

# The Great **ADMISSIONS REDESIGN**

One Year Later: Lessons Learned



# When it comes to enrollment, higher education is at a crossroads.

Over the next 15 years, the high school graduating class is expected to **shrink by nearly half a million students nationwide**, representing a 13% decline ([WICHE](#)). Institutions of higher education are already starting to feel the gradual onset of this demographic cliff, making enrollment an increasingly urgent priority. At the peak of the COVID-19 pandemic in the Fall of 2020, freshman enrollment dropped by nearly 10%, only recently recovering ([NSC](#)). By 2022, college-going rates were still demonstrating year-over-year declines ([NCES](#)). And today, bachelor's degree program enrollment continues to lag behind its pre-COVID numbers ([NSC](#)).

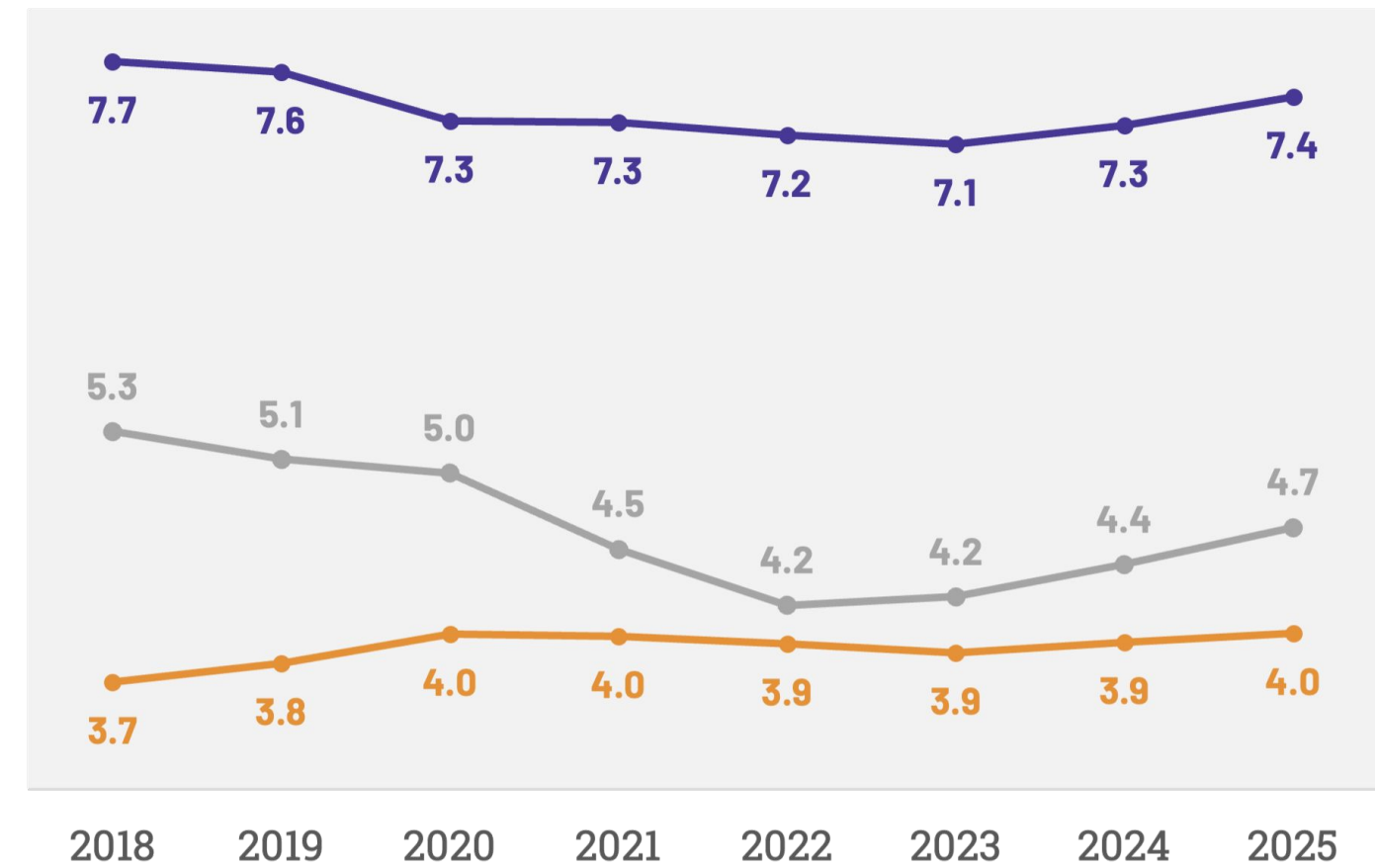
These trends are particularly pronounced among students of color, first-generation students, and students from low-income and rural backgrounds.

On top of demographic challenges, **higher education is facing a growing chorus of questions about its value**. Plus, shifting test policies, historic legal rulings, and volatility in federal funding have only further complicated the admissions landscape.

## Total Spring Enrollment by Sector

(Millions)

Public 4-year Private, Nonprofit 4-year Public 2-year



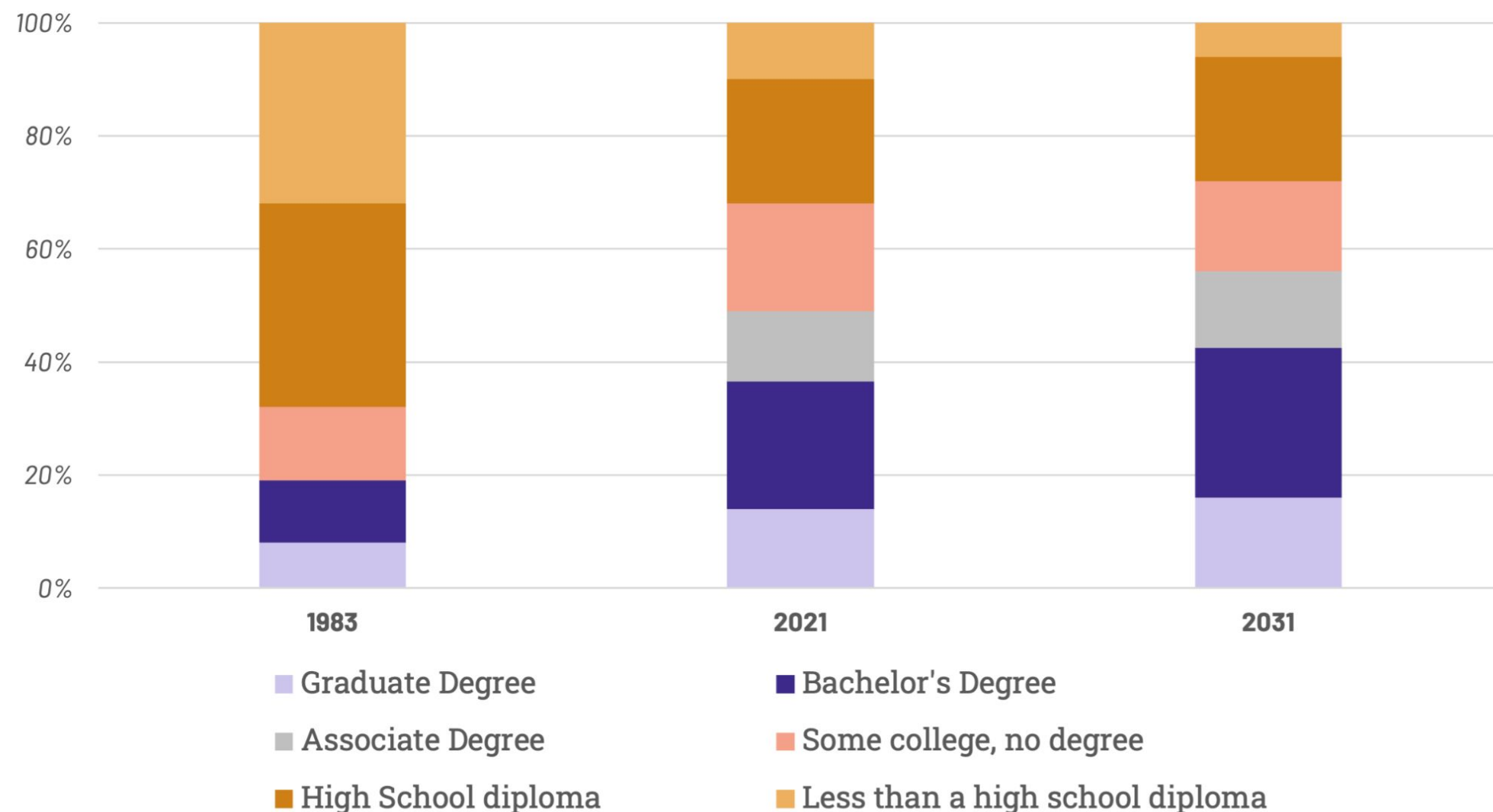
Source: [National Student Clearinghouse](#)

Today, higher education is wrestling with a somewhat unfamiliar question:  
**How can the college admissions process evolve from *gatekeeper* to *gateway*?**



# Despite waning public trust, postsecondary education is more essential than ever for economic mobility.

**By 2031, 72% of jobs in the US will require postsecondary education and/or training; 42% will require at least a bachelor's degree.**



Source: [Georgetown Center on Education and the Workforce](#)

Thus, the country is facing

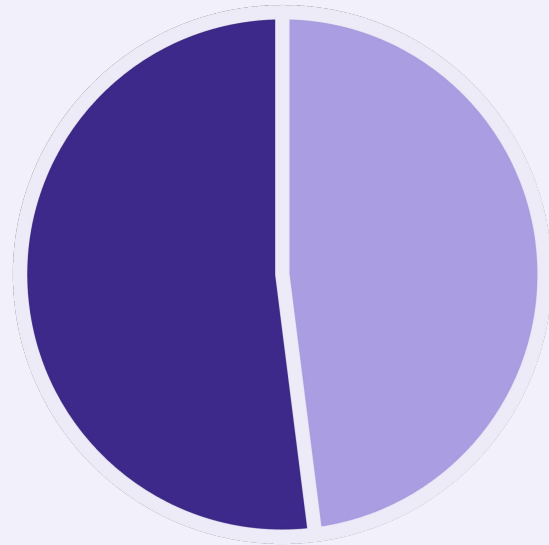
**MORE THAN JUST AN ENROLLMENT CRISIS;**

helping more Americans earn degrees – and particularly those with labor market value – is critical for meeting the nation's talent needs and

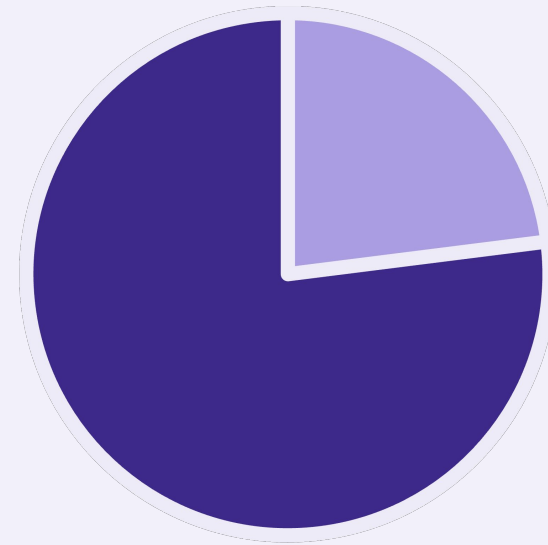
**MAXIMIZING ECONOMIC MOBILITY.**

# ➤ Students face steep barriers to navigate the enrollment process because of unnecessary bureaucracy and misaligned systems.

A recent survey of students aged 16-22 found that:



**52%** of students say that applying to college has been more stressful than anything else they have done academically.



More than **three-quarters** of students feel the college admission process is complex.

