REVIEW OF THE *COMPREHENSIVE ARTICULATION AGREEMENT* THAT EXISTS BETWEEN CONSTITUENT INSTITUTIONS OF THE NORTH CAROLINA COMMUNITY COLLEGE SYSTEM AND CONSTITUENT INSTITUTIONS OF THE UNIVERSITY OF NORTH CAROLINA SYSTEM

A Report to

The Joint Legislative Education Oversight Committee,

The Senate Appropriations Committee on Education/Higher Education, and

The House Appropriations Subcommittee on Education

Submitted by

The State Board of Community Colleges and

The Board of Governors of the University of North Carolina

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As Required by

Session Law 2013-72 (HB 903)

**ANNUAL REPORT ON THE *COMPREHENSIVE ARTICULATION AGREEMENT* TO
THE JOINT LEGISLATIVE EDUCATION OVERSIGHT COMMITTEE**

NOVEMBER 1, 2020

S.L. 2013-72 (HB 903) North Carolina General Statute 116-11(10c) requires the University of North Carolina System and the North Carolina Community College System to conduct biannual joint reviews of the *Comprehensive Articulation Agreement* to ensure that the agreement is fair, current, and relevant for all students and institutions and to report their findings to the Joint Legislative Education Oversight Committee, including all revisions to the *Comprehensive Articulation Agreement* and reports of noncompliance by November 1 of each year. The statute also requires the University of North Carolina System and the North Carolina Community College System jointly to develop an articulation agreement advising tool for students, parents, and faculty to simplify the course transfer and admissions process.

SUMMARY

The revised *Comprehensive Articulation Agreement* (*CAA*) was signed by the UNC Board of Governors and the State Board of Community Colleges on February 21, 2014. The *CAA* was implemented in the fall 2014 semester. To date, the Transfer Advisory Committee (TAC) has completed two full rounds of compliance visits and is just beginning their third round. There have yet to be any reports of noncompliance by any institution.

The University of North Carolina (UNC) System and the North Carolina Community College System (NCCCS) continue to work to enhance educational opportunities for NCCCS students by improving transfer administration, utilizing data to assess transfer effectiveness, and facilitating communication between respective constituent institutions. The UNC Transfer Student website, the College Foundation of North Carolina, and published baccalaureate degree plans (BDPs) from each university provide access to details that students need to make informed choices when selecting institutions, degree programs, and courses. Online data dashboards containing transfer information for each community college and university, as well as aggregate information for the two systems, improves transparency and accountability through public access to transfer and performance data. Both systems of public higher education in the state of North Carolina continue to work together to develop and support degree-mapping tools to facilitate informed and efficient transfer.

This report summarizes ongoing efforts to implement and fulfill the *CAA*. The TAC is committed to providing students and institutions with information and strategies to support both associate degree and baccalaureate degree completion.

The most recent version of the 2014 *CAA*, complete with appendices, is available at
https://myapps.northcarolina.edu/transfertoolbox/download/5/caa/619/caa_2020-tac-approved-08-28-20.pdf

CAA PROGRESS - 2020

Transfer Enrollment and Performance Data

The UNC System data dashboard provides essential data on transfer students to include enrollment trends, credit hours and degree transfers, graduation rates, grade point average, and performance in disciplines after transfer. Within the dashboard, data for individual community colleges and universities are available for deeper analysis. The UNC System data dashboard continues to be a vital resource in determining whether the 2014 *CAA* is having the desired impact on transfer student success and whether the changes in policy and practice put in place because of the *CAA* and the associated compliance site visits are achieving the desired positive outcomes. This information is critical to the decision-making process for both individual community colleges and universities, as well as for the two systems. Students who entered the NCCCS in fall 2014 are under the protections of the 2014 *CAA*, and an increasing number continue to transfer to the UNC System as of fall 2019. This increasing number of transfer students who possess the protections of the 2014 *CAA* and their successful transfer to the state universities give a clear indication of the value of the 2014 *CAA* to students.

Transfer Student Enrollment

There continues to be a steady increase in the enrollment of NCCCS transfer students into UNC System institutions. This increase is a clear result of the revised *CAA*, proper advising, and the strong collaboration between the UNC System and NCCCS. Data from fall 2018 and fall 2019 indicate slight decreases in associate degree completion and in overall transfer enrollment. Since the majority of community college students do not complete their associate degrees in two years, the TAC anticipates an increasing trend in associate degree completion prior to transfer and in overall transfer enrollment as students, advisors, and institutions continue to gain a better understanding of the protections of the *CAA* and the wide-ranging benefits of degree completion.

