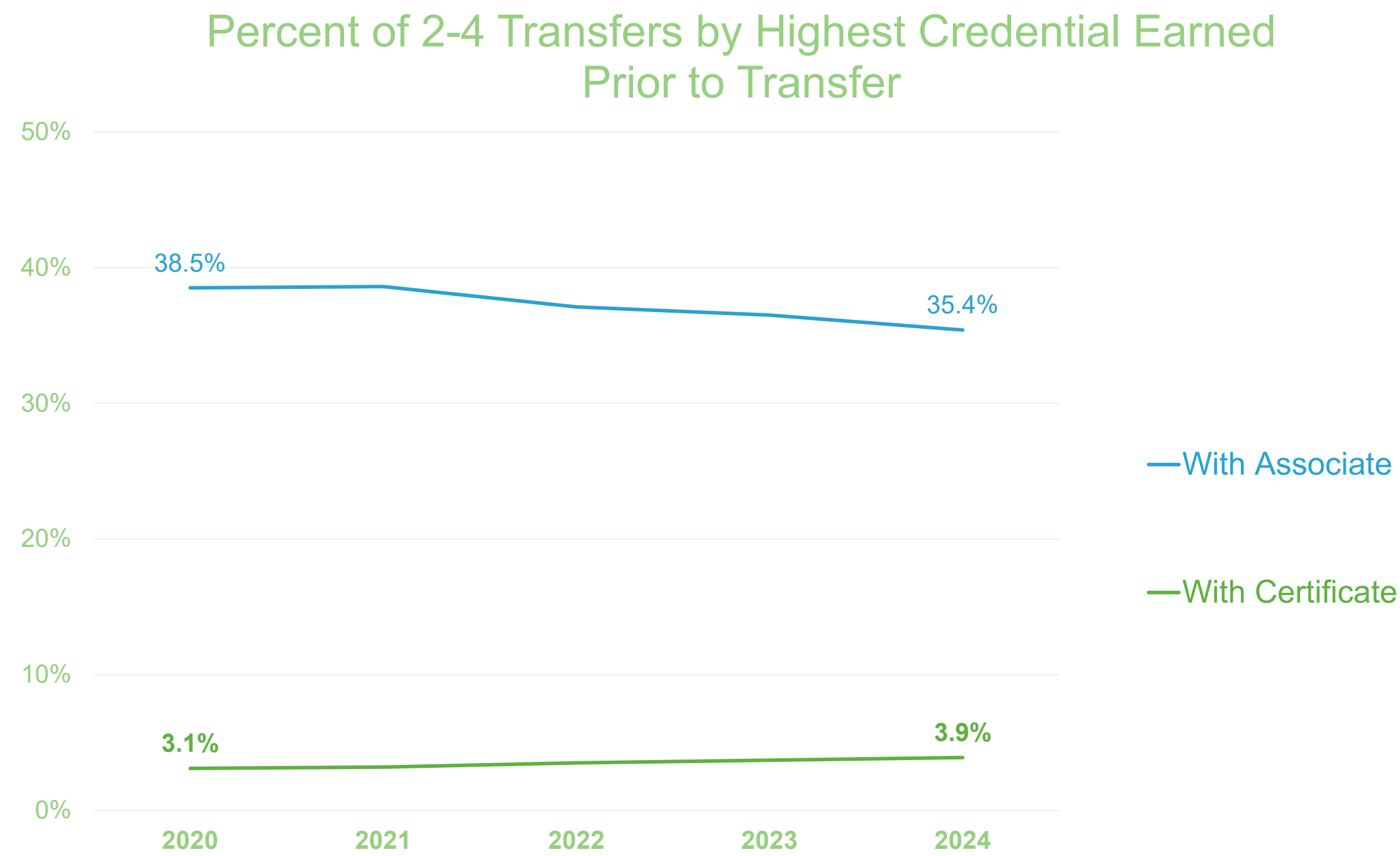
Upward Transfers are Increasingly Coming from Community Colleges that have High Vocational Program Focus

Percent Change in 2- to 4-Transfers, Fall 2020 to Fall 2024

Legend:
- High Transfer (green)
- Mixed (blue)
- High Vocational/Technical (orange)