Source: [National Association for College Admission Counseling](#)

To **disentangle the “gauntlet”** that college applicants currently square up against, scholars have been increasingly advocating for admissions innovations that prioritize:



## Proactivity

*Informs students of their options before they apply and communicates quickly and efficiently*



## Automation

*Leverages data and technology to reduce the burden on both students and practitioners*



## Transparency

*Ensures information, including eligibility, total cost, and financial aid, is clearly conveyed*

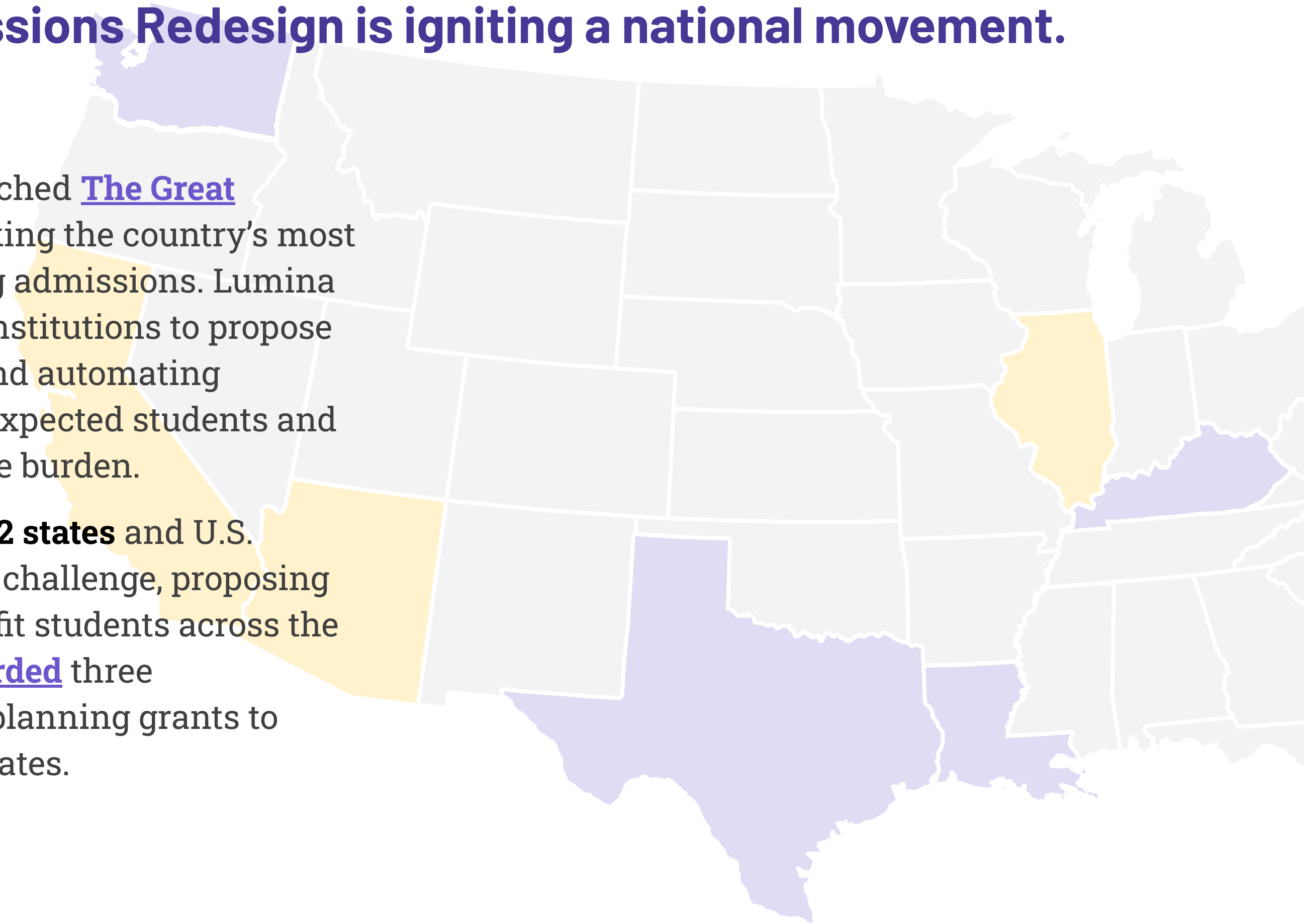
Source: [Odle & Delaney \(2025\)](#)



## Lumina's Great Admissions Redesign is igniting a national movement.

In 2023, Lumina Foundation launched [The Great Admissions Redesign](#) (GAR), seeking the country's most innovative ideas for transforming admissions. Lumina challenged states, systems, and institutions to propose bold approaches to simplifying and automating processes that have historically expected students and their families to carry much of the burden.

More than **70 applicants across 32 states** and U.S. territories responded to Lumina's challenge, proposing cutting-edge innovations to benefit students across the country. Ultimately, Lumina [awarded](#) three implementation grants and four planning grants to stakeholders in seven different states.







# Lumina's Great Admissions Redesign is igniting a national movement.

**Implementation grants** sought to propel the progress of mature redesign projects. Three grants were awarded in 2024:

Northern Arizona University

California State University

Illinois Board of Higher Education

**Planning grants** sought to support discovery and vision-setting within nascent redesign projects. Four grants were awarded in 2024:

Kentucky Council on Postsecondary Education

Louisiana Board of Regents\*

Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board

Washington Student Achievement Council

*Click on the bubbles above for a detailed look at each project.*

\*Note that the Louisiana Board of Regents received funding for two separate projects.

# An ecosystem of support organizations helped grantees turn bold ideas into strategic action.

From May 2024 to April 2025, as grantees executed against ambitious change agendas, Lumina curated support from national experts on **data, communications, and partnerships**:



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**Data Quality Campaign,** a national advocacy organization with expertise in education data policy, provided **webinars, office hours, and 1:1 consultation sessions.**



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**Education Strategy Group,** a mission-driven strategic consulting firm, provided implementation **planning templates and 1:1 coaching sessions** to planning grantees.



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**Research for Action,** a leading research organization in education policy and practice, supported implementation grantees with **logic model development and program evaluation**, as well as authored a **typology of admissions innovations** across the field.



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**TrendyMinds,** a strategic marketing agency, supported the development of **student personas, press releases, and messaging toolkits.**



# Grantees engaged stakeholders, launched new tools, and reshaped policies.

Over the course of the year, GAR grantees...



distributed and synthesized surveys from more than 2,000 students and parents;

conducted focus groups with nearly 150 practitioners;



launched brand new digital tools;

and successfully advocated for the passage of student-centered policies...

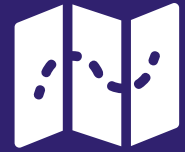


**...FUELING A NATIONWIDE MOVEMENT**  
of practitioners committed to redesigning outdated systems and processes.





## Six key lessons emerged from the grantees' inspiring redesign efforts.



The field is moving beyond traditional “direct admissions” efforts to consider simplification and automation **throughout the student journey**, including financial aid, transfer, and/or dual enrollment.



**Policy**, while not required, can create the enabling conditions to catalyze action.



It's essential to articulate a clear, compelling **vision** for simplification to all stakeholders.



A robust cross-sector **data ecosystem** is necessary for enabling automation.



**Technology** plays a crucial role in advancing the efficiency and transparency of admissions innovations, offering powerful tools to both students and practitioners.



To break through to students and families, admissions innovations must be supported by a “**ground game**” of champions in the field.



## About This Report:

To illuminate each lesson, detailed examples and artifacts from the field are dispersed throughout this report. Grantee spotlights capturing the critical components of each project are included in the appendix, offering contextualization for common acronyms and tools leveraged by grantees. Use the tabs to the right to navigate.

This report, authored by Education Strategy Group in July 2025, offers a reflective inside look at early activities spurring a rapidly expanding, nationwide admissions redesign movement. As grantees work to transform their ideas into reality, inspiring stories and lessons will continue to emerge. We hope you will join them.



1: Beyond Direct Admissions



2: Policy Enables Progress



3: Clarity Inspires Action



4: Data Matters



5: Technology is a Lever



6: People Empower Change

[Appendix – Grantee Spotlights](#)

## LESSON ONE



# BEYOND DIRECT ADMISSIONS

The field is moving beyond traditional “direct admissions” efforts to consider simplification and automation throughout the student journey, including financial aid, transfer, and/or dual enrollment.

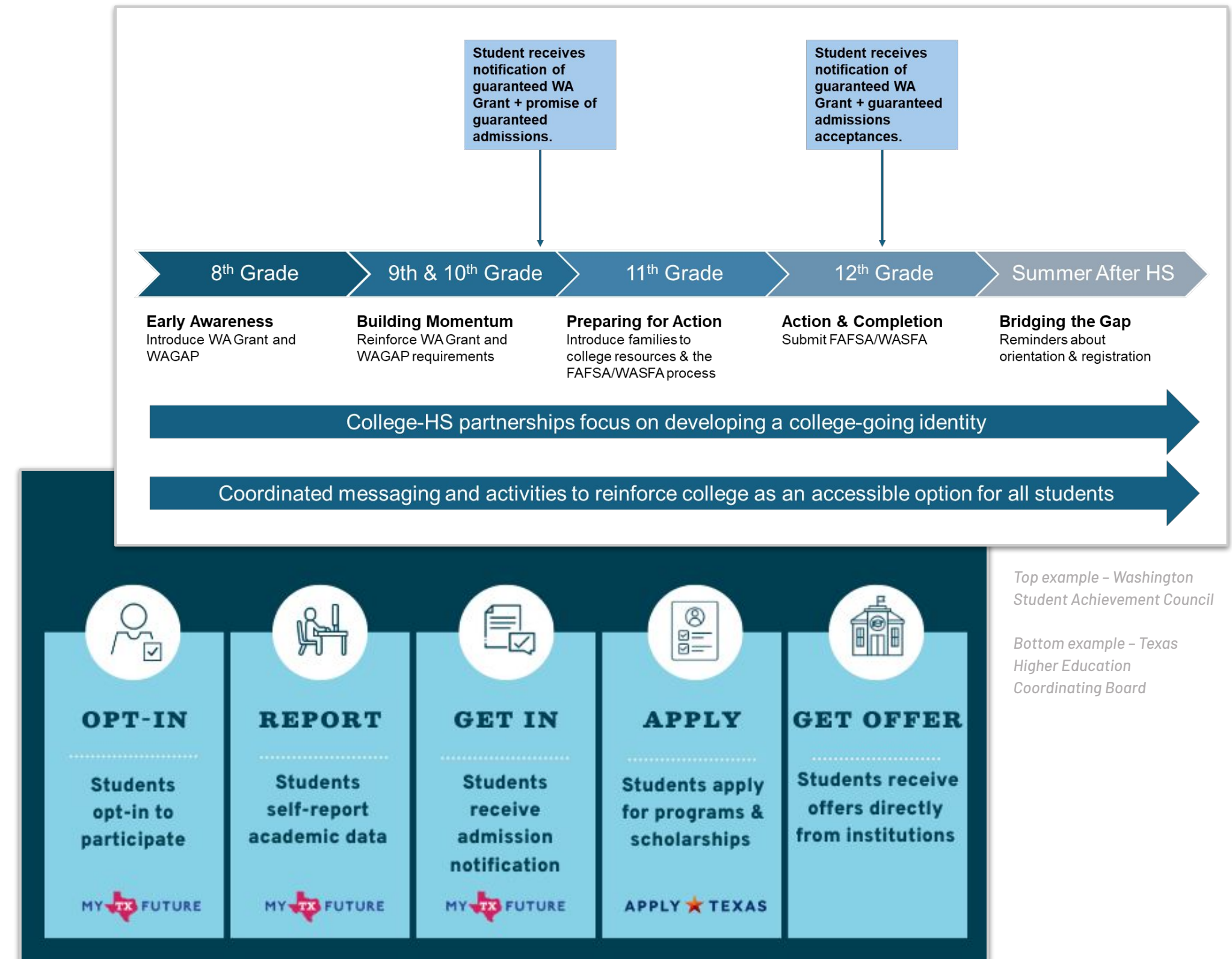


# Admissions redesign aims to support students across the student journey.

The long-term outcomes that states and higher education systems are hoping to promote with admissions simplification go far **beyond improving immediate postsecondary enrollment** – zeroing in on persistence, attainment, and more.

Thus, many grantees theorized that intentionally and thoughtfully integrating admissions innovations with other elements of the college-going experience for students could lead to increased long-term impact.

In designing and implementing their admissions innovations, grantees looked to address the needs of **students across the education continuum**, meeting students beyond their senior year of high school to incorporate earlier outreach and navigational support starting in middle school, provide transition support before enrollment (e.g. summer bridge programs), and extend coverage to adult and working learners.





