A Bold Step for Improving Transfer in Kentucky: Improvement Communities

2023

The Kentucky Student Success **Collaborative**

In 2021, the Kentucky Council on Postsecondary Education (CPE) created the Kentucky Student Success Collaborative, a first-of-its-kind statewide program, to accelerate transformational change on strategic student success priorities critical to the 60 x 30 goal. Through broad stakeholder engagement, the KYSSC facilitates strategy development, continuous improvement implementation, collaborative learning networks, and capacity building for campus partners to lead transformational change.

About the Council on Postsecondary Education

CPE is Kentucky's higher education coordinating agency committed to strengthening our workforce, economy and quality of life. We do this by guiding the continuous improvement and efficient operation of a high-quality, diverse and accessible system of postsecondary education.

Key responsibilities include:

- Developing and implementing a strategic agenda for postsecondary education that includes measures of progress.
- Producing and submitting a biennial budget request for adequate public funding of postsecondary education.
- Determining tuition rates and admission criteria at public postsecondary institutions.
- Collecting and distributing data about postsecondary education performance.
- Ensuring the coordination and connectivity of technology among public institutions.
- Licensing non-public postsecondary institutions to operate in the Commonwealth.

TEAM
KENTUCKY

The Kentucky Council on Postsecondary Education was selected by the National Association of System Heads (NASH) to participate in a Transfer NASH Improvement Community (NIC) in May of 2022. NASH set an ambitious aim for the NIC to increase the percentage of in-state students enrolling at two-year institutions who transfer and complete baccalaureate degrees within six years by seven percent by May 2030.

Using improvement science methodology adapted for use in higher education, Kentucky, along with the Pennsylvania State System of Higher Education, Texas A&M University System and the University of Illinois System, embarked on a cutting-edge experience leading four- and two-year campus partners through testing small changes to scale to improve transfer student success across campuses and ultimately, across the system. CPE invited Western Kentucky University (WKU) and Southcentral Community and Technical College (SKYCTC) to participate in the first ever Transfer Network Improvement Community (NIC) for Kentucky.

Improvement Science

The improvement science model establishes common methodology, language, and norms.[1] Using action-oriented learning through Plan, Do, Study, and Act {PDSA} cycles, each campus tested small changes over 45-day increments to lead large scale change toward the common aim.

Kentucky's Team

Beginning with process mapping the transfer experience between their institutions, WKU and SKYCTC created a visual display of the steps a student experiences during transfer. The process maps identified inefficiencies, duplication of effort, variation in the process and unnecessary steps.

Action Cycle I

WKU and SKYCTC selected three areas for the first test of change action period. Higher than anticipated positive outcomes and a couple of unexpected early wins occurred during the period.

Target	Test of Change	Outcome	Early win
Breakdown in communication on program options and program requirements.	Joint advisor convening for sharing of knowledge and a questions/answer session.	Over 100 participants. Post event satisfaction survey results found 100% were more than satisfied with the convening and asked for more time and tangible takeaways to use in advising transfer students.	Other nearby community colleges asked WKU to provide training for their transfer advisors after hearing how beneficial the convening was for transfer advisors.
Eliminating wait time between transfer and course registration by using non-faculty advisors (onboarding specialists).	Train professional, non-faculty staff to register transfer students while faculty are away on leave.	Twenty students indicated plans to attend WKU. Of the twenty, eleven had not created a schedule. Outreach helped four of the eleven enroll in courses, identified three not transferring and three others were in process to enroll with WKU.	WKU experienced quick results and expanded using non-faculty advisors. WKU engaged with an additional 85 incoming transfer students to fully enroll them.
Earlier connection of students to WKU by SKYCTC transfer advisors for early access to on campus activities and enrollment.	The names of third and fourth semester associate of science major students had their names sent to WKU advisors after the closing of the drop/add window at SKYCTC.	Twenty student names were sent to WKU. Nine ended up successfully registering, two chose not to attend (one went to the workforce and the other went to another institution).	

All three tests of change were adopted and scaling to implementation is in progress.

Action Cycle II

Target	Test of Change	Outcome
Students earning an associate in science degree as a second-choice degree when not selected to a competitive preference program.	Thirty-six students were invited to repeat the career interest inventory and meet with advisors to select a new major.	Only one student completed a new career interest inventory. The other thirty-five students either reapplied to the selected allied health program or stopped out of college.
Earlier connection of all SKYCTC students intending transfer to WKU.	Developing of a four-semester checklist that is linked to the early elementary education program sheet on the WKU webpage.	A one-page, semester-by-semester document was created and linked to the online program information sheet at WKU. SKYCTC IEC faculty advisors began tracking the number of advisees receiving the document to see if those receiving transfer at higher rates than those who do not.
Expanding knowledge on program options and program requirements beyond the top five transfer majors to WKU.	WKU identified the five transfer academic programs (beyond the top five transfer majors) lacking program check sheets and leadership worked with program chairs/academic deans to develop check sheets.	Between five and eight new transfer academic program check sheets were completed and posted to the transfer center website.