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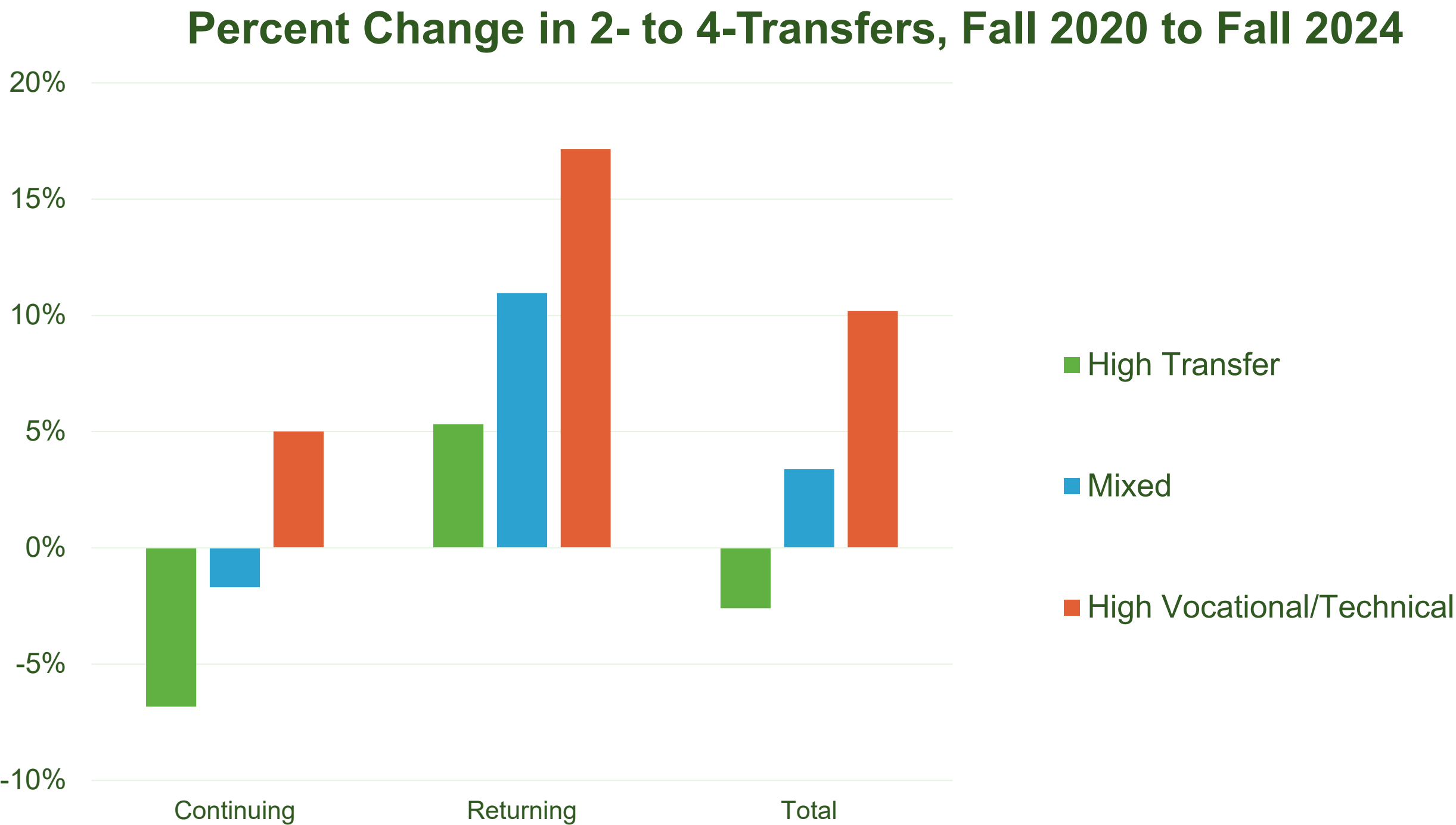
Upward Transfers Remain Dominated by Students from Higher-Income Backgrounds

Neighborhood Income Distribution of Students Transferring from 2-yr to 4-yr Institutions

2020 ■ 2024

- In Fall 2020 and 2024 alike:

  - 52% of transfers come from the top two quintiles of neighborhood income (combined)

  - 27% come from the bottom two quintiles

  - Virtually no change since 2020 in either the top or the bottom quintile share

(Includes Traditional-Age Students only)

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Key Takeaways

- 2-4 Transfers are recovering faster than total CC enrollments, and slightly faster than non-transfers at 4-yr institutions

- All of the growth has been among students returning from stopouts

- Following trends in CC enrollments generally:

  o Most of the transfer growth has been from CCs with high vocational program focus

  o More students are transferring with certificates, fewer with associates degrees

- No change in the shares of transfer students coming from higher- vs. lower- income neighborhoods

More at

*nscresearchcenter.org/**transfer-enrollment-and-pathways/***

*nscresearchcenter.org/**current-term-enrollment-estimates/***

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Tracking Transfer

Community College and Four-Year Institutional Effectiveness in Broadening Bachelor's Degree Attainment

Tatiana Velasco, Ph.D., Senior Research Associate

Community College Research Center

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Broken Transfer Negatively Impacts Millions of Students