## States and systems are linking admissions to other key enrollment levers.

Financial Aid



Transfer



Dual Enrollment



With perceptions of the affordability of a postsecondary education cited as a leading concern among students and families, some grantees are **tying admissions notifications with communications around financial aid eligibility**, considering how to simplify and standardize financial aid award letters, and building online tools to enable students and families to compare costs across institutions.

**WASHINGTON** plans to notify students that are eligible for SNAP benefits as early as 10th grade, with awareness activities occurring even earlier in middle school, that they are eligible for the state's [WA Grant](#) – which offers award amounts up to full tuition and most fees at public institutions. This notification will eventually be paired with admissions offers for the state's Guaranteed Admissions Program for eligible 12th graders as part of a comprehensive statewide communications strategy.



# States and systems are linking admissions to other key enrollment levers.

Financial Aid



Transfer



Dual Enrollment



With data demonstrating challenges faced by community college students in successfully transferring to a four-year institution, other grantees are looking to leverage data to **simplify the admissions process for transfer students.**

**CALIFORNIA STATE UNIVERSITY SYSTEM** (CSU) has created a [Transfer Success Pathway](#) for 12th grade students who are not eligible for university admissions upon high school graduation. Students may enroll in a dual admissions program at a community college, which offers them guaranteed admission into CSU upon completion of required coursework. Required coursework varies among receiving institutions, but may mirror requirements for Associate Degrees for Transfer. Participating students have access to library, counseling, and other services from the CSU campus nearest to their primary residence while enrolled at community college.

**LOUISIANA** plans to create one common transfer application with information auto-generated from existing data from the Louisiana Board of Regents, lessening the burden on students to complete multiple applications and eliminating a portion of the administrative burden for Registrars.





# States and systems are linking admissions to other key enrollment levers.

Financial Aid



Transfer



Dual Enrollment



With research consistently demonstrating the value of dual credit in supporting student success in postsecondary, some grantees are looking to capitalize on **dual credit enrollment to build a pipeline for undergraduate enrollment.**

**KENTUCKY** is considering creating a dual credit transcript exchange to support dual credit mobility for entering undergraduate students. This approach aims to ensure a more seamless admissions process for dual credit students, leveraging the state's existing investments in expanding dual credit participation.

**LOUISIANA** has centered dual enrollment as a core element of its statewide college-going strategy. The Board of Regents recently revised its college admissions standards to enable students who successfully complete the required number of early college academic credits with a qualifying GPA to pursue admissions at the institution of their choice. Additionally, the Board of Regents and Board of Elementary Secondary Education set a goal for all high school freshmen to graduate with some college credit, a market-relevant credential, or both.

## LESSON TWO



# POLICY ENABLES PROGRESS

Policy, while not required, can create the enabling conditions to catalyze action.

# ➤ States and systems have taken multiple paths to formalizing their redesign efforts.

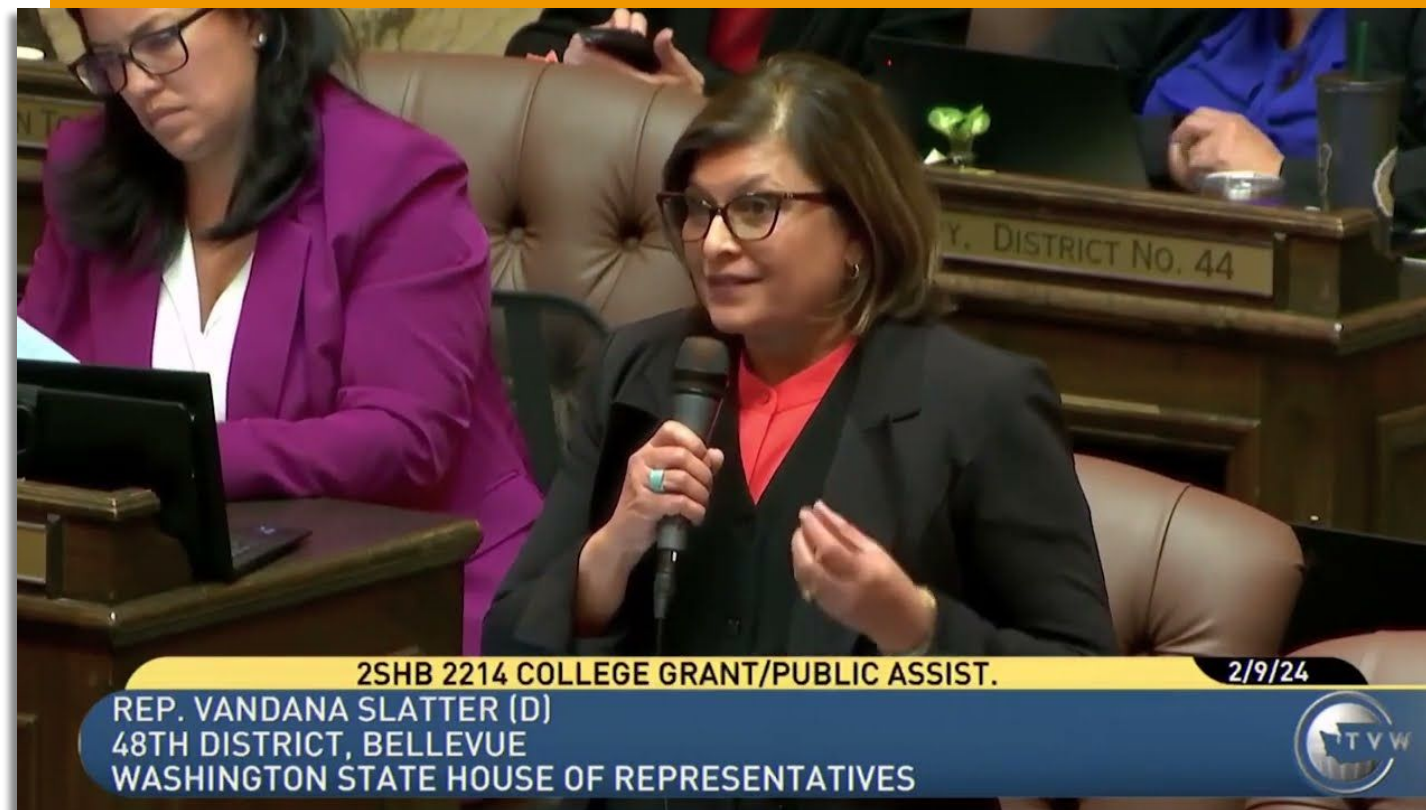
As states and communities have brought admissions redesign to life (e.g. direct, guaranteed, or proactive admissions policies) over the past several years, some have been seeded by legislation, while others have been borne out of participation in existing initiatives (e.g. [Common App's pilot program](#)) or through local partnership agreements between districts and institutions. And as some of the grantees discovered, in many cases, all three can be true, creating **a need for alignment and coherence among multiple discrete efforts.**

Ultimately, **states should consider their unique context** when deciding on whether or not to pursue a legislative route, including:

- the culture of institutional autonomy,
- the existence of other enabling conditions (e.g. data-sharing infrastructure, education governance structure, etc.), and
- the resources and capacity available to manage implementation.



Top photo – Illinois State Senator Christopher Belt gives remarks about his bill to permanently establish the Illinois Public University Direct Admission Program ([IL Senate Democrats](#))



Bottom photo – Washington State Representative Vandana Slatter presents her bill promoting proactive communication about state financial aid ([Washington House Democrats](#))





## States may decide to pursue legislation in order to...

Build a **sense of urgency** by instituting a mandated timeline for implementing admissions redesign

Formalize **cross-sector partnerships** and identify roles

Promote the necessary **cross-sector data sharing**

Mandate the **participation and/or compliance** of K-12 districts or postsecondary institutions

Dedicate **state funding** to support planning and implementation efforts

Establish a more **singular statewide approach** when multiple related efforts are operating

**Scale the reach** or scope of existing efforts



## Admissions simplification is becoming a bipartisan issue.

Recently, admissions-related legislation has gained significant traction across the country, often garnering bipartisan support. In red and blue states alike, legislators on both sides of the aisle have found appeal in the potential for admissions redesign to address declining enrollments at in-state institutions and promote workforce development.

### TEXAS

The passage of [SB2314](#) (May 2025) signaled support from the executive and legislative branches for the expansion of THECB's direct admissions work. Introducing a new graduation requirement, the bill requires high school students to choose whether to opt-in to the data sharing necessary to personalize the direct admissions opportunities displayed in My Texas Future (MTF). The bill additionally requires colleges and universities to prominently link to MTF from their admissions websites, and school districts and charter schools to inform students and families about MTF.

### WASHINGTON

[HB2214](#) – passed in 2024 – requires the Washington Student Achievement Council (WSAC) to proactively communicate with students whose families receive SNAP benefits, notifying them in 10th-12th grades about guaranteed WA College Grant eligibility.

### ILLINOIS

The Public University Uniform Admissions Pilot Program Act established a state pilot in 2020. The bill specifies criteria for admissions, as well as allowable exemptions for universities.

Since its passage, additional bills have been passed to amend the program, including expanding to community college transfer students. Most recently, [HB3522](#) passed to establish the program permanently, create a timeline for universities to align on admissions criteria, and establish an access and outreach campaign for high-achieving students to consider the University of Illinois-Urbana Champaign and the University of Illinois-Chicago.

### CALIFORNIA

[SB640](#) – introduced February of 2025 – would put the California State University (CSU) “direct admissions” and “dual admissions” programs in statute.

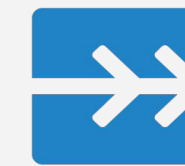


## Meanwhile, other states have shown what's possible without formal legislation.

Many states and systems have been successful in driving admissions redesign forward without legislation.

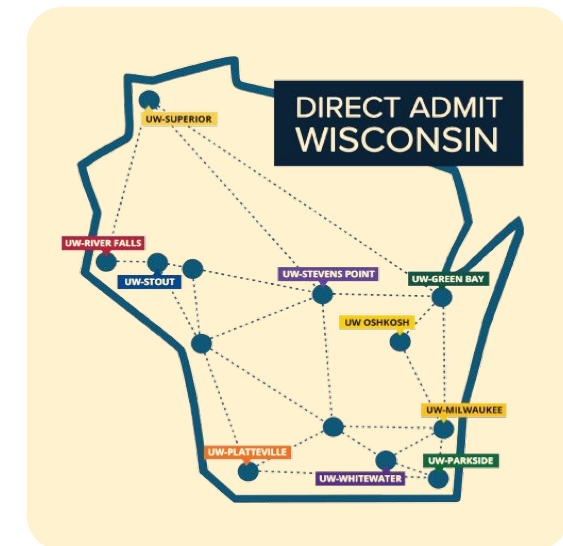
[Idaho](#) is widely considered to be at the forefront of the admissions redesign movement, having launched its program in 2015. The initiative is operated by the Idaho State Board of Education, with no bills in the legislature authorizing or mandating it. The program remains flexible and adaptable, with any changes to GPA thresholds, letter timing, or other program rules implemented administratively by the Board, without needing new legislation. Idaho's centralized governance structure has enabled this approach; it is one of only two states where the State Board of Education governs both K-12 and higher education, including universities and community colleges. This structure provides easier access to student data and the agility to set uniform policies systemwide. Early data from Idaho's program reported an **88% increase in applications** and over a **3% increase in full-time enrollment** ([Odle & Delaney, 2022](#)).

[Minnesota](#), [Wisconsin](#), [Connecticut](#), [Indiana](#), [Tennessee](#), and others have also recently launched new statewide admissions programs outside of legislation.



**Direct Admissions**  
IDAHO

*Connecticut*  
**Automatic Admission Program**



  
**DIRECT ADMISSIONS**  
MINNESOTA



**TN DIRECT ADMISSIONS**



## LESSON THREE



# CLARITY INSPIRES ACTION

It's essential to articulate a clear, compelling vision for simplification to all stakeholders.



# Admissions redesign is inherently a change management process.

As with any change management process, **tactfully engaging stakeholders** and **crafting clear and compelling messaging** has emerged as one of the most critical elements of the redesign process.

Effective redesign efforts necessitate **breaking down silos** within institutions – bringing together staff from admissions, financial aid, and enrollment management – and leveraging partnerships with K-12 and community-based organizations.

Moreover, GAR grantees are redefining what it means to apply and enroll in postsecondary education. In uncharted territory, hard and fast definitions are rare – creating **confusion around a concept that many students and practitioners are encountering for the first time**. For example, words like “automated,” “direct,” and “guaranteed” carry different connotations depending on various stakeholders’ knowledge and experiences.