Data illustrate a slight decrease in the number of NCCCS students transferring to the UNC System, decreasing from 11,160 in fall 2018 to 10,756 in fall 2019. This represents a decrease of 404 students or 3.6% (see Figure 1); however, the overall trend since the institution of the 2014 *CAA* has been markedly positive.
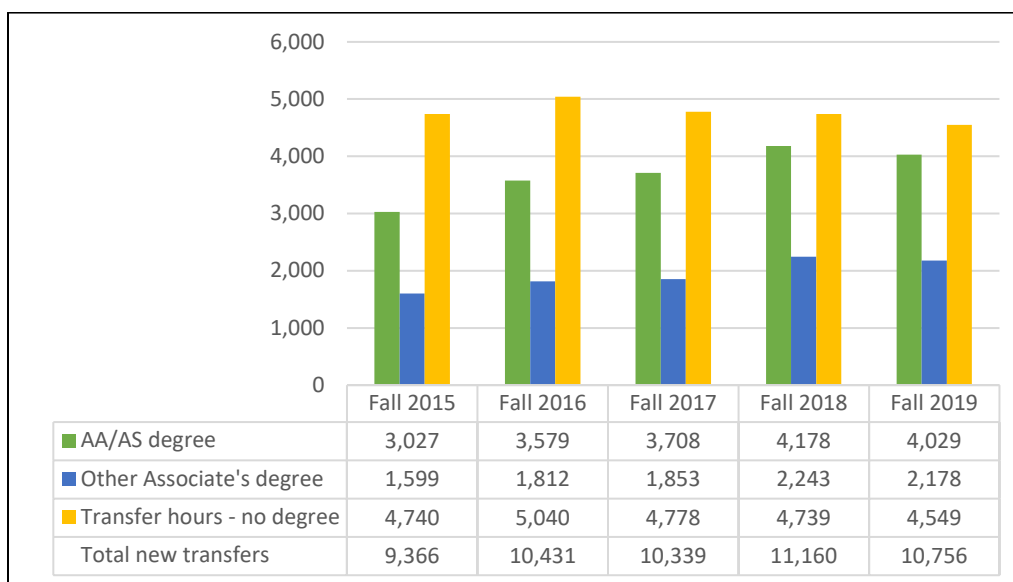
The number of NCCCS students transferring with a completed associate degree also dropped slightly (see Figure 2) during the past year. In fall 2018, the total number of NCCCS students transferring with a completed degree (AA/AS or any other associate degree) was 6,421 compared to 6,207 students in fall 2019. This change represents a decrease of 214 students or 3.3% (see Figure 2), but it is only the first year since the implementation of the 2014 *CAA* in which we have seen any decrease at all.

Conversely, the number of NCCCS students who transfer to UNC System institutions with transfer credits but no degree has declined since the implementation of the revised *CAA*. In fall 2016, 5040 NCCCS students transferred before completing an associate degree compared to 4549 non-degree-earning students in fall 2019 (see Figure 1). From fall 2016 to fall 2019, this number has decreased every year, and the overall decrease in the number of students transferring with credits but without a degree over this period totals 491 students or 9.7%. This decrease supports the sustained emphasis on degree completion at the community college level prior to transfer to a senior institution. The increase in

overall transfer numbers and the increase in degree completers prior to transfer illustrate the continued positive impact of the 2014 *CAA* on transfer student success in North Carolina.
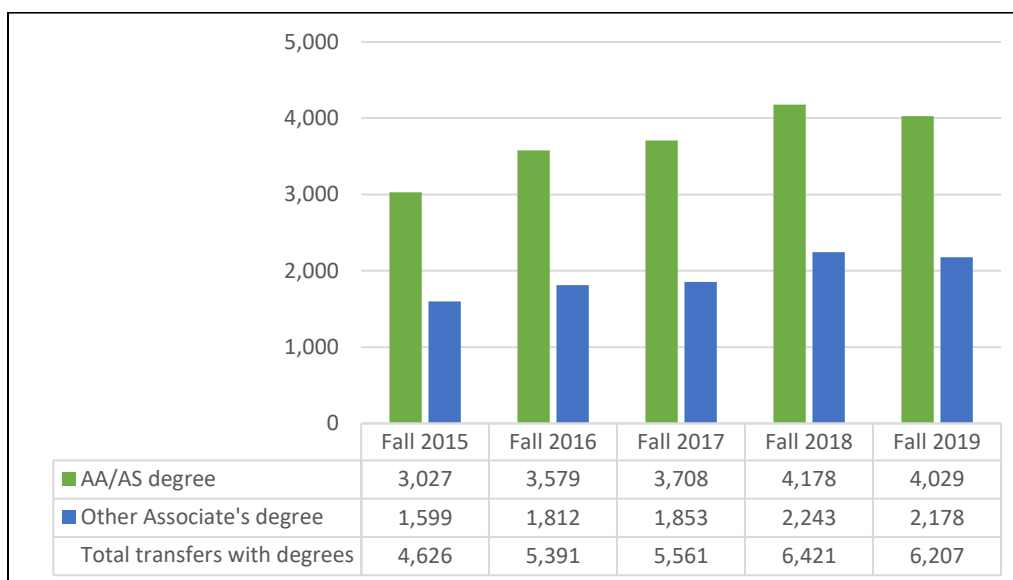
Figure 1

