# THE UNIVERSITY OF NORTH CAROLINA SYSTEM

## UNC-NCCCS 2+2 E-Learning Initiative

### Report to the Joint Legislative Education Oversight Committee

June 15, 2020

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

## UNC-NCCCS 2+2 E-Learning Initiative

**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 build stronger pathways with community college partners.

Nearly 11,000 North Carolina community colleges students transferred into the UNC System in Fall 2019, a 51 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 near the nation's average among transfer students of 42 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)
- Advanced Issues in School-Age Education (EDU 289)
- Educational Technology (EDU 271)
- Effective Teacher Training (EDU 275)
- Foundations of Education (EDU 216)
- Introduction to Early Childhood Education (EDU 119)
- Issues in Early Childhood Education (EDU 188)
- Teacher Licensure Preparation (EDU 250)

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

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[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 school can be found at: https://myapps.northcarolina.edu/transfertoolbox/advising-tools-nc-community-college-transfer-students.

This information is embedded into the Transfer Toolbox, which has been made available to all 58 community colleges and UNC System institutions. 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. Plans for a student version of the Transfer Toolbox are underway. When it is completed, it will provide user-friendly information directly to potential transfer students.

To further facilitate seamless transfer from North Carolina community colleges to UNC System institutions, a series of Transfer Talks were conducted to provide information and updates to community college and senior institution transfer personnel. Feedback regarding improvements for BDPs, revisions to the CAA, and best transfer practices was gathered within the monthly Transfer Talks. Refinement to teacher education BDPs were addressed as a part of the information gleaned during the web conferences. The Transfer Talks serve as a collaborative platform between the two systems to improve the transfer student experience.

**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, 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

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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. Future research will study outcomes of students who transfer from NCCCS.

In 2015, the UNC Educator Quality Dashboard was developed to share and disseminate key findings from the strategic research agenda. The dashboard is 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. Visitors to the dashboard may examine performance indicators at the System and campus levels across a range of factors, including educator recruitment, selection, preparation, and performance. The dashboard is also useful for analyzing the impact of educator preparation program graduates on P12 student learning, measures associated with national accreditation, and other outcome-based indicators. The dashboard can be viewed online at eqdasbhoard.northcarolina.edu.

In 2017, the Data and Strategic Research Advisory Committee (DSRAC) was established to better utilize the significant expertise at UNC System institutions to guide and inform the annual strategic research agenda, data dashboards, and required educator preparation program reporting. The DSRAC is comprised of university leaders and research faculty from all 15 UNC System educator preparation programs and is tasked with ensuring all research initiatives reflect the most accurate and beneficial data for program improvement. The DSRAC is also tasked with providing expert consultation on the development of new measures and refinement of current indicators of educator quality; ensuring that data and research drive program improvement and evidence-based decision-making cultures among UNC System educator preparation programs; and ensuring all strategic research initiatives remain at the forefront of research and development.

**Conclusion**

With new approaches and support for reform, the UNC System, in partnership with the North Carolina Community College System, can be a launching pad for many more North Carolinians to begin rewarding careers in education. Student success can be boosted through the creation of highly structured transfer pathways with clear academic requirements that ensure that students are connected to effective academic, social, and financial supports that promote retention and persistence.