## TOWARDS A SHARED VOCABULARY



Research for Action (RFA) is currently developing and gathering feedback from the field on a [typology of admissions innovations](#) to foster alignment on these definitions. Consider the variability in the labels and functionality of even the country’s most mature programs:

- [Washington Guaranteed Admissions Program](#): Notifies high school students of their eligibility for admission at six participating universities
- [Direct Admit Wisconsin](#): Proactively offers admission to qualifying high school students, inviting them to bypass the college application
- [Connecticut Automatic Admissions](#): Eligible students are automatically admitted to participating institutions, bypassing application fees, essays, and recommendation letters



# The voices of students and practitioners lie at the heart of redesign.

Each of the four planning grantees started by engaging their end users in their design processes, offering opportunities for students and practitioners to identify potential opportunities and challenges and provide feedback along the way. These localized engagement strategies imbued grantees' visions with wisdom from the field.

## KENTUCKY

- Held ten **workgroup meetings** including 40 education partners to identify highest-leverage strategies for impact
- Conducted multiple **focus groups** with college admissions staff to react to key themes uncovered in student journey mapping

## LOUISIANA

- Distributed **survey** to academic leadership at all Louisiana public IHEs; collected 50+ responses
- Conducted two practitioner **focus groups**; included 38 IHE administrators
- Hosted four **regional convenings** for community-based college access professionals

## TEXAS

- Conducted 11 **discovery interviews** with high school counselors, teachers, and administrators
- Facilitated an **in-person workshop** with practitioners in Round Rock, TX
- Conducted two **ideation sessions** with admissions experts

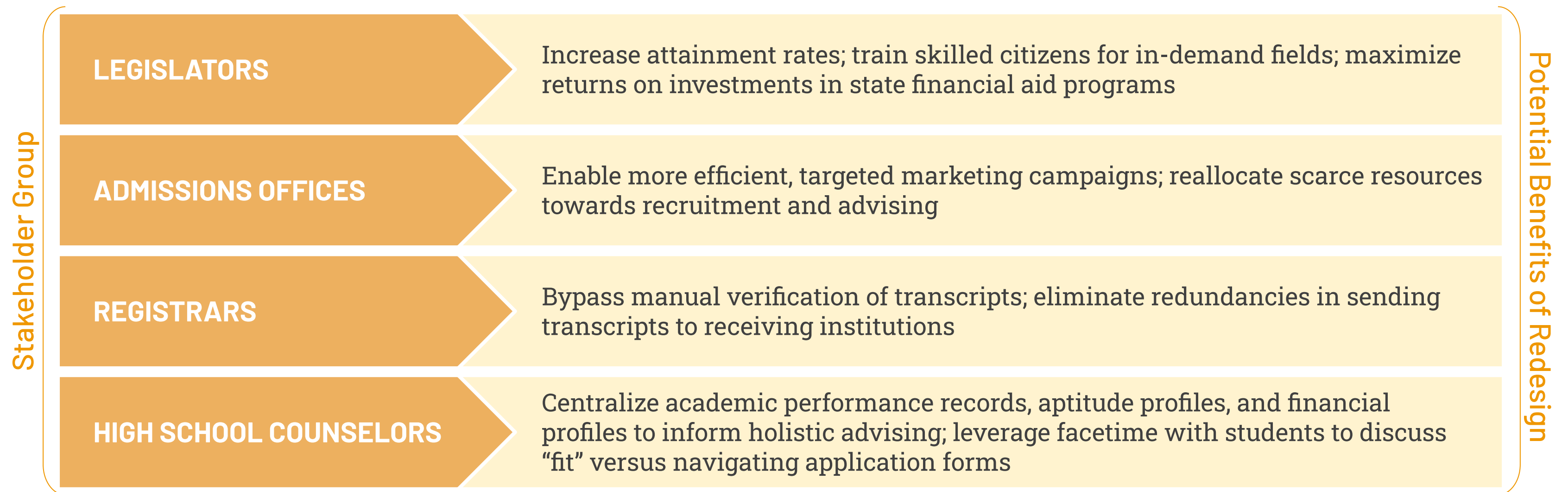
## WASHINGTON

- Hosted **intake sessions** with institutional partners at three IHEs
- Facilitated **listening tours** at four school districts
- Conducted a **survey** with over 800 student and parent responses
- Gathered feedback from attendees at the [Limitless Spring Convening](#) and the [WERA annual conference](#)



## To build buy-in, grantees connected the “why” of admissions redesign to each stakeholder’s reality.


To promote clarity and buy-in at the highest level, grantees began conversations by focusing on program outcomes – improving enrollment, affordability, and persistence for students. But beneath the why lives the who, what, where, when, and how. In order to counter potential skepticism with practitioners on the logistical considerations, grantees are thinking carefully about how to broaden their whys, highlighting benefits for all stakeholders, not just students.





## When incubating, pilot sites are carefully selected for enabling conditions.

Grantees are seeding success stories among the most eager stakeholders, striking a delicate balance between honoring institutional autonomy and laying the groundwork for systems-level change.



The **CALIFORNIA STATE UNIVERSITY** Direct Admissions program produced a compelling case study through an initial **pilot with the Riverside County Office of Education**. In the Spring of 2025, more than **12,000 students** in Riverside County were offered conditional admission to CSU. As enrollment numbers become available, **CSU-Riverside predicts** a **30% increase in first-year enrollment**. As July of 2025, the California State Assembly was deliberating **a bill** that would permanently establish this program in statute.



Institutions and high schools in **WASHINGTON'S** pilot program were explicitly selected based on their capacity and **readiness to engage in experimental work**.



In **TEXAS**, various direct admissions pilot programs (e.g. **CommonApp**, **Niche**) were already in progress when THECB launched MyTexasFuture. THECB executed a **differentiated engagement strategy** across the **31 institutions** included in the 2024-2025 program cycle, seeking out synergies at institutions with automated processes well underway.

## LESSON FOUR



# DATA MATTERS

A robust cross-sector data ecosystem is necessary for enabling automation.



# Automation starts with data.

When the Great Admissions Redesign launched in 2023, Lumina Foundation challenged states to imagine more transparent, proactive, and automated admissions processes. At the time, Lumina provided a very simple definition of “automated:” *limits the work that prospective students must undertake to apply.*

Much of the “work” of applying to college for students comes in the form of researching and assessing options and writing applications. But some of the most **tedious and frustrating** elements of the student experience involve data entry and re-entry.

*Discovery activities for Louisiana’s Automated Transfer Application plan produced a galvanizing insight:*



The image shows the cover and Table of Contents of a report titled "Automated Transfer Application" by the Louisiana Board of Regents. The cover features a silhouette of a person holding a diploma against a sunset background. The Table of Contents lists the following sections and page numbers:

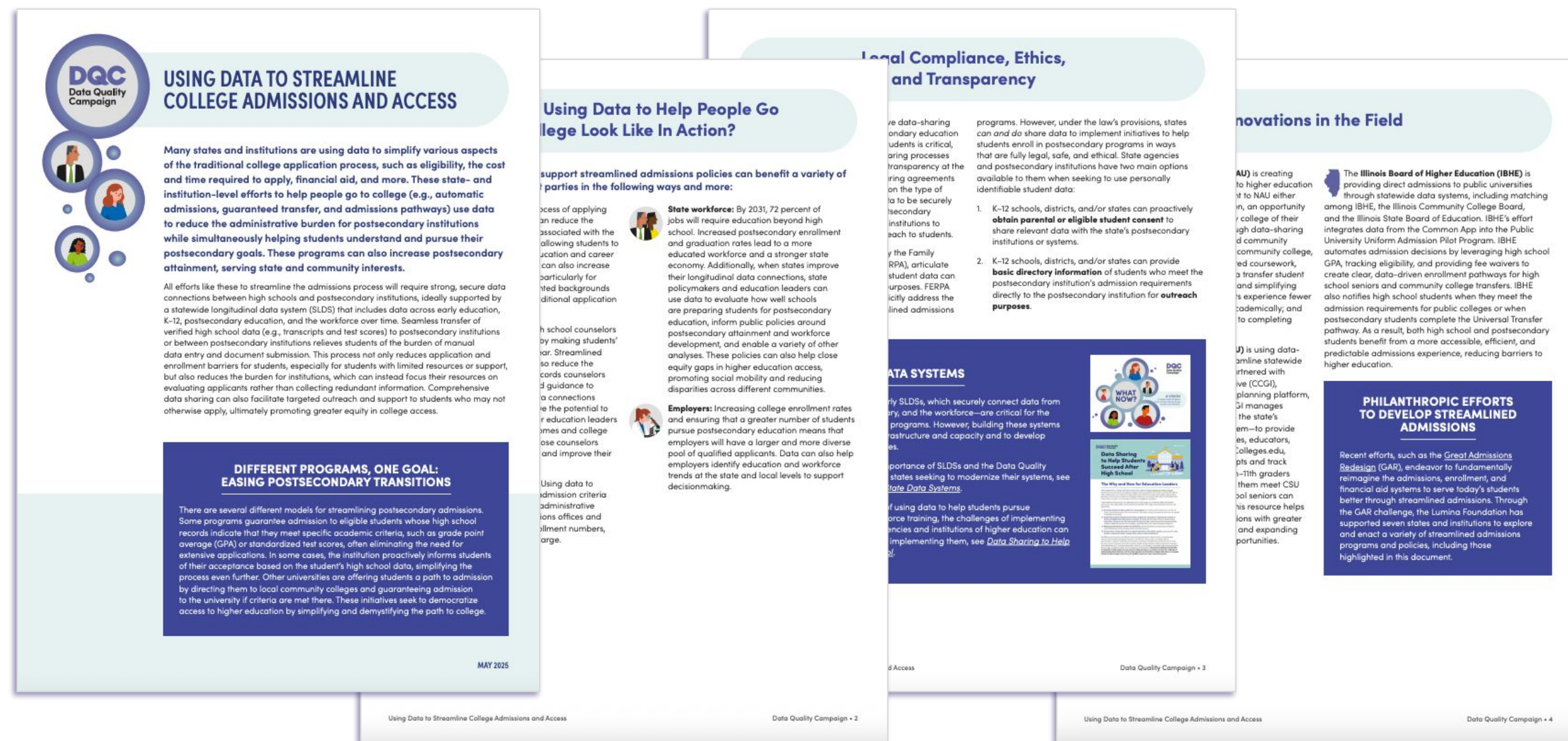
Table of Contents	
Introduction	01
Vision for the Louisiana Automated Transfer Application	02
Discovery Findings	04
Survey Results	04
Focus Group Themes	06
Data Collection and Potential Efficiencies	08
Need for Additional Student Engagement	11
Recommendations for Implementation	12
Blueprint for Automated Transfer Application	12
Organizational Planning for Implementation	14
Capacity Planning	19
Lessons Learned & Advice for the Field	22
Appendix A:	24
Appendix B:	25

“Public education in Louisiana is **repeatedly asking** students to provide information that it already has.”



# Linking K-12 and postsecondary data systems is critical, but challenging.

Streamlined admissions processes are predicated upon streamlined data systems that connect the dots between high schools and postsecondary institutions. Whether seeking to secure modern data-sharing agreements, centralize disparate databases, or report on a new set of metrics, every GAR grantee has squared up against data as both a key enabler and blocker of change.



**Data Quality Campaign** (DQC), a national nonprofit organization uplifting student-centered perspectives on education data policy, served as a valuable thought partner as grantees explored the legal and ethical implications of various data solutions. Check out their [latest resource](#) for more detailed information about the role of data systems in admissions redesign.





## FERPA compliance is a navigable challenge.

As grantees searched for opportunities to promote data sharing between K-12 and postsecondary institutions, they repeatedly ran into questions related to FERPA compliance. The Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA) establishes parameters for the protection of personally identifiable student data – data that is typically implicated in institutional admissions criteria.

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**To comply with FERPA parameters, admissions innovations may leverage one or both of the following allowances:**

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1

### **Educational institutions obtain consent to share student data.**

*Example:* Recent legislation in **TEXAS** will require high schools students (or their guardians) to opt-in or decline participation in THECB's Direct Admissions program. When students opt-in, they approve the release of their academic records to colleges and universities.