80% of community college students **want a bachelor's degree**

33% of community college students **transfer to a four-year institution**
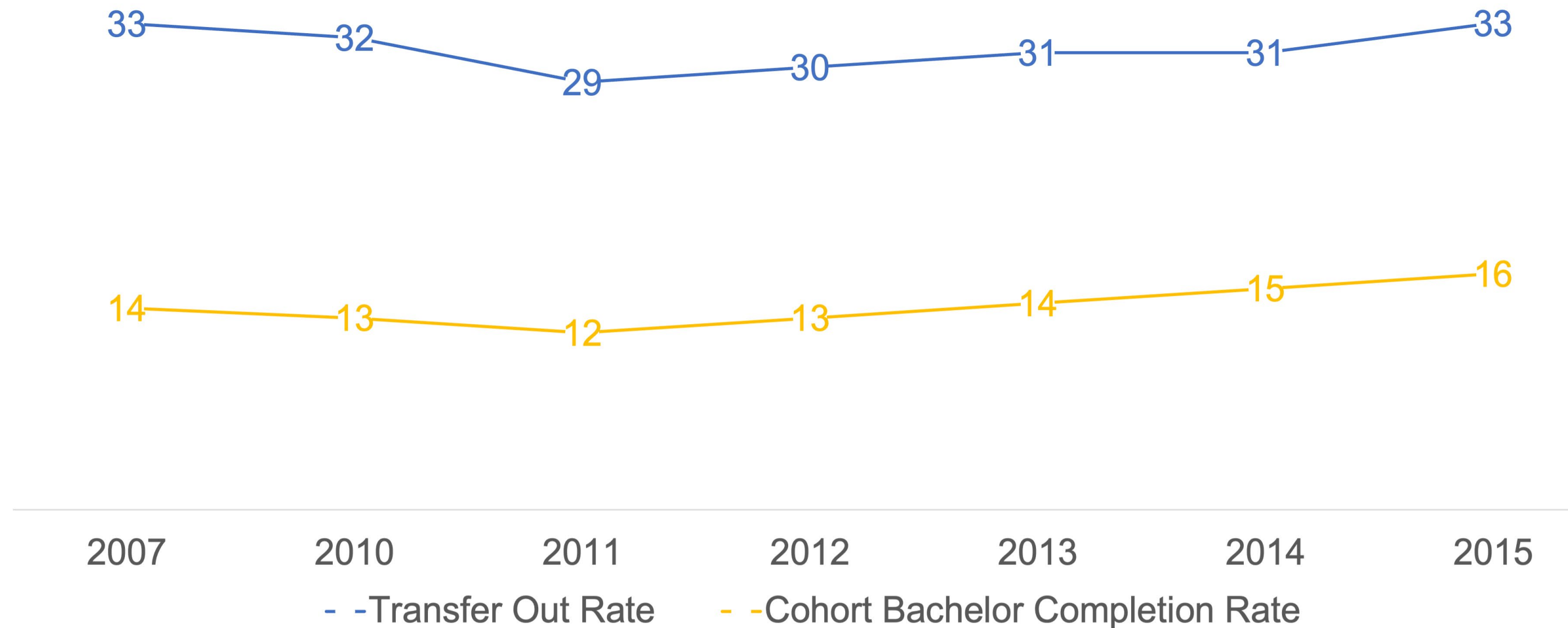
16% of community college students will **graduate with a bachelor's degree** within six years of starting college

Velasco, Fink, Bedoya-Guevara, Jenkins, & LaViolet. (2024, February). Tracking Transfer: Community College and Four-Year Institutional Effectiveness in Broadening Bachelor's Degree Attainment. In https://ccrc.tc.columbia.edu/publications/Tracking-Transfer-Community-College-and-Four-Year-Institutional-Effectiveness-in-Broadening-Bachelors-Degree-Attainment.html.

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Transfer Outcomes Have Improved Slightly but Remain Too Low

Trends in National Transfer Outcome Rates: Fall 2007 to Fall 2015 FTIC Community College Entrants

- - Transfer Out Rate   - - Cohort Bachelor Completion Rate

Velasco, Fink, Bedoya-Guevara, Jenkins, & LaViolet. (2024, February). Tracking Transfer: Community College and Four-Year Institutional Effectiveness in Broadening Bachelor's Degree Attainment. In https://ccrc.tc.columbia.edu/publications/Tracking-Transfer-Community-College-and-Four-Year-Institutional-Effectiveness-in-Broadening-Bachelors-Degree-Attainment.html.
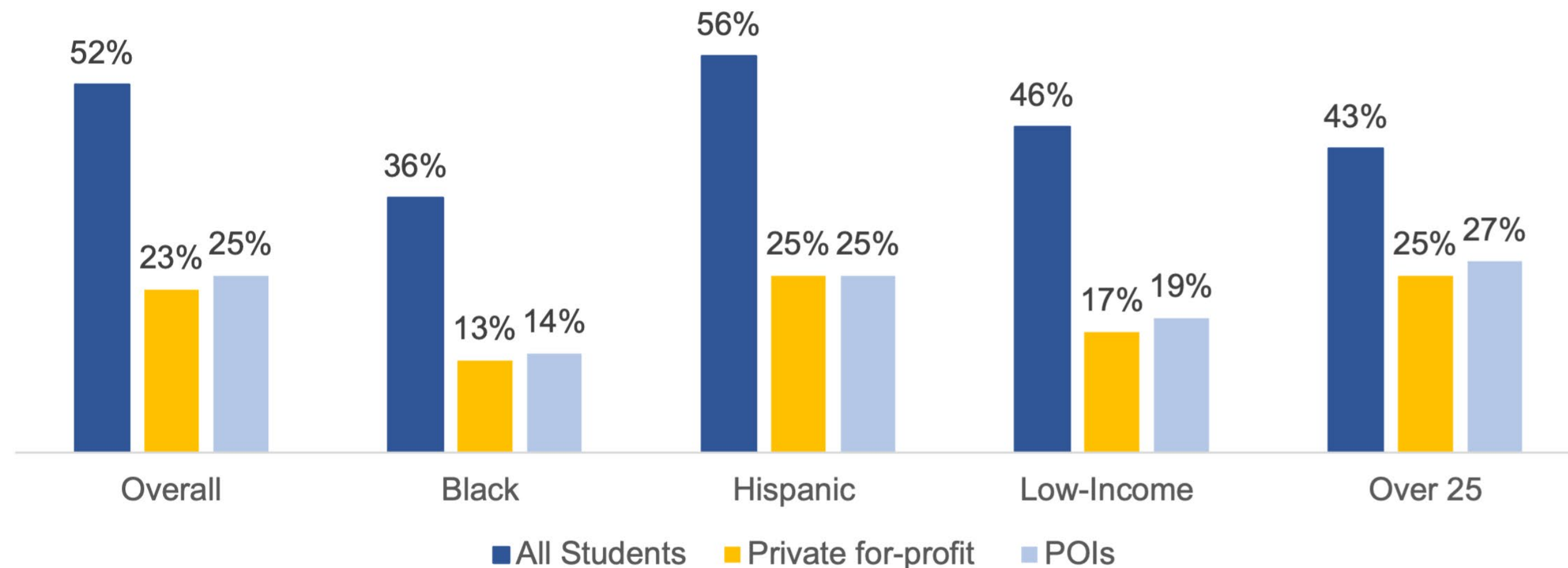
Transfer: Low Outcomes, High Disparities

National Six-Year Transfer Outcomes Rates:
Fall 2015 FTIC Community College Entrants

Who makes the leap?