New NCCCS Student Enrollment in UNC System Institutions

	Fall 2015	Fall 2016	Fall 2017	Fall 2018	Fall 2019
AA/AS degree	3,027	3,579	3,708	4,178	4,029
Other Associate's degree	1,599	1,812	1,853	2,243	2,178
Transfer hours - no degree	4,740	5,040	4,778	4,739	4,549
Total new transfers	9,366	10,431	10,339	11,160	10,756

Note: Data within Figure 1 include the most current information posted on the UNC public dashboards and may differ slightly from previously reported information.

Figure 2

NCCCS Student Transfers with Completed Associate Degree

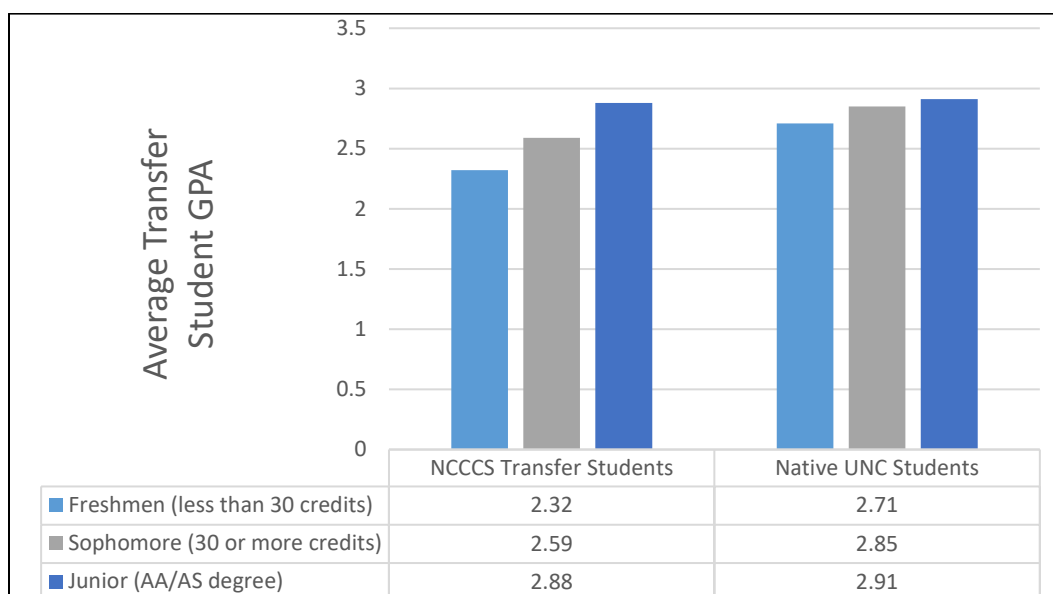|	Fall 2015	Fall 2016	Fall 2017	Fall 2018	Fall 2019
AA/AS degree	3,027	3,579	3,708	4,178	4,029
Other Associate's degree	1,599	1,812	1,853	2,243	2,178
Total transfers with degrees	4,626	5,391	5,561	6,421	6,207

Note: Data within Figure 2 include the most current information posted on the UNC public dashboards and may differ slightly from previously reported information.