2

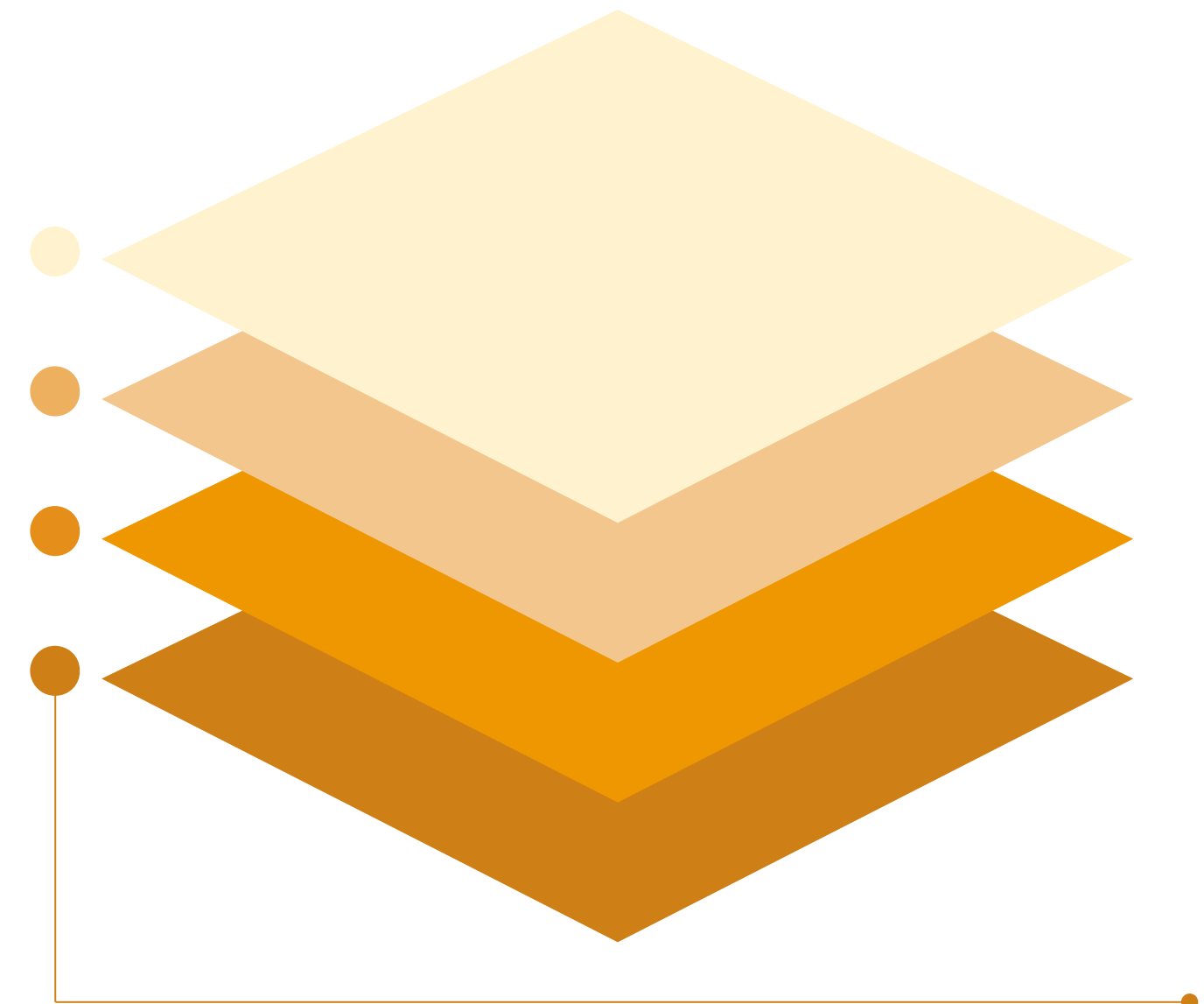
### **If a student meets an institution's admissions requirements, K-12 schools, districts, and/or states can share directory information.**

*Example:* Currently, postsecondary institutions in **WASHINGTON** have access to the directory information of students who qualify for the Guaranteed Admissions Program (GAP). To inform more impactful student messaging going forward, WSAC is exploring opportunities to combine guaranteed financial aid information with guaranteed admissions at the right level, be it at the state, institution, and/or school district level.

## ➤ Interconnected data systems provide scaffolding for more advanced automation down the line.

Among grantees *and* the broader pool of over 70 applicants who pitched ideas for the Great Admissions Redesign, **iteration emerged as a central focus** on the data side of the work. Lumina Foundation has urged innovators to consider the “[stackability](#)” of various data interventions, noting that building high-quality, foundational data systems will have outsized effects on the impact of more advanced efforts down the line.

For example, in their listening sessions, grantees heard many practitioners rank standardized transcripts at the top of their innovation wishlists. For an agency like the **LOUISIANA BOARD OF REGENTS**, which already maintains a centralized database containing academic records from both K-12 and postsecondary institutions, the standardization of a statewide “Louisiana Transcript” looms within reach.




In most cases, establishing a Statewide Longitudinal Data System can unlock a domino effect of data solutions.  
Read more from [DQC](#).

# Outcomes data is critical to bolster storytelling.

Particularly amid the often rapid cycle of implementation, setting up data systems to be able to capture outcomes of admissions redesign efforts — for students, institutions, and systems — was frequently underemphasized, but proved essential to be able to effectively communicate progress.

Outcomes data grounds storytelling in evidence, **making the case for admissions redesign** more compelling and credible, and in turn, building trust and buy-in with stakeholders.

Start with identifying both the **short-term outcomes and intended overall impact** and then backwards map to how to collect quantitative data.

  
UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA, RIVERSIDE  
ANNOUNCEMENTS » JULY 11TH, 2025 » FALL 2025 ENROLLMENT  
**ELIZABETH WATKINS**  
Provost And Executive Vice Chancellor  
Dear Colleagues,  
This fall, we are expecting the largest first-year class in UCR's history. This is good news—not only for our mission to expand access to world-class education but also for our financial stability. As you have heard me say before, nearly 90% of our core operating budget comes from tuition and enrollment-based state allocations. In the current climate of adverse federal actions, sustaining strong enrollment has become even more critical.

  
DIVE BRIEF  
**California State University pilots direct admissions program**  
The 461,000-student system will inform certain public high school students in Riverside County that they've been automatically accepted to 10 campuses.  
Published Nov. 5, 2024

*In their logic models, implementation grantees identified intended outcomes such as:*

- More students perceive themselves as “college ready”
- Increased number of submitted applications
- Increased enrollment
- Increased persistence, completion, and attainment of credentials of value
- Increased transfer enrollment
- Improved financial aid application and packaging
- Greater awareness of value
- Greater economic mobility
- Reduction in achievement and attainment gaps

## LESSON FIVE



# TECHNOLOGY IS A LEVER

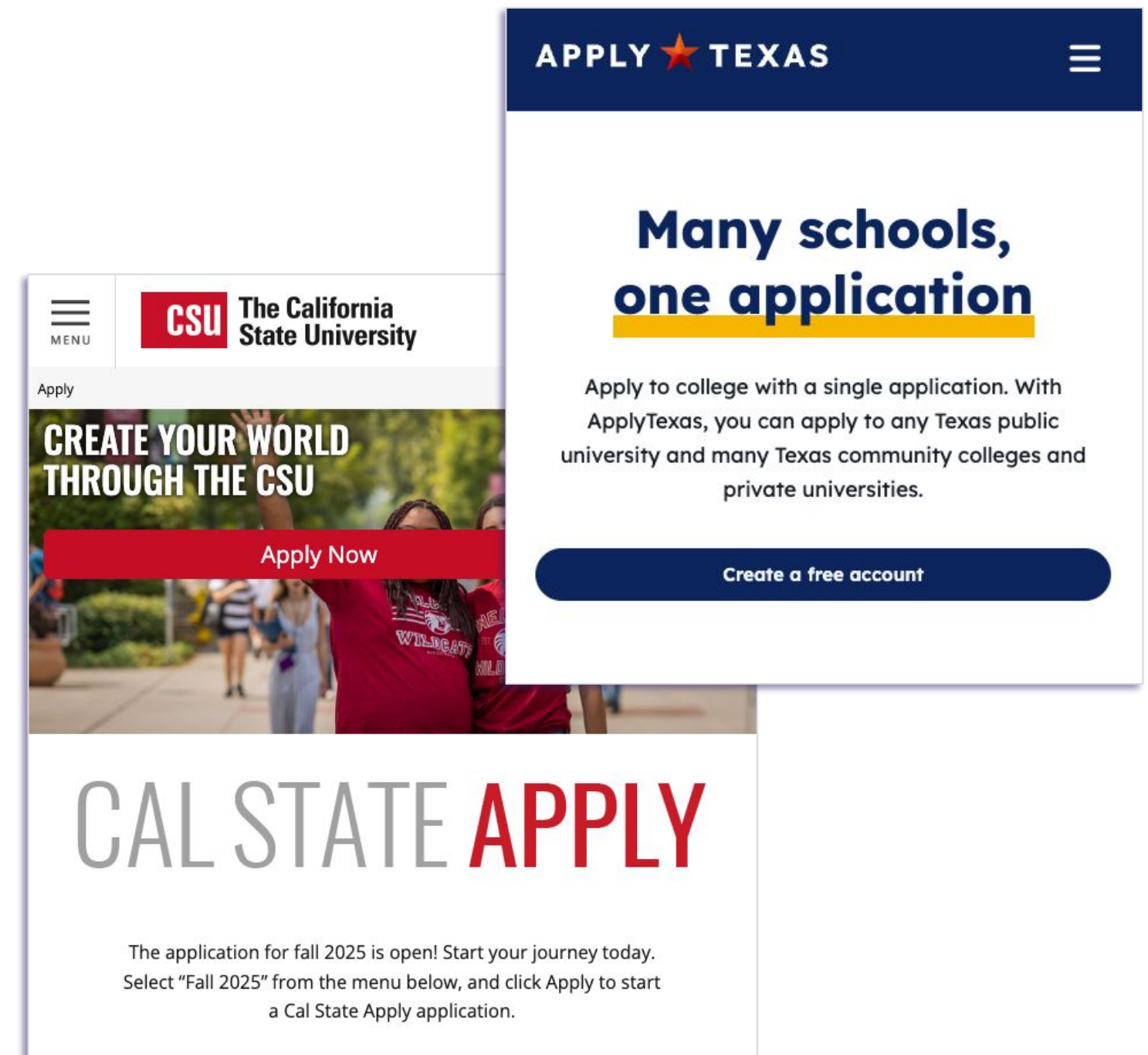
Technology plays a crucial role in advancing the efficiency and transparency of admissions innovations, offering powerful tools to both students and practitioners.



## ➤ Centralized application portals and automated transcripts streamline the process.

One of the most transformative technologies in this space is the **centralized application portal**, such as the Common App or state- or system-specific platforms like [Apply Texas](#) and [Cal State Apply](#). These systems allow students to access applications to multiple institutions in a single place and simplify data management for states and institutions.

**Automated digital transcript** and data sharing systems also significantly enhance the functionality of admissions innovations, particularly for transfer students. When K–12 and higher education systems are linked — either through integrated state data systems or partnerships with transcript clearinghouses — student academic information can be securely transmitted and evaluated in real time. This automation reduces administrative burdens, minimizes errors, and accelerates admissions decisions. Several grantees have either instituted or are exploring the potential for automated transcripts to support their efforts.