How many transfers get a bachelor's?

How many CC students get a bachelor's?

Who makes the leap? (Transfer-Out-Rate)
- Overall: 33%
- Black: 29%
- Hispanic: 29%
- Native American: 32%
- Low-Income: 26%
- 25 or above: 17%

How many transfers get a bachelor's? (Transfer-Out Bachelor's Completion Rate)
- Overall: 48%
- Black: 32%
- Hispanic: 44%
- Native American: 42%
- Low-Income: 41%
- 25 or above: 36%

How many CC students get a bachelor's? (Cohort Bachelor's Completion Rate)
- Overall: 16%
- Black: 9%
- Hispanic: 13%
- Native American: 13%
- Low-Income: 11%
- 25 or above: 6%

Legend: Overall | Black | Hispanic | Native American | Low-Income | 25 or above

(Velasco et al., 2024)

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For-profit Colleges and Predominately Online Institutions (POIs) Have the Weakest Transfer Outcomes

Community College Transfer-In Bachelor's Completion Rate
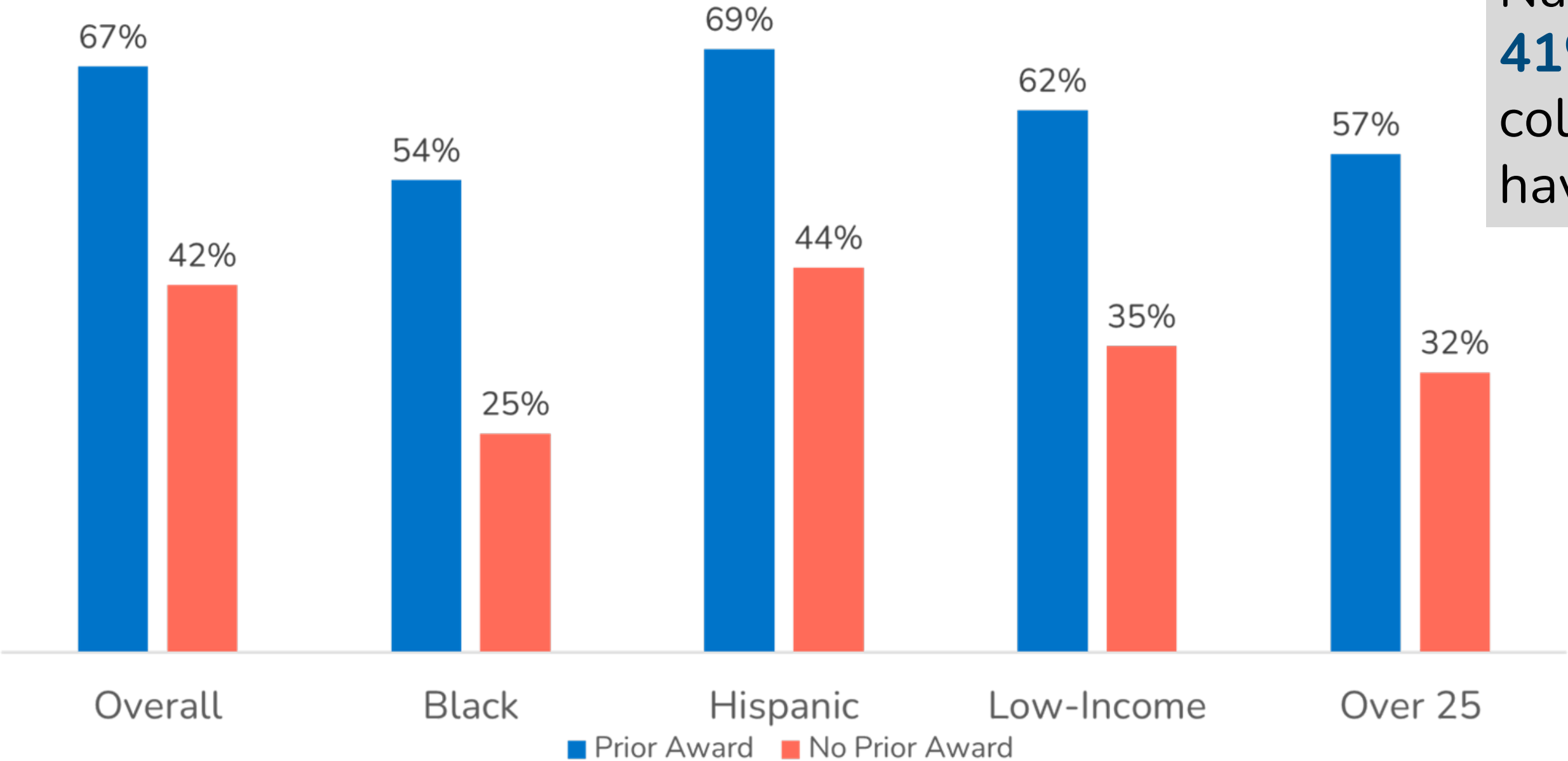Within Four Years by Student and Institutional Characteristics

	Overall	Black	Hispanic	Low-Income	Over 25
All Students	52%	36%	56%	46%	43%
Private for-profit	23%	13%	25%	17%	25%
POIs	25%	14%	25%	19%	27%