Transfer Performance Data

The most recent data on transfer student performance (2019-2020 data for students who transferred in fall 2018) continue to indicate a strong correlation between degree and credit-hour completion prior to transfer and academic performance at the university (see Figure 3). With regard to first-year performance, students who transfer from an NCCCS institution into a UNC System institution with fewer than 30 completed credit hours significantly lag behind those who started at a university as freshmen. This is also true of students who transfer before completing an associate degree but have more than 30 credit hours of transferable coursework: The overall first-year student GPA of non-degree-earning transfer students with more than 30 completed hours is lower compared to their native UNC System sophomore counterparts. Students who complete the associate degree prior to transfer and matriculate as juniors, however, perform comparably with native UNC System juniors. These results confirm the foundational principle of the *CAA* that transfer students who complete the associate degree prior to transfer will perform as well as students who began their higher education journeys at UNC System institutions.

Figure 3

2019 Transfer Student Performance Grade Point Average After First Year

	NCCCS Transfer Students	Native UNC Students
■ Freshmen (less than 30 credits)	2.32	2.71
■ Sophomore (30 or more credits)	2.59	2.85
■ Junior (AA/AS degree)	2.88	2.91

Note: Data indicated in Figure 3 are reflective of first-year performance at UNC institutions for transfer students. This measurement was taken during fall 2019 to spring 2020 for the cohort entering in fall 2018.

Campus Compliance Site Visits

In January 2016, the Transfer Advisory Committee (TAC) established a process for reviewing the institutional transfer credit policies and procedures of UNC System institutions once every two years to ensure compliance with the *CAA.* (The North Carolina School of the Arts is not included in the compliance visits because it has very few transfer students). The TAC completed its first round of reviews for the 15 UNC System institutions in November 2017 (see Table 1). The second round of reviews began in October 2018 and was completed in November 2019. The third round of reviews began in March 2020 and is projected to be completed in fall 2021. To date, each institution has been found in compliance with the *CAA* after each site visit review of its policies.

Table 1

Dates of TAC Site Visits to each UNC System Institution

Institution	First-round Visit	Second-round Visit	Third-round Visit
Appalachian State University	07/25/2016	10/18/2018	04/24/2020
East Carolina University	09/15/2016	10/11/2018	Fall 2020 TBD
Elizabeth City State University	09/16/2016	10/12/2018	Fall 2020 TBD
Fayetteville State University	10/18/2017	10/29/2019	Fall 2021 TBD
North Carolina A&T University	03/29/2017	04/30/2019	Spring 2021 TBD
North Carolina Central University	11/17/2016	11/28/2018	Fall 2020 TBD
North Carolina State University	11/16/2016	11/07/2018	Fall 2020 TBD
UNC Asheville	04/17/2017	04/17/2019	Spring 2021 TBD
UNC-Chapel Hill	04/05/2017	05/01/2019	Spring 2021 TBD
UNC Charlotte	04/13/2016	10/16/2018	04/08/2020
UNC Greensboro	04/14/2016	10/18/2018	03/10/2020
UNC Pembroke	10/18/2017	10/28/2019	Fall 2021 TBD
UNC Wilmington	10/20/2017	10/17/2019	Fall 2021 TBD
Western Carolina University	04/19/2017	03/28/2019	Spring 2021 TBD
Winston-Salem State University	06/23/2016	11/16/2018	05/27/2020

TAC/CAA Campus Site Visit Process and Compliance Feedback Reports

The UNC System sends a CAA Review Form to each of the universities at least one month prior to the scheduled site visit. The TAC continued to refine this form in the past year to make it more useful to the institution under review and to the TAC site visit team. Accompanying this form, the UNC System Office forwards data concerning transfer statistics and asks the university to reflect on their observations from these data on the *CAA* Review Form. A site visit team consisting of one TAC representative from the NCCCS and one from the UNC System reviews the forms along with other information from the Data Dashboard and the institution's website to assess transfer student admissions and performance data, completion rates, transfer credits accepted, total credits accumulated upon baccalaureate degree completion, most popular transfer student majors, top feeder community colleges, currency of baccalaureate degree plans (BDPs), and institutional practices. The TAC site visit team then interviews key transfer personnel at the UNC System institution and meets with NCCCS transfer students to hear about their transition experience. (Due to rather low attendance on previous occasions and the advent of the COVID-19 pandemic, the TAC site visit teams decided to cancel the scheduled open forums for all campus personnel during the site visits held during spring 2020.)