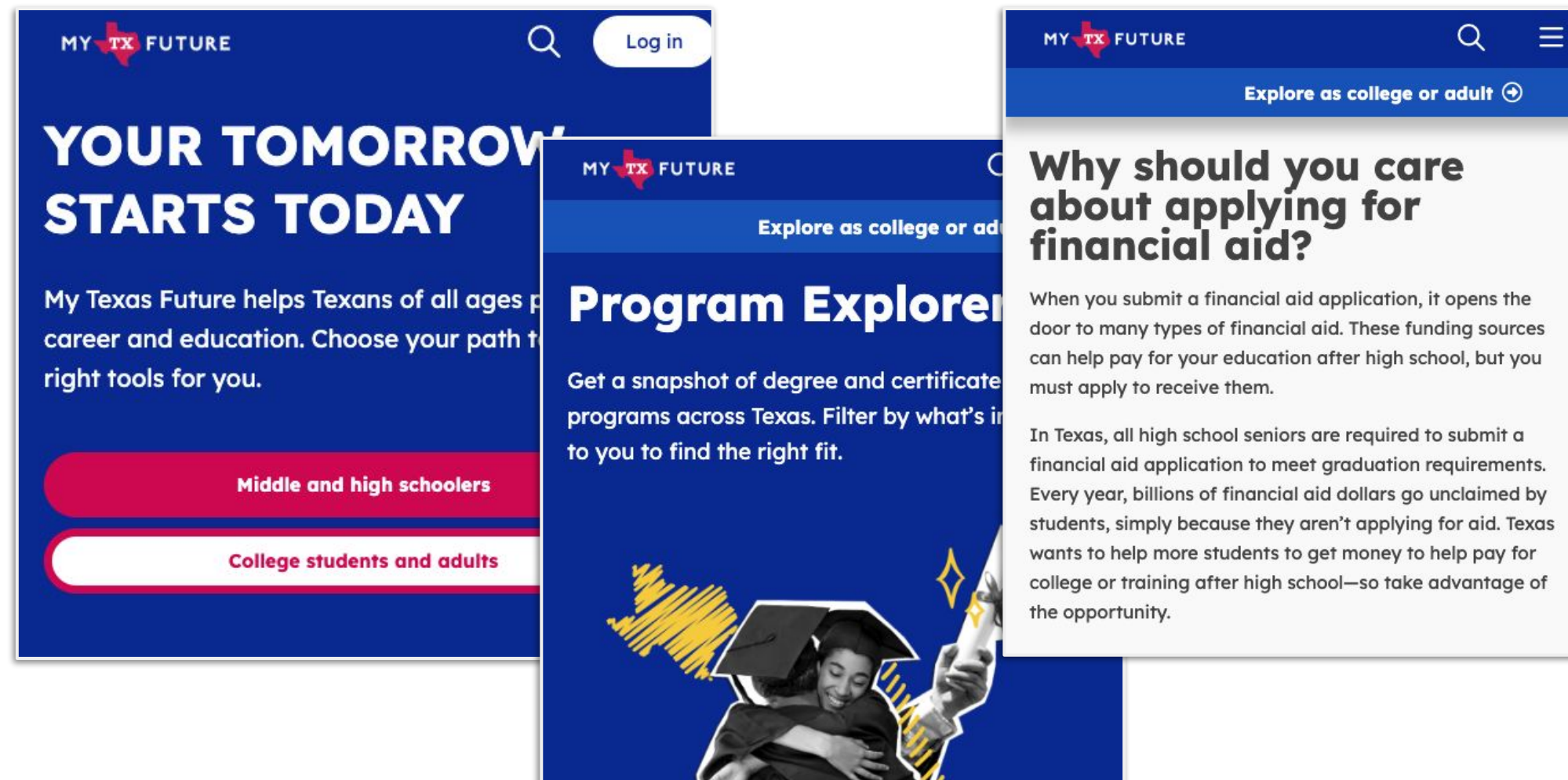




# Advising platforms help demystify the admissions process.

Advising and communications platforms ensure that students receive timely, actionable information tailored to their profiles. Within these tools, some grantees are further exploring how the responsive and ethical use of AI, infused with behavioral science techniques, can further drive automation and personalized support for students.

TEXAS



## MY TEXAS FUTURE

### Notable Features:

- Provides a visual pathway from pre-application to enrollment to guide students along the process
- Showcases programs based on student interest to help compare and evaluate institutions for fit
- Integrates with Apply Texas, the statewide common application
- Serve as a cornerstone data center of Direct Admissions, with student records automatically uploaded with simple permissions to allow institutions to request data

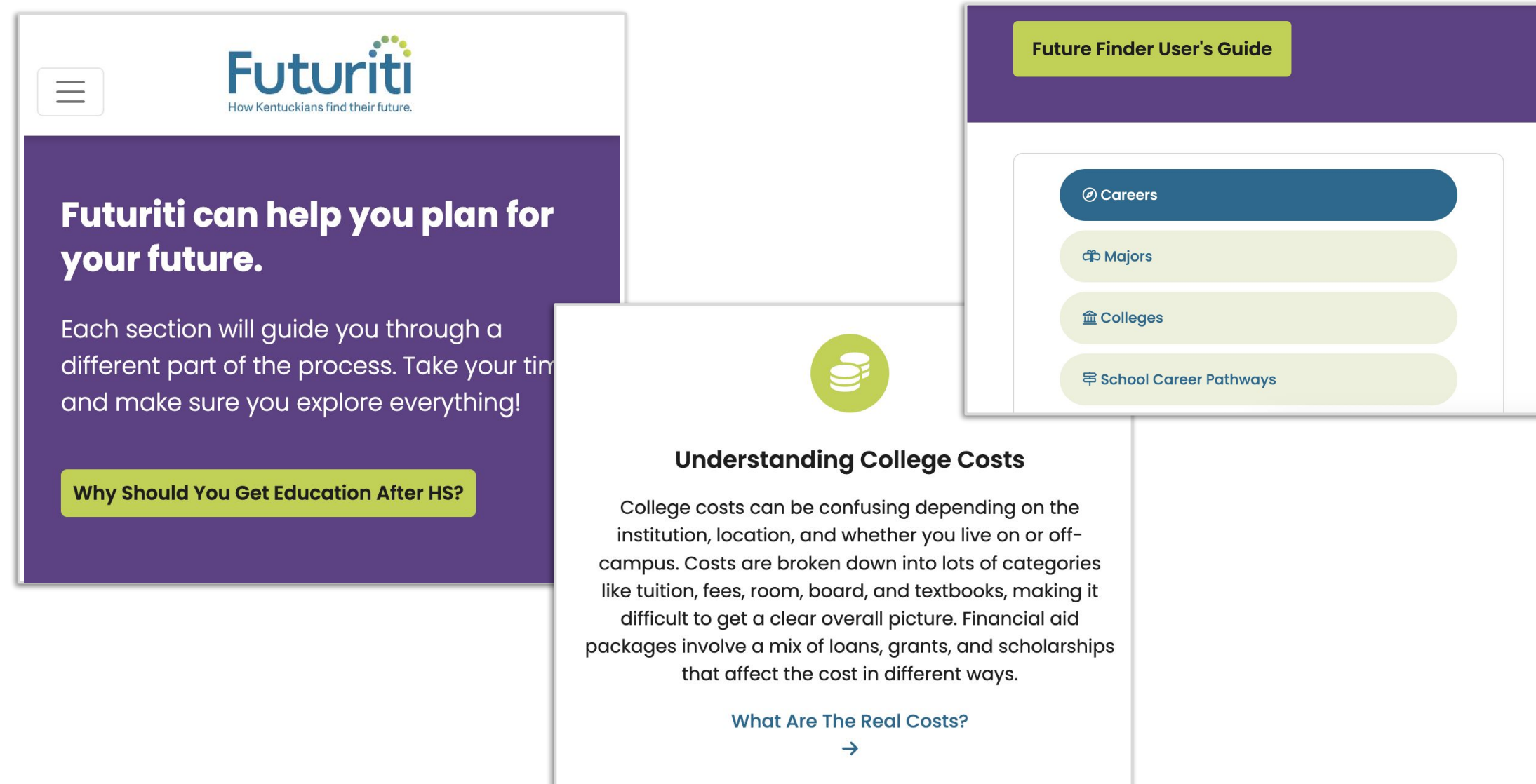




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KENTUCKY



## FUTURITI

### Notable Features:

- Includes the Future Finder tool that allows students to explore careers, including information on labor market demand, expected salaries, related majors and offering institutions
- Provides information on the steps of the college application process—from exploring, to applying and deciding, to accessing financial aid, to attending



# Advising platforms help demystify the admissions process.

Advising and communications platforms ensure that students receive timely, actionable information tailored to their profiles. Within these tools, some grantees are further exploring how the responsive and ethical use of AI, infused with behavioral science techniques, can further drive automation and personalized support for students.



The screenshot displays the CaliforniaColleges.edu website. The top navigation bar includes the logo, the text 'CALIFORNIA COLLEGES.edu', the tagline 'DISCOVER. PLAN. LAUNCH.', and a 'Register' button. The main content area features a large orange banner with the text 'CaliforniaColleges.edu' and 'Your free, all-access pass to a bright future.' Below this, it states 'Students, find your path and build knowledge and a plan to achieve your dreams. For educators, guide and support them every step of the way.' A 'Students' section is visible, asking 'What kind of life do you want after high school?' and listing five bullet points: 'Discover your interests and values.', 'Find careers, colleges, or training to reach your goals.', 'Learn how to find money to pay for college.', 'Launch college and financial aid applications.', and 'Monitor all your progress in one place.' To the right, a 'College and Career Exploration Tools' section includes links for 'College and Career Lessons', 'Career Assessments', and 'Testimonials', followed by a paragraph explaining the purpose of the lessons.

## CALIFORNIACOLLEGES.EDU

### Notable Features:

- Only statewide college and career readiness platform in the country that links to K-12 student records
- Includes tools for students to assess their interests, develop their college and career plans, access information on financial aid, launch college applications, and monitor progress in multiple languages
- Counselors have access to online lessons and dashboards to track student progress to tailor their support
- K-12 participation in student transcript sharing to be required by 2026 through 2024 omnibus budget bill

## LESSON SIX



# PEOPLE EMPOWER CHANGE

Building ground-level champions — such as counselors, advisors, and enrollment staff — is crucial for effective implementation.





## Students need trusted adults to cut through the admissions noise.

“

Direct admissions systems....  
**typically include trusted adults**, [such as] parents, high school counselors, and principals. This feature....**increases the legitimacy** of the program....and reduces the probability that direct admissions notifications will be ignored or overlooked by students. In addition, involving trusted adults **gives students someone they know that they can engage in conversations** about which postsecondary institution might be the best fit for them.

”

*Odle & Delaney (2025)*

Insights uncovered by grantees in listening sessions and focus groups mirrored an emerging emphasis in the academic literature on advising and navigational supports in the admissions process. Since the COVID-19 pandemic, **students, families, and counselors have experienced an especially noisy admissions landscape** – test-optional policies were activated and de-activated, the affirmative action strikedown introduced new considerations in essay-writing, and the Better FAFSA did not live up to its promise.

If admissions innovations are not carefully – and repeatedly – presented to students, states run the risk of exacerbating, rather than alleviating, the noise.



## Even more so than students and families, reaching school counselors is a top priority in early communications efforts.

To prepare practitioners as champions of admissions redesign, grantees are elevating school counselors and college access professionals as critical audiences for their communications strategies.

### WASHINGTON

After thoroughly involving counselors in their discovery process, the Washington Student Achievement Council (WSAC) team has prototyped a “[Reminder & Outreach](#)” system to help school staff shape their college-going messages for students in grades 8-12. The tool’s highest aspiration is to facilitate a **coherent communications environment for students** throughout the postsecondary planning process. As part and parcel, it includes key details about guaranteed admissions and financial aid opportunities

### TEXAS

In its multi-phased marketing and communications plan, the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board (THECB) identified **high school counselors and teachers as the primary audiences** of their first phase of implementation, which kicked off in October 2024. Through social media channels associated with [Texas OnCourse](#), a statewide network of college access professionals, THECB is encouraging practitioners to engage with My Texas Future so that they may support the expanding population of students registered on the platform. Additionally, the team has overseen the **dissemination of role-specific toolkits** to facilitate the integration of My Texas Future into college and career planning activities.



## ➤ Community-based organizations play a valuable role in lending advising capacity.

Although counselors and teachers are the “trusted adults” that students frequently approach with curiosities about postsecondary options, **school staff have dozens of competing priorities** that limit their capacity for college counseling. Recognizing this reality, grantees are finding ways to buttress their “ground games” by engaging community-based organizations.

For example, last year, the **LOUISIANA BOARD OF REGENTS** (LBOR) set out to establish a Louisiana College Access Network to create more **cohesion among college-going efforts statewide**. From November 2024 to April 2025, LBOR hosted regional convenings and focus groups with college access professionals in various corners of the state. Not only did these efforts build momentum for a formal launch of the network, they also provided a platform for community-based organizations to provide feedback and identify opportunities to engage with the Board’s “Promoting Admissions” project.