■ All Students ■ Private for-profit ■ POIs

(Velasco et al., 2024)

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Prior Award Completion Is Associated with Stronger Outcomes

Community College Transfer-In Bachelor's Completion Rate Within Four Years by Pre-Transfer Community College Award

Nationally, only **41%** of community college transfers have a prior award

Overall: Prior Award 67%, No Prior Award 42%
Black: Prior Award 54%, No Prior Award 25%
Hispanic: Prior Award 69%, No Prior Award 44%
Low-Income: Prior Award 62%, No Prior Award 35%
Over 25: Prior Award 57%, No Prior Award 32%

■ Prior Award ■ No Prior Award

(Velasco et al., 2024)

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Institutional Variation is Substantial Everywhere

Community College Transfer Outcomes by State (All FTIC Students)
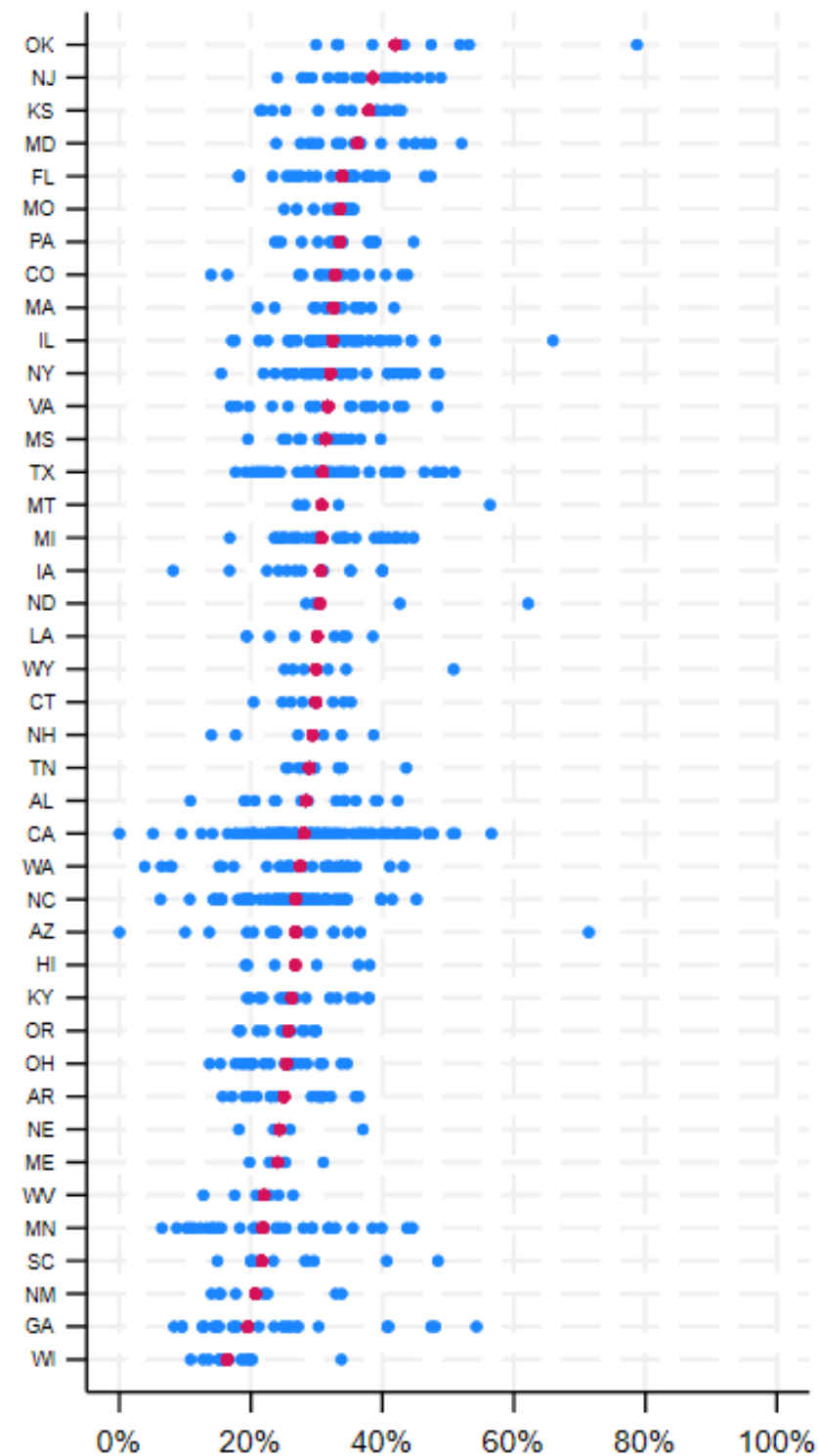
Transfer Out
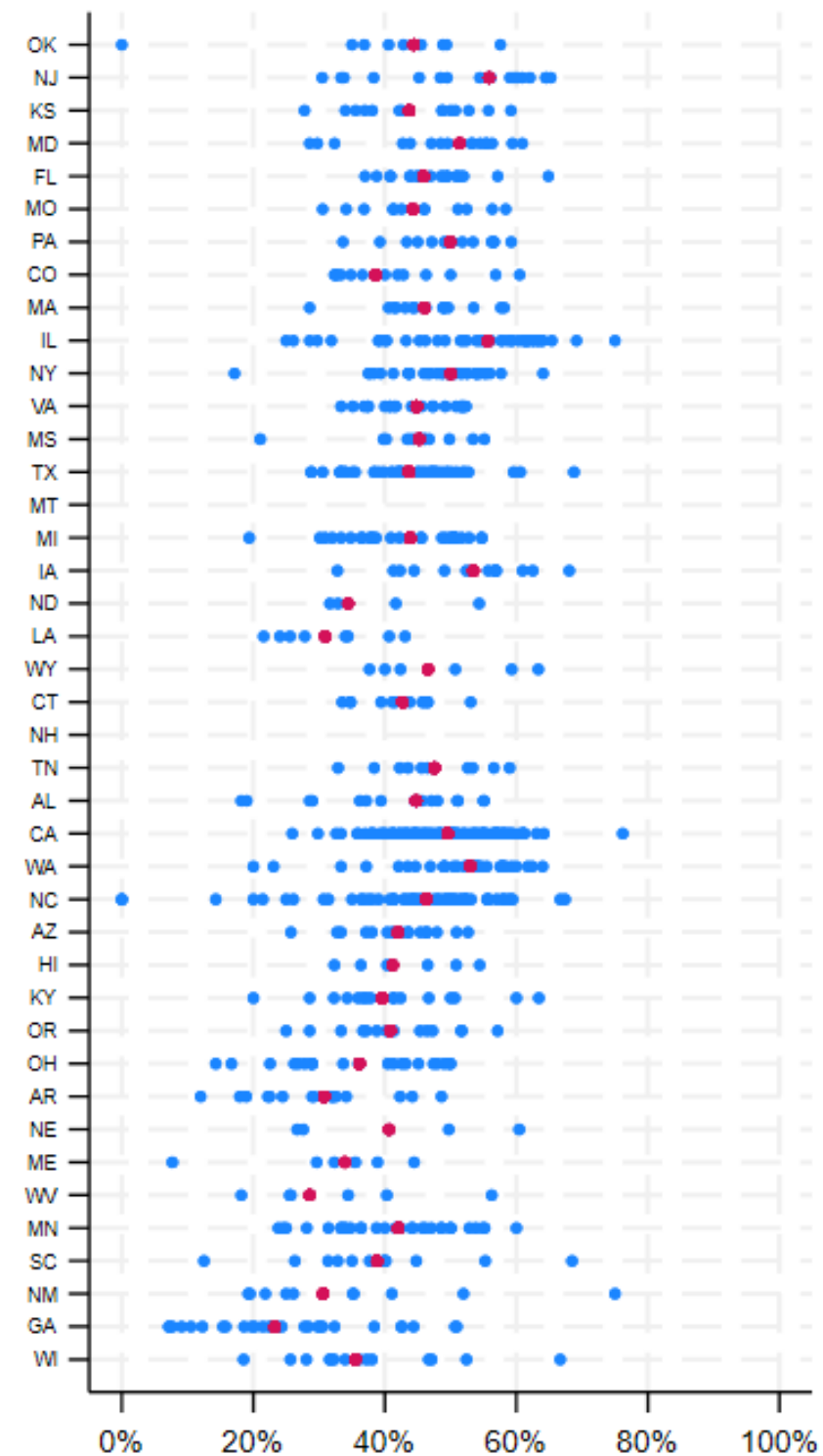
Transfer Out BA Completion