Two of the three tests of change were successful and were adapted moving forward in the scaling process towards implementation. However, with the third test of change WKU and SKYCTC experienced their first failure. Testing to increase the number of transfer students from the pool of students who received denial letters to a selective admissions program but graduated with an Associate of Science was unsuccessful.

Data collected during the test revealed that students receiving denial letters either stopped out after receiving the letter, leaving SKYCTC without a degree, or returned and reapplied for admission to the allied health program. Tracking for admittance to an allied health program after applying for a second time is unknown. None of the thirty-six transferred. The change was abandoned. Idea exploration is ongoing by SKYCTC on how to better support this population of students through earlier use of career interest inventories and career counseling.

Second semester of NIC

Following a NASH convening for systems to share lessons learned, insights gained and to plan for the next semester of improvement science work, Kentucky's team updated key improvement science tools (i.e., driver diagram and action plan templates) and four tests of change emerged for the third rapid action cycle.

Third Action Cycle

Target	Test of Change	Outcome
Improving the transfer culture through reverse transfer.	WKU identified students who transferred with significant general education hours but failed to declare a credential from SKYCTC.	WKU sent 121 student names to SKYCTC for outreach and if appropriate, credential awarding. Of the 121 students, eleven received credentials.
Expanded use of non-faculty advisors for registering transfer students during periods when faculty are away.	WKU identified SKYCTC transfer students not registered and have been waiting longer than three or more days to complete course registration for enrollment by non-faculty advisors.	Preliminary data supports the hypothesis that expanding outreach would lead to an uptick in transfer from SKYCTC to WKU. Final data not available until the end of August 2023.
Joint admission of SKYCTC Business students at WKU	SKYCTC Business faculty teaching BUS 283 (marker for transfer intending) complete a joint admissions application to WKU.	Glitch in link for the joint admissions application created a delay in student applying. However, the test in its current format failed. A revised process for getting the joint admission application completed and transfer fee waived will be tested in Fall 2023.

Tests of change are not impervious to internal forces that can delay progress, and two of the three tests of change conducted during the third rapid action cycles were delayed. Deeming them as in progress at the end of the 45-day window, the two tests were carried forward from cycle three into cycle four. The team added only one of the two other tests of change that had been planned. The fourth is deferred for Fall 23.

Results for tests implemented in the third rapid action cycle are denoted in the above chart. The results for the third test added during the fourth rapid action cycle are in the next chart.

Fourth Action Cycle

Target	Test of Change	Outcome
Official, in-progress transcript of students indicating transfer to WKU sent prior to graduation for course articulation and enrollment.	SKYCTC registrar sent electronic, official in-progress transfer for Spring 2023 graduating students who completed a transfer application at the time the student files for graduation. WKU to articulate and use in-progress files for registration.	Test of change is inconclusive. SKYCTC experienced difficulties in sending the in-progress transcript to WKU so reliable data is unavailable. The test to be repeated in Fall 2023.

Success that comes slowly can be rather difficult to maintain momentum and patience to achieve; however, the ability to sit in discomfort for the goal is always worth the investment.

WKU has seen an 53% increase of transfer students from SKYCTC when comparing the number of transfer students enrolled by the same date last year.

This number will assuredly increase as fall registration continues through early August 2023.

Future NIC's

Somerset Community College and the University Center of Southern Kentucky partner institutions will launch a NIC. with a focus on decreasing excessive credits at the time of bachelor's degree completion, in mid-September 2023. Two additional NIC's over the next two years are also planned.

Results

Preliminary findings identify four-year institutions leaning into the relationship community colleges have with students and connecting students earlier with transfer advisors and four-year transfer resources increases the percentage of students who transfer.

Data findings from tests of change across the Kentucky NIC's will be compiled into a change playbook ultimately creating a Kentucky generated, proven results resource for institutional use.

Endnotes

1   Langley, Moen, Nolan, Nolan, Norman, Provost (also known as "Associates in Process Improvement"). "The Improvement Guide: A Practical Approach to Enhancing Organizational Performance".
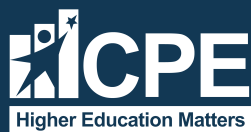
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