Upon completion of the compliance visit, the site visit team submits feedback reports to the entire TAC for review and approval. The UNC System Office then sends the approved reports to each university provost for distribution to appropriate university personnel. To date, all UNC System institutions have been found to be in compliance with the provisions and guidelines of the *CAA*. TAC members continue to observe a growing familiarity with the tenets and provisions of the *CAA* now that the third round of site visits have begun. Furthermore, many UNC System institutions have implemented additional practices to form stronger partnerships with their community college neighbors. For example, several UNC System institutions have developed co-admission or provisional admission programs that allow university advisors the opportunity to work more closely with prospective transfer students. Additionally, several community colleges are offering dedicated space on their campuses for UNC System institution advisors to visit and work with students to be sure they are on a seamless path to transfer.

COVID-19 Impacts

As with so many other institutions and processes, the work of the TAC was disrupted, but not impeded, by the worldwide COVID-19 pandemic. Three site visits that were initially scheduled to occur in person during the spring 2020 semester, had to be modified for virtual visits instead. Furthermore, all four site visits planned for the fall 2020 semester will be conducted virtually, and it is likely that spring 2021 site visits will be scheduled in that same manner as well. The main difference between these virtual visits and the traditional in-person visits has been the reduction in time spent with university representatives and the lack of student interaction. Fortunately, as university personnel are becoming more familiar with the *CAA*, the time required to address concerns and to hear of successes is not as great as in the initial rounds of visits. However, the lack of interaction with NCCCS transfer students is not ideal, and concerted efforts to meet with these students will be undertaken with the resumption of site visits in fall 2020.

The main challenges mentioned by UNC System institutions regarding COVID-19 were the difficulty in predicting enrollment trends with both transfer and traditional student populations and the implementation of grading systems that were fair to students during the unprecedented times faced in

spring 2020. Understandably, universities were unsure how students and families would react to the worldwide pandemic as regards to their enrollment in higher education. This made it difficult to plan accordingly for fall 2020. Additionally, decisions regarding the nature of grading (a traditional grading scale versus a pass/fail scale) and its relationship to transferring students were difficult to make. Fortunately, most, if not all, universities decided to hold students harmless for grades earned during the spring 2020 semester, regardless of whether they were traditional or transfer students.

Transfer Credit Appeal Procedure

Students who believe the terms of the *CAA* have not been adhered to by universities to which they are admitted may appeal by following the Transfer Credit Appeal provision in Appendix E of the *CAA*. Student awareness and use of the appeal process remain quite limited though, with no formal appeals having been filed to date. When faculty and staff advisors at NCCCS institutions have conveyed concerns about *CAA* adherence to the TAC, the issues have been resolved through conversations between TAC members and UNC System Office personnel. This process has worked well for situations of which college and university personnel have been made aware and given the opportunity to make satisfactory resolutions or explanations; however, there may be other undocumented cases whereby students are being deprived of the guarantees of the *CAA* but are also unaware of their options for recourse. Thus, the TAC is examining ways to encourage the appeals process, thereby creating a history of documented issues and their eventual resolutions. This would create greater transparency in the appeals process, strongly advocate for transfer student rights, and provide a record of issues and associated resolutions should those issues arise again in the future at a different institution. The TAC continues to promote greater awareness of the Transfer Credit Appeal provision among transfer students by recommending it be a required topic in the ACA 122 – College Transfer Success courses taken at NCCCS institutions.

Baccalaureate Degree Plans

The 2014 *CAA* requires UNC System institutions to develop and maintain baccalaureate degree plans (BDPs) to outline community college and university courses that lead to timely baccalaureate degree completion for each major plan of study that the university offers. While there remain varied approaches for maintaining these BDPs, more institutions are centralizing the responsibility for BDP maintenance in hopes of creating consistent and accurate BDPs while also being able to respond to course and program updates in a timely manner. The TAC continues to share best practices for BDP maintenance with UNC System institutions during site visits.

CAA Revisions

In August 2020, the TAC made minor modifications to phrasing and references to names in the most recent version of the 2014 *CAA.* The most substantial update added references to other commonly recognized exams besides Advanced Placement exams in section V.A.10. This year, no new courses were added to the Universal General Education Transfer Component or other General Education lists. However, multiple foreign language courses in Irish were added to the list of Pre-major/Elective courses. All changes to the *CAA* were presented to appropriate personnel in both systems, with the expectation that BDPs will continue to be updated to reflect these changes in the next academic term. The latest version of the *CAA* has been presented to both the State Board of Community Colleges and the UNC Board of Governors.