Cohort BA Completion

- Community College rate

- Median rate

There are some schools and partnerships with stronger and more equitable bachelor's completion outcomes.

Transfer Playbook 2.0

A Practical Guide for Achieving Excellence in Transfer and Bachelor's Attainment for Community College Students

Josh Wyner, Founder and Executive Director
Aspen Institute College Excellence Program

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Key Findings

Transfer Playbook 2.0 Strategies

Achieving Excellence in Transfer and Bachelor's Attainment with Three Strategies

Strategy 1	Strategy 2	Strategy 3
Prioritize Transfer at the Executive Level to Achieve Sustainable Success at Scale	Align Program Pathways and High-Quality Instruction to Promote Timely Bachelor's Completion within a Major	Tailor Transfer Advising and Nonacademic Supports to Foster Trust and Engagement

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Strategy 1

Prioritize Transfer at the Executive Level to Achieve Sustainable Success at Scale

Essential Practice #1: President-led, team-based, and well-resourced partnerships

- Shared, president-led vision for the partnership's impact, clearly communicated with key stakeholders

- Individual and shared investment, including funding and dedicated staff

- Cabinet-supported teams that advance strategy, implementation, relationship-building, and collaboration

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Prioritize Transfer at the Executive Level to Achieve Sustainable Success at Scale

Essential Practice #3: Routinized, transfer student-centered systems and processes

- Automation, technology, and predictable processes to improve student experiences at scale

- Actionable, disaggregated data to promote accountability, support case-making, and inform continuous improvement
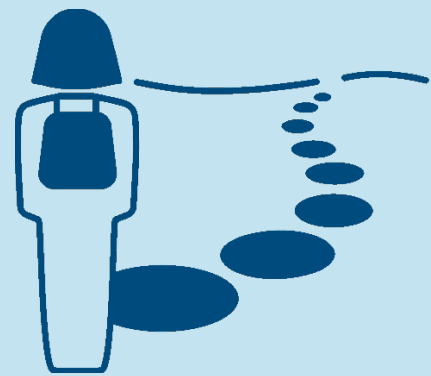
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Align Program Pathways and High-Quality Instruction to Promote Timely Bachelor's Completion within a Major

Essential Practice #1: Four-year sequences that promote learning and major progression

- Create and maintain clear, term-by-term, four-year maps within each major that set expectations for timely completion and are adjustable for part-time students