# WHERE TO START

If your state or higher education system would like to redesign your admissions process, here are a few steps to get started:

1

## Define Program Goals & Eligibility Criteria

**Clarify objectives:** Are you aiming to increase college access, improve equity, retain in-state talent, or boost enrollment at specific institutions?

**Determine eligibility:** Decide what qualifies a student for guaranteed admission – class rank, GPA thresholds, standardized test scores (if applicable), or completion of specific coursework.

**Target population(s):** Will it apply to all in-state students? Public high schools only? Specific underrepresented or rural populations?

2

## Build Partnerships Across Stakeholders

**Involve key partners early:** Collaborate with state higher education agencies, K–12 school districts, public universities and colleges, and legislators.

**Establish buy-in:** Ensure participating institutions support the program and understand implications for enrollment, funding, and admissions standards.

3

## Strengthen Data Infrastructure

**Align data systems:** Enable seamless sharing of student academic records between K–12 and higher education systems (e.g., through state longitudinal data systems).

**Ensure privacy compliance:** Create FERPA-compliant processes for data sharing.

**Identify eligible students early:** Automate identification and outreach processes.

4

## Create Communications & Outreach Plans

**Inform students and families:** Design clear messaging so students understand eligibility and what steps they must take to claim admission.

**Train school counselors and admissions officers:** Equip them to guide students through the process.

5

## Pilot the Program and Scale Strategically

**Start small:** Launch with a limited number of institutions or districts to test systems and refine processes.

**Evaluate and iterate:** Collect data on application, enrollment, and equity outcomes to adjust eligibility criteria or outreach strategies.

**Plan expansion:** Use lessons from the pilot to scale the program across more schools or institutions, as well as to consider integrations with other related elements of the student experience (e.g. transfer, financial aid, etc.).



## CONCLUSION

Lumina's Great Admissions Redesign challenge has demonstrated that meaningful change in college admissions is not only possible — it is already underway. Across seven states, a diverse array of institutions and agencies have begun to reimagine the admissions process as **a proactive, student-centered system** that reduces friction and expands opportunity. Their efforts underscore a set of core themes: the need to integrate admissions with other critical touch points like financial aid and transfer; the catalytic power of policy when aligned with practice; the central role of data and technology in enabling automation; and, above all, the importance of people—practitioners on the ground—who translate innovation into action.

But these lessons are not just for the grantees who received funding; they are a call to action for the entire field. As the higher education sector faces mounting demographic, political, and economic pressures, leaders at every level must ask: **What barriers are we willing to dismantle in order to better serve students?**

Now is the time for states, systems, and institutions to reflect on how to improve their own admissions systems — building lasting pathways to postsecondary access and success for every learner, in every community.



***Who will be the  
next leader of  
admissions  
redesign?***





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# APPENDIX

## *Detailed Grantee Spotlights*



# GRANTEE SPOTLIGHT – KENTUCKY COUNCIL ON POSTSECONDARY EDUCATION

## Planning Grantee

### PROBLEM STATEMENT

In an effort to improve both college-going and success rates, Kentucky is interested in increasing participation in dual credit, particularly for **first-generation and free and reduced price lunch students**; increasing access to summer bridge and co-requisite courses for **students considered academically underprepared** by GPA or placement tests; and streamlining the process **for transfer students**.

### VISION FOR INNOVATION

Kentucky's vision is to alleviate student stresses and elevate student joy along the college admissions journey. Recognizing the interwoven nature of admissions, this includes considering how to address the following priorities:

- **Accessible Transcripts:** Establish Parchment best practices for final high school transcripts.
- **Dual Credit Opportunities:** Establish the KY Transcript exChange for dual credit transcripts.
- **Transparency in Financial Aid:** Digitize the "Affordable Higher Education" scholarship database.
- **Proactive 9-12 Grade Communications:** Establish 9-12 grade key messaging campaign for school counselors.
- **Seamless Transfer:** Share intent-to-transfer information with public universities.

### ENABLING CONDITIONS & ASSETS

- **Data & Infrastructure:** [Futuriti.org](https://futuriti.org) serves as a comprehensive resource for college and career planning for students and families.
- **Data & Infrastructure:** KYSTATS provides robust longitudinal data collection, analysis, and reporting.
- **Data & Infrastructure:** Data-sharing agreements between CPE, KHEAA, and the Kentucky Department of Education (KDE) allow execution of statewide communications to all high school students.
- **Programs & Partnerships:** Kentucky has invested statewide in supporting summer bridge programs to help ease the transition for students to postsecondary.
- **Programs & Partnerships:** Kentucky has developed a statewide advising framework and toolkit as part of the Kentucky Advising Academy led by CPE.

### KEY PARTNERS

- Kentucky Council on Postsecondary Education
- Kentucky Department of Education
- Kentucky Higher Education Assistance Authority
- Kentucky Community & Technical College System
- Eight Public Universities

### PLANNING MILESTONES

- **Working group meetings:** Engaged over 40 partners across 10 meetings to identify shared priorities.
- **Student Journey Mapping:** Conducted a yearlong journey project in partnership with GEARUP Kentucky with over 40 high school seniors to better understand the joys and stresses of the college admissions journey.
- **Data Exploration**
- **Artificial Intelligence Webinar Series**
- **College Admissions Staff focus groups**

### LOOKING AHEAD

In addition to continuing the student diary studies to lift up the student experience, Kentucky plans to begin engaging key partners, conducting necessary research and audits, and conducting communications and outreach activities to implement the **priority commitments for each of five focus areas** (see left).

### COLLECTIVELY PURSUING...

A statewide goal to increase the percentage of high school students participating in dual credit to 50% by 2030.

# GRANTEE SPOTLIGHT – LOUISIANA BOARD OF REGENTS (1/2)

## Planning Grantee

### PROBLEM STATEMENT

**Only half of Louisiana high school graduates immediately enroll in postsecondary education.** Especially among low-income and rural communities, high school graduates are often college-eligible, but not college-going. Disjointed communications and opaque admissions processes obscure the path to postsecondary for Louisiana's young people.

### VISION FOR INNOVATION

The Promoting Admissions program seeks to cultivate college-going identities within high school seniors through **proactive, straightforward messages about postsecondary options** in Louisiana. Based on their academic performance, high school seniors will receive communications directly from the Board of Regents (LBOR), alerting them to their eligibility for admission at Louisiana's public institutions. LBOR messages will be amplified through the **Louisiana College Access Network**, a new Board initiative launched in 2025.

### ENABLING CONDITIONS & ASSETS

- **Policy & Advocacy:** LBOR's Master Plan, Louisiana Prospers, directs attention and resources towards efforts to increase college-going
- **Policy & Advocacy:** With the exception of LSU, all institutions adhere to LBOR's minimum admissions criteria
- **Data & Infrastructure:** The Office of Student Financial Aid already receives all of the data necessary to evaluate students against statewide minimum admissions criteria
- **Data & Infrastructure:** In 2024, LBOR experimented with invitational admissions notifications across 13 parishes

### KEY PARTNERS

- Louisiana Office of Student Financial Assistance
- Louisiana Department of Education
- Louisiana State University System, Louisiana Community and Technical Colleges System, University of Louisiana System, Southern University System
- Select K-12 parishes, including Acadia, Rapides, Saint Mary, and more
- Community-Based Organizations, including Baton Rouge Youth Coalition, Career Compass, College Beyond, and more

### PLANNING MILESTONES

- **Nov-Dec 2024:** Four college access convenings hosted at the city/regional level
- **Feb 2025:** Statewide convenings hosted to articulate parameters and objectives of the new Louisiana College Access Network
- **Mar-May 2025:** Focus groups conducted with college access professionals and students

### LOOKING AHEAD

To prepare for the 2025-2026 admissions cycle, LBOR is **refreshing invitational admissions letters** to reflect student feedback. Moving beyond language tweaks, LBOR is also collaborating with institutions to offer **automated admissions tools** for students who engage with invitational admissions notifications. In addition, LBOR will continue to facilitate the emergence of the **Louisiana College Access Network**, preparing college access professionals statewide to serve as champions of forthcoming admissions innovations. Follow along with LBOR on [LinkedIn](#), [X](#), or [Instagram](#).

COLLECTIVELY IMPACTING...

More than 10,000 students across 20 parishes by 2026.



# GRANTEE SPOTLIGHT – LOUISIANA BOARD OF REGENTS (2/2)

## Planning Grantee

### PROBLEM STATEMENT

In Louisiana, less than 30% of first-time community college students ultimately transfer to a four-year institution, though evidence suggests that the majority of these students enroll with aspirations to complete a bachelor's degree ([CCRC](#)). To initiate the transfer process, students must submit **separate applications to each institution** that they're interested in, even if the entire list is composed of public institutions in Louisiana. Consequently, students must also pay **multiple application fees** and ensure that their test scores and transcripts are separately received in multiple places. These redundant processes can be discouraging – or even prohibitive – for hopeful transfer students.

### VISION FOR INNOVATION

A **statewide transfer application** would reduce the time, money, and anxiety that students expend when applying for transfer. Housing a common application on one streamlined platform would also allow for the **auto-population of student data** (pulled from LBOR's central database), further alleviating the burden for students.

### ENABLING CONDITIONS & ASSETS

- **Policy & Advocacy:** LBOR's Master Plan, Louisiana Prospers, directs attention and resources towards efforts to improve student persistence and success
- **Policy & Advocacy:** The proliferation of Universal Transfer Pathways – which are now available for 30 of Louisiana's most in-demand academic programs – demonstrate LBOR's capacity to innovate in the transfer space
- **Data & Infrastructure:** LBOR's centralized database already contains many of the components necessary for a student's transfer application, e.g. demographics, summative high school performance records, and postsecondary academic records

### KEY PARTNERS

- Student Ready Strategies, a consulting and technical assistance organization with expertise in transfer policy and processes
- Louisiana State University System
- Louisiana Community and Technical Colleges System
- University of Louisiana System
- Southern University System

### PLANNING MILESTONES

- **Nov 2024:** Statewide practitioner survey administered to explore institutional differences in transfer application processing
- **Jan - Feb 2025:** Administrator focus groups conducted, investigating the feasibility and requirements of an automated transfer application
- **Apr 2025:** Data flow mapping session with institutional admissions professionals

### LOOKING AHEAD

Having mapped a desired data flow for the automated transfer application, LBOR's immediate next step is to identify an IT developer to kick off the prototyping process. Initial conversations with Instructure, the company behind Canvas, have uncovered opportunities to leverage the platform's "Badges" feature as the **testing grounds for a statewide transcript**. In addition to exploring next steps related to IT, LBOR will remain in close conversation with institutions about streamlining admissions and **articulation policies across systems**. Follow along with LBOR on [LinkedIn](#), [X](#), or [Instagram](#).

**COLLECTIVELY IMPACTING...** More than 12,000 transfer students enrolling in Louisiana public institutions. ([IPEDS](#))





# GRANTEE SPOTLIGHT – TEXAS HIGHER EDUCATION COORDINATING BOARD

## Planning Grantee

### PROBLEM STATEMENT

Data from the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Commission (THECB) showed a **decline in college-going rates** during the COVID-19 pandemic, with trends showing increasing enrollment over recent years. **Low-income, first generation, and students from rural areas** face the greatest barriers. Furthermore, schools without robust college counseling services often leave students without critical information on admissions requirements and financial aid. The biggest challenges to address include a lack of awareness and familiarity with My Texas Future and gaps in technology access.

### VISION FOR INNOVATION

Our vision is to **create a seamless, transparent, and accessible admissions process** where all Texas high school juniors and seniors, regardless of background, can be identified by colleges that match their academic profiles and aspirations. By simplifying the admissions process and proactively notifying students of their eligibility, we aim to **increase college enrollment and completion rates**, especially for historically underserved populations.

### ENABLING CONDITIONS & ASSETS

- **Policy & Advocacy:** The state’s strategic plan for higher education, Building a Talent Strong Texas, has established clear statewide goals to increase higher education attainment completion rates by 2030.
- **Data & Infrastructure:** Texas benefits from a robust Texas Education Research Center (ERC) that provides detailed data on K-12, higher education, and workforce outcomes.
- **Data & Infrastructure:** ApplyTexas is a centralized college application system that allows students to apply to multiple public institutions through a single portal.
- **Data & Infrastructure:** The launch of My Texas Future provides a strong technological platform to host the Direct Admissions tool and integrate it with existing advising and career resources.

