

Press Release

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Maryland Colleges Launch Plans to Strengthen Student Transfer Success

WASHINGTON, D.C. — Twenty-five Maryland colleges and universities took a major step toward making it much easier for community college students to transfer and earn bachelor's degrees across the state last month. At a convening hosted by the Aspen Institute College Excellence Program and the Maryland Higher Education Commission (MHEC), community colleges and four-year institutions shared the culmination of a full two years of work by launching their Strategic Transfer Excellence Plans—concrete roadmaps to strengthen transfer pathways, boost bachelor's degree completion, and better align college credentials with Maryland's workforce needs.

Maryland is already a national leader in educational attainment; 43 percent of Maryland residents aged 25 and older hold a bachelor's degree or higher, compared to the national average of 36 percent. But Maryland's education leaders understand that more can be done, that the state's long-term economic competitiveness depends on ensuring that even more residents earn college degrees. Among the greatest opportunities: building stronger, more accessible pathways that result in thousands more Maryland's community college students earning bachelor's degrees from four-year institutions.

Transferring from a community college to a four-year institution remains one of the most affordable, high-impact routes to a bachelor's degree—for Marylanders and their families, and for employers seeking talented workers. Yet statewide outcomes show that, while 55 percent of Maryland community college students are enrolled in transfer programs, only 23 percent transfer to a Maryland four-year institution within six years. Moreover, fewer than half complete a bachelor's degree within three years of transferring.

"Maryland's students have clear ambitions—and our responsibility is to make sure the pathway to a bachelor's degree is clear, affordable, and achievable," said Dr. Sanjay Rai, Secretary of the Maryland Higher Education Commission. "The STEP Launch is a turning point: institutions across the state are moving from analysis to action, with concrete plans to strengthen transfer, ensure credits apply toward degree requirements—especially within a student's major—and accelerate progress into bachelor's degrees that lead to good jobs for Marylanders and delivering the talent Maryland employers need."

The STEP Launch marks the culmination of the first two years of the Maryland Transfer Intensive, a seven-year statewide effort to address persistent challenges in transfer through proven practices: aligning leadership at the highest levels, investing in data-driven reforms, and strengthening institutional partnerships to improve transfer student success at scale.

“Maryland is showing what it looks like to scale transfer reform—not as a set of isolated pilots, but as a statewide strategy to help more community college students, especially low-income learners, earn bachelor’s degrees on time, at an affordable price,” said Josh Wyner, Founder and Executive Director of the Aspen Institute College Excellence Program. “I am really impressed that so many of these Strategic Transfer Excellence Plans are designed to significantly change student outcomes by focusing on what research says matters most: building major-ready transfer pathways and transfer-specific advising. Most encouraging has been the commitment of college presidents to developing the kind of scaled reforms that can change thousands of students’ lives.”

Reflecting on the progress and leadership of participating teams across Maryland, the launch event included presentations by three teams on particularly impressive strategies from their Strategic Transfer Excellence Plans:

- **Frostburg University and Allegany College:** Align K-12 schools, colleges, and employers in Western Maryland around regional workforce needs, with a focus on increasing degree attainment and alignment to fast-growing, good jobs in teaching and related fields that require at least a bachelor’s degree. The partnership will underscore how small colleges can have a substantial regional impact through transfer, needed in a region where bachelor’s attainment is 23 percent, well below Maryland’s average of 43 percent.
- **Carroll Community College, Community College of Baltimore County, and Towson University:** Guarantee dual admission to both Towson University and the community college for students who declare transfer intent in the first year of enrollment at a partner community college and earn an associate degree. Students on this path are supported by specialized Bridge advisors and opportunities to build community through high-impact experiences.
- **University of Maryland, College Park, Montgomery College and Prince George’s Community College:** Convening discipline-specific faculty across partner institutions to design clear pathways from community college directly into a student’s intended major at UMD. The goals: to ensure learning is continuous and every credit earned applies from the associate degree through bachelor’s degree completion in the major.

“Our guiding focus is clear: ensuring that our students who transfer to four-year institutions have the support they need to earn their bachelor’s degrees quickly and successfully, aiming for 70 percent of our community college students to complete their bachelor’s degrees within two years of enrolling,” said Prince George’s Community College President Falecia Williams, who served as co-chair of the Presidential Steering Committee on Transfer Student Success.

Over the next four years, the Maryland Transfer Intensive will evaluate its impact on transfer enrollment, bachelor’s completion, and other success metrics, with the goal of establishing a blueprint for other states interested in adopting similar reforms. The partnership underscores Maryland’s commitment to delivering on its promise of educational excellence and social mobility for all.

The Maryland Transfer Intensive is delivered in partnership by the Aspen Institute College Excellence Program and the Maryland Higher Education Commission (MHEC).

For more information, including the 25 participating colleges, visit Aspen's [state page](#).

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About the Aspen Institute College Excellence Program

The Aspen Institute's College Excellence Program aims to advance higher education practices and leadership that significantly improve student learning, completion, and employment after college—especially for the growing population of students of color and low-income students on American campuses. We support colleges and universities in their quest to achieve a higher standard of excellence, delivering credentials that unlock life-changing careers and strengthen our economy, society, and democracy. We know it takes visionary college leaders to achieve this higher standard and we make it our mission to equip them with the knowledge, skills, and research-backed tools to inspire change, shift practice, and advance the capacity of colleges to deliver excellent and equitable student outcomes. For more information, visit highered.aspeninstitute.org

About the Maryland Higher Education Commission

The Maryland Higher Education Commission (MHEC) is the State of Maryland's higher education coordinating board responsible for establishing statewide policies for Maryland public and private colleges and universities and for-profit career schools. MHEC also administers state financial aid programs to students statewide.

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