- Frontload courses that inspire early major exploration, commitment, or changes

- Expect at least one major-specific course each term in community college

- Embed college-level, program-specific math and English in the first year

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Transformational Models Combine Reforms that Redefine the Transfer Student Experience

Partnership Driven Examples of Transformational Models and Their Components

NOVA & GMU (ADVANCE)

Dual admissions

Academic coaches in community college

Major-specific four-year pathways

Limited set of GMU courses available to NOVA students when community college equivalent is unavailable (co-enrollment)

Access to GMU resources (e.g., library, social events) while enrolled at NOVA

Holistic success coaches at GMU complement academic advising

Free tuition for Pell-eligible ADVANCE students

AWC & NAU-Yuma

Co-location of NAU on AWC's campus

Robust, pathway-connected high school dual enrollment

Wraparound supports that start in high school

AWC-bound students commit to NAU transfer pathway before high school graduation

AWC scholarships incentivize academic and nonacademic behaviors associated with transfer success

Collaborative, four-year advising plan from AWC to NAU

John Jay & six CUNY community colleges (Justice Academy)

Auto-enrollment in dual admissions for specific majors

Major-specific four-year pathways

Systematic advising across transfer experience, including mandatory appointment before matriculating at John Jay

Institutionally Driven Examples of Transformational Reforms

East Carolina (BSIT)

Specific bachelor's pathways for AAS completers

Dedicated, trained advisors

Most concentrations can be completed in person or online

On-site delivery at satellite locations with high demand (e.g., local community college, military base)

Employer-informed, career-connected learning

Tallahassee State College

Systematic new student onboarding to create tailored education plans by the end of first year

Major-specific four-year pathways (developed with partners) pre-populate plans/schedules

Direct registration from tailored plans

Imperial Valley College

Robust, pathway-connected high school dual enrollment

Advisors guide admitted high school students in developing a starter degree plan that reflects transfer and/or career goals

Advising campaign aims for every student to have a tailored degree plan through to graduation/transfer by the end of the student's first year
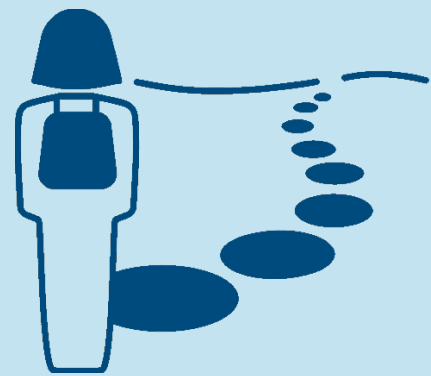
Strategy 2
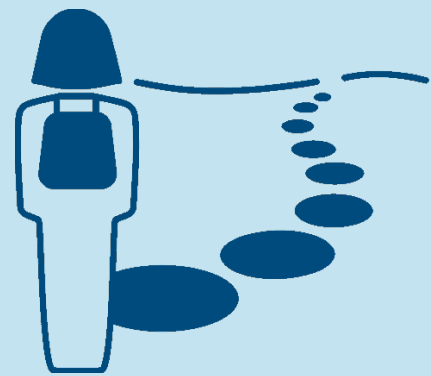
Align Program Pathways and High-Quality Instruction to Promote Timely Bachelor's Completion within a Major

Essential Practice #2: Systematized translation of maps into tailored education plans

- Set systems to ensure plan development within the first term

- Create customized plans that support timely completion while balancing students' work and family responsibilities

- Embed maps and plans into student information and degree audit systems

- Adjust course schedules and modalities to enable plan completion

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Align Program Pathways and High-Quality Instruction to Promote Timely Bachelor's Completion within a Major

Essential Practice #3: Strengthened instruction, academic support, and curricular alignment

- Create space and routines for faculty to build cross-sector relationships, develop and maintain pathways, and align and strengthen curriculum and instruction

- Include content on transfer student needs in faculty professional development

- Support success in gateway courses, writing, and STEM through enhanced instruction and robust academic services at the community college and university levels

Tailor Transfer Advising and Nonacademic Supports to Foster Trust and Engagement

Essential Practice #1: Early, Sustained, And Inevitable Advising Systems

- Make advising inevitable throughout community college

- Engage transfer students before, during, and after they transition to a university

- Start transfer outreach and advising in high school

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Tailor Transfer Advising and Nonacademic Supports to Foster Trust and Engagement

Essential Practice #2: A Trained, Knowledgeable, And Caring Advising Corps

- Use hiring and training to increase advisor empathy for transfer students

- Invest in mandatory, routine, transfer-specific professional development

- Develop advising protocols that start with students' career goals

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Strategy 3

Tailor Transfer Advising and Nonacademic Supports to Foster Trust and Engagement

Essential Practice #3: A Transfer-Specific Approach To Holistic Success

- Provide quick on-ramps to career advising and high-impact experiences in community college and university

- Foster community-building, belonging, and inclusion informed by transfer student demographics and needs

- Attend to transfer students' basic and non-academic needs

Northern Virginia Community College and George Mason University

The ADVANCE Program:

- Scaling, dual-admission, guided-transfer program designed to guarantee 60+60 credits = bachelor's degree
- Maps are built, advising is shared, and scholarships are jointly raised
- 3,300 students enrolled, 40% low-income and majority are students of color

Annual ADVANCE Academic Summit

- Full day meeting with George Mason and NOVA leaders and faculty
- Plenary sessions include:
    - Grounding in ADVANCE goals
    - Sharing student feedback and outcomes data
    - Highlighting success stories (e.g., student success, faculty collaboration)
- Facilitated faculty breakout groups by discipline, includes George Mason and NOVA faculty focused on curricular and instructional alignment