### KEY PARTNERS

- Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board (THECB)
- Texas Workforce Commission (TWC)
- Texas Higher Education Foundation
- TNTP - designing stakeholder-specific toolkits

### PLANNING MILESTONES

- **Summer 2024:** Developed MTF technical features
- **October 2024:** Publicly deployed Direct Admissions feature in MTF
- **October 2024:** Launched a “My Texas Future Back to School” campaign through Texas OnCourse network of over 18,000 educators
- **October 2024:** Launched a multi-audience, multi-platform marketing campaign to build awareness of MTF

### LOOKING AHEAD

In the next phase of work, THECB is considering how to **better connect administrative datasets** to further streamline the student experience and potentially connect students with **financial aid** options. They are also beginning to work on the next phase of **user-centered design research**, aimed at informing the next iteration of the direct admissions rollout.

Follow along with THECB on [LinkedIn](#), [Instagram](#), and [X](#).

### COLLECTIVELY IMPACTING...

Over 10,000 students have opted in to use the Direct Admissions feature in MTF since October 2024.



# GRANTEE SPOTLIGHT – WASHINGTON STUDENT ACHIEVEMENT COUNCIL

## Planning Grantee

### PROBLEM STATEMENT

The WA Grant is one of the most generous need-based financial aid programs in the country – guaranteeing free college or career training to low-income students across the state. Yet, unaware of the WA Grant, many students continue to forego postsecondary options due to **financial concerns**. FAFSA completion rates among low-income students is 46%, meanwhile, millions of dollars in **financial aid are left unclaimed each year**.

### VISION FOR INNOVATION

Starting as early as 10th grade, students will receive **proactive notifications** indicating their eligibility for guaranteed financial aid and admissions. For students whose families receive SNAP benefits, **eligibility will be automatic**—no extra paperwork, no complicated steps.

### ENABLING CONDITIONS & ASSETS

- **Policy & Advocacy:** In 2024, the WA State Legislature passed a bill requiring WSAC to disseminate proactive communications about financial aid and affordability.
- **Data & Infrastructure:** Legislation passed in 2023 guaranteed financial aid for families receiving SNAP benefits. To bring this legislation to life, government agencies and institutions must observe new data-sharing agreements.
- **Communications:** Over the last four years, the Guaranteed Admissions Program has developed a robust communications strategy, heavily integrating practitioners on the ground.

### KEY PARTNERS

- Office of Superintendent of Postsecondary Instruction
- Department of Social and Health Services
- WSU-Tri Cities, Western Washington University, Central Washington University
- Mt Vernon, Pasco, Yakima, Granger, Sunnyside, Grandview, and Mabton School Districts
- State Board for Community and Technical Colleges
- Washington Council of Presidents

### PLANNING MILESTONES

- **Summer 2024:** Conducted intake sessions with participating colleges and high schools
- **Fall 2024:** Distributed surveys to high school staff, college administrators, students, and parents
- **Winter 2024:** Designed prototype “reminder & outreach” system; coordinated with schools to prepare for messaging rollout

### LOOKING AHEAD

This Fall, WSAC will **onboard and train key stakeholders** at participating high schools and colleges to roll out student messaging strategies in the Spring of 2026. As these pilot initiatives get off the ground, feedback loops will initiate, allowing WSAC to **adapt and improve messaging** for the Fall of 2026 and beyond. You can follow along with WSAC on [LinkedIn](#) and [X](#).

### COLLECTIVELY IMPACTING...

More than 500,000 households in Washington receive SNAP benefits, and more than 30% of recipients are children ([Hunger Free Washington](#)). More and more of these children will soon have the opportunity to develop college-going identities.



# GRANTEE SPOTLIGHT – CALIFORNIA STATE UNIVERSITY

## Implementation Grantee

### PROBLEM STATEMENT

The CSU system perceives acute **competition for enrollment** from the University of California, California Community Colleges, and out-of-state institutions actively recruiting in California. Students and families are concerned about **affordability and the value** of a postsecondary degree. While students commonly believe that beginning at a community college is more economical, successful **transfer** rates are low. CSU aims to help students, particularly **students of color, low-income families, and first-generation college students**, see four-year degrees as possible.

### VISION FOR INNOVATION

The CSU initiative is comprised of three complementary components:

- **Automatic Admissions:** Leveraging Cal State Apply, students applying as first-time freshman will be automatically provided admissions notifications regardless of the submission status.
- **Direct Admissions:** Leveraging CCGI's student-facing platform will notify eligible 12th graders of their direct admissions offer to 18 CSU campuses and the opportunity to apply to five more competitive campuses if they have met minimum admissions criteria.
- **Dual Admissions:** Current 12th graders who are not eligible for dual admissions will be directed to the Transfer Success Pathway that ensures admissions into a CSU institution following the completion of required coursework at a community college.

### ENABLING CONDITIONS & ASSETS

- **Data & Infrastructure:** Cal State Apply is CSU's systemwide application.
- **Data & Infrastructure:** CCGI's student-facing platform [CaliforniaColleges.edu](https://CaliforniaColleges.edu) collects student course-taking and performance data; CSU uses CCGI to identify eligible 12th grade students.
- **Policy & Advocacy:** The Cradle-to-Career initiative statutorily authorized all K-12 districts to provide student-facing accounts with CCGI; the 2024 omnibus budget bill requires participation in student transcript data collection.

### KEY PARTNERS

- California State University (CSU)
- California College Guidance Initiative (CCGI)
- Liaison International

### PLANNING MILESTONES

- **September 2024:** Signed MOU with RCOE to launch first direct admissions pilot
- **October 2024:** Automated Admissions went live in Cal State Apply
- **October 2024:** Started direct admission pilot with RCOE by sending proactive admission offers to over 17,000 students

- **February 2025:** Sent follow-up correspondence to students about the value of a college degree and CSU affordability in English and Spanish.
- **March 2025:** Held Discover CSU days for approximately 2000 students that were part of the direct admission pilot. Including a family evening event.
- **April 2025:** Announced the expansion of the direct admission pilot to include Oakland Unified School district
- **April 2025:** Sent Signing Day Kits to RCOE for distribution to their students who committed to a CSU

### LOOKING AHEAD

Broaden the reach of the direct admissions initiative by partnering with **additional high schools and districts** across California, with a focus on increasing access for historically underserved communities. In parallel, develop and implement a **transfer-specific direct admissions** pathway in collaboration with California Community Colleges, ensuring that eligible transfer students receive clear, proactive admission offers.

### COLLECTIVELY IMPACTING...

CSU is the largest public university system in the country, comprised of 23 campuses, and serving more than 450,000 students.





# GRANTEE SPOTLIGHT – ILLINOIS BOARD OF HIGHER EDUCATION

## Implementation Grantee

### PROBLEM STATEMENT

In response to enrollment declines and current transfer rates, Illinois aims to improve access for underrepresented high school and community college students, especially **students of color, low-income, and first-generation students**.

### VISION FOR INNOVATION

Illinois is **expanding upon two pre-existing admissions innovations**: *guaranteed* admissions for high-achieving high school seniors and *direct* admissions based on a self-reported GPA for *all* seniors with most of the Illinois Public Universities and Community Colleges. To **connect and augment these programs**, Illinois is transitioning to direct admissions for *all* high school students *and* seamless transfer for community college students. To accomplish this, they are implementing the following strategies:

- Utilizing **Common App** for statewide Direct Admissions
- Conducting **outreach and awareness** campaigns to high school students
- **Recruiting early adopter** community colleges to join Common App for Direct Admission offers
- **Passing legislation** authorizing school districts to provide ISAC and IBHE with student data
- Adopting and implementing a **transfer application tool** to facilitate the process for community college students

### ENABLING CONDITIONS & ASSETS

- **Policy & Advocacy**: Public University Uniform Admission Pilot Program passed by legislature in 2020; in 2022, the law was expanded to include community college transfer students. In 2025, the state enacted the Public University Direct Admissions Program.
- **Policy & Advocacy**: IBHE adopted a new strategic plan, [A Thriving Illinois](#).
- **Programs & Partnerships**: The state covers the cost for all public universities to use the Common App.

### KEY PARTNERS

- Illinois Board of Higher Education (IBHE)
- Common App
- Illinois Community College Board (ICCB)
- Illinois Student Assistance Commission (ISAC)
- Illinois State Board of Education (ISBE)

### PLANNING MILESTONES

- **Launching [One Click College Admit](#)**, and establishing its brand as a student-centered tool to promote certainty in the admissions process. The tool was launched mid-application cycle with most public institutions.
- Creating an **opt-in process** for student data sharing.
- Establishing a **School Superintendent advisory group** to guide student and family communications.

- Establishing the processes, procedures, and communication pieces necessary for a **smooth transfer experience** from the community colleges to four-years.
- **Engaging the Common App** to align their tools with Illinois Direct Admissions needs.

### LOOKING AHEAD

- **Launching One Click College Admit** with 8 of the 10 state public universities and 8 community colleges.
- Launching the One Click College Admit **opt-in campaign** for High School Juniors and their parents, seeking permission to share the student's educational records for the purpose of generating direct admission offers. A corollary campaign will launch for eligible community college transfer students.
- Coordinating the necessary **data matching and communications materials** to release Direct Admissions offers in mid-September 2026

### COLLECTIVELY IMPACTING...

Early data already demonstrates that **first generation, fee waiver eligible, and students living in zip codes below the median income are the most likely to uptake Direct Admission offers.**



# GRANTEE SPOTLIGHT – NORTHERN ARIZONA UNIVERSITY

## Implementation Grantee

### PROBLEM STATEMENT

Less than half of Arizona high school graduates immediately enroll in postsecondary education. Universal admissions is intended to provide all Arizonans, regardless of background, with a vehicle for upward **economic mobility**.

Supporting seamless transfer pathways to bachelor's degrees at NAU aligns with the needs of Arizona's people, communities, and economy; ensuring graduates are prepared for lives of purpose and careers of prosperity..

### VISION FOR INNOVATION

Through the Universal Admissions Program, every applicant to Northern Arizona University (NAU) is either admitted directly to the university or given the opportunity to start their education at an Arizona community college before continuing at NAU. To do so, NAU plans to implement the following strategies:

- Create a **single application process** between NAU and community colleges
- Develop systems to **securely transfer** admissions files
- Conduct **outreach** to K-12 districts
- Update academic **advising protocols** and training
- Build **optimized systems** for application processing, transcript evaluation, and data sharing across campuses.

### ENABLING CONDITIONS & ASSETS

- **Data & Infrastructure:** NAU staff have developed new systems for optimizing student file transfer.
- **Communications:** A six-touchpoint communication strategy was implemented, transitioning outreach responsibilities to community college partners after two months of Strategic Enrollment and Marketing communications from NAU. Synchronized and standardized interactive virtual welcome sessions were created and presented to students.

### KEY PARTNERS

- Northern Arizona University (NAU)
- Arizona Attainment Alliance (A++)
- Arizona Commerce Authority (ACA)
- Arizona Institute for Education of the Economy
- Data Labs Program at Georgetown University

### PLANNING MILESTONES

- **2022:** Ideate and design the program
- **2023:** Early adopter community college partner joins
- **2024:** Expand and add another five community colleges
- **2025:** Scale to a total of nine community colleges
- **2026:** Scale to 14 community colleges and begin integration with AZ Ahead concierge counseling services.

### LOOKING AHEAD

**Enhancing Cross-Institutional Systemic Communication:** Establishing a system for real-time student status updates between NAU and partners.

**Scaling to Additional Institutions:** Bringing the total number of schools up to 14.

**Refining Branding & Positioning:** Strengthening UA and 2NAU branding to align with NAU's broader enrollment and marketing strategy.

**Affordability & Transparency:** Utilizing the value proposition to accentuate the cost savings for beginning an education pathway at the community college.

**Accelerated Degree Pathways:** Developing clear degree pathway options to maximize efficiency and affordability while minimizing loss of transfer credits.

**Student-Centered Services:** Enhancing concierge-like student support, including advising, financial aid navigation, and academic resources.

If successful, NAU will have yet another tool to drive student success, economic mobility and social impact in Arizona.

COLLECTIVELY IMPACTING... 270,000 undergraduate students annually across NAU and A++ community colleges.