# Northern Virginia Community College and George Mason University

Results:

- 87% fall-to-fall retention rate (2019 cohort)
- Average of 3.5 semesters to graduation (compared to 4.36 semesters for non-ADVANCE students)
- 124 average credits at graduation (compared to 131 for non-ADVANCE students)
- ADVANCE students **save about $15,000 in tuition costs** compared to students who spent four years at George Mason
- High visibility in community, substantial investments from corporations with talent needs

Arizona Western College and Northern Arizona University
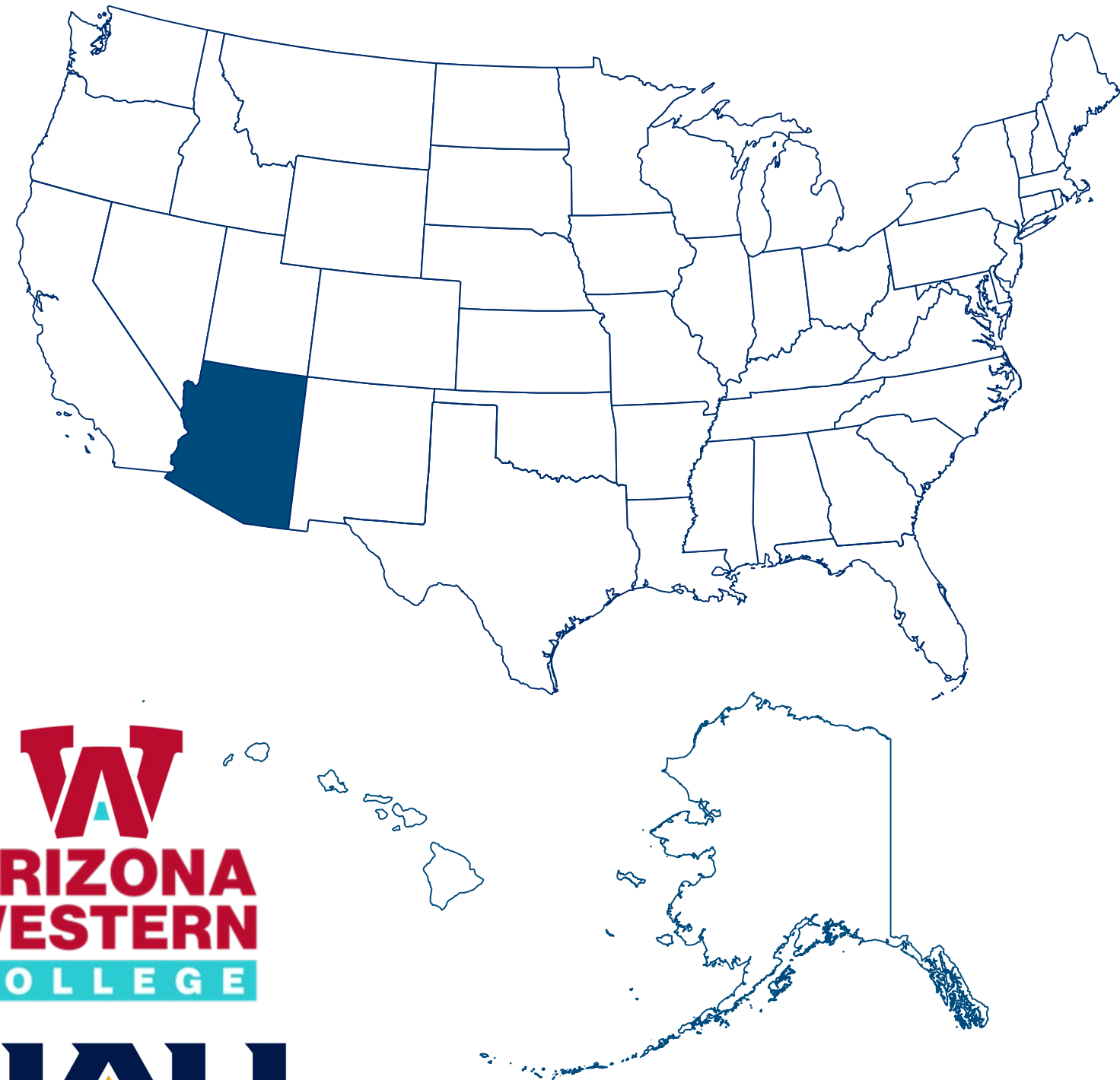
Context:

Despite a co-located campus since 1988, the two institutions remained organizationally separate.

Reforms:

- Both presidents and their leadership teams met in person to create a shared North Star vision and devise a partnership structure
- Set a "Big Hairy Audacious Goal": double the rate of earned baccalaureate degrees in La Paz and Yuma counties by 2035
- Yuma Educational Success (YES) program offers $1000/semester scholarship for up to four semesters at AWC to encourage college going, completion, and transfer to NAU

Results:

- Jointly lobbied AZ legislature for $5 Million for a mechanical engineering program
- Enduring partnership structure—leadership teams regularly communicate and collaborate

Transfer Playbook 2.0 Framework

Practical Guidance from Our Fieldwork

Make Transfer a President-Level Priority to Achieve Sustainable Success at Scale

Align Program Pathways and High-Quality Instruction to Promote Timely Bachelor's Completion within a Major

Tailor Transfer Advising & Nonacademic Supports to Foster Trust and Engagement

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Q&A

What questions do you have about what you just heard?