Data Improvements

At the request of TAC, the UNC System Data and Analytics team has been able to provide more detailed information on their data dashboard. Specifically, they have been able to break out the category previously labeled as "other associate degrees" into more specific degrees (e.g., AAS, AE, AGE, etc.). Additionally, each semester, this team has begun to provide the TAC with updated data on transfer performance and completion metrics for each state university. To complement this work, the NCCCS Analytics and Reporting team has also begun instituting detailed data dashboards to provide relevant transfer information from the NCCCS institutions. Fortunately, a strong partnership and collaborative spirit has developed between these two teams so that they can provide more cohesive data that informs relevant stakeholders concerning the effectiveness of a variety of educational initiatives including, but not limited to, transfer.

UNC System Director of Community College Partnerships

The UNC System has experienced regular turnover in their Director of Community College Partnerships position (established in 2017). The most recent director was appointed in March 2019 but left the position (due to a promotion) after only one year in the role. This director brought a significant understanding of institutional practices and capacity at both the community college and university levels and was very well aware of transfer student needs. Thus, the director instituted many new initiatives to enhance the transfer process. These initiatives resulted in greater and more regular communication between the TAC and the information technology and data analysts employed by the UNC System Office to assist in the improvement of the UNC System data dashboard, the creation of transfer equivalency tools for more consistent credit evaluation, the collection of advising resources in an electronic *Transfer Toolbox* (see "Communication" below), and regular monthly communication about all things transfer-related with both community college and university transfer personnel. While the role of Director of Community College Partnerships currently remains unfilled, it is imperative that another passionate professional be appointed soon so as to promote the continued successful implementation of the *CAA.*

Communication

The dissemination of transfer information to appropriate personnel in a timely manner can create challenges for both NCCCS and UNC System institutions. Up-to-date adjustments to the *CAA* as approved by the TAC, advising information, and a clearinghouse of best practices are invaluable resources to transfer advisors and administrators. In addition, the TAC strives for transparency and public accessibility in its work. To these ends, two platforms for enhanced communication among constituents were launched during fall 2019 to promote a smoother flow of information across both the NCCCS and the UNC System, as well as to the public at large. A Transfer Toolbox – Advisor Resource website now houses information about policy changes, *CAA* updates, advising tools, best practices, and opportunities for connections (e.g., transfer conferences) such that advisors can obtain needed information in one location. The Transfer Advisory Committee website provides the public with details regarding membership, meetings, and current policy. This website curates information about the work of the TAC that was previously split between websites belonging to both the NCCCS and the UNC System. It also serves a workspace for TAC members to participate in ongoing discussions and committee work.

The immediate past Director of Community College Partnerships also instituted a monthly series of Transfer Talk webinars designed to promote enhanced communication and collaboration for successful

student transitions between the two systems. Separate webinar series were launched for university advising personnel and for community college advising personnel. Participants discuss relevant information about the *CAA* and the work of the TAC, and group facilitators collect concerns from individuals who work most directly with transfer students in both systems to share with TAC members so that they are aware of challenges that exist in the field. Unfortunately, because the position of Director of Community College Partnerships remains unfilled and because the COVID-19 pandemic has led to a focus in other more pressing areas, the webinars were temporarily halted during spring 2020. They remain in hiatus for the time being but are scheduled to reemerge once the appropriate personnel can be put in place at the UNC System Office.

Collaborative Efforts and Initiatives

The TAC participated in a Transfer Data Convening for leaders from the NCCCS Office, the UNC System Office, the North Carolina Independent Colleges and Universities, myFutureNC, North Carolina State University's Belk Center, and researchers from the University of North Carolina at Charlotte. They met on July 13, 2020, to discuss opportunities for collaboration to better support transfer student success across the state. Following the meeting, attendees agreed to form working groups to focus on Policy Implementation, Policy Analysis, and Research & Evaluation. These working groups began meeting in September 2020 and will identify action steps for the 2020-2021 academic year. The Research & Evaluation group is using recent TAC Legislative Reports (including this one) to guide the focus of the needed research and evaluation action steps.

Funding for TAC

Since its inception, the TAC has relied upon the home institutions of its members to fund member participation in TAC meetings, compliance site visits, and presentations at professional conferences or workshops. The TAC is intentionally comprised of members from across the state from both urban and rural areas and representing both large and small institutions. Unfortunately, the travel costs associated with the duties and responsibilities of membership place an additional financial obligation on institutions that have already existing significant constraints and limitations on their spending. The NCCCS and the UNC System Offices both strongly advise that funding be allocated to provide for travel to TAC meetings, site visits, and professional presentations – all of which support the mission of increased transfer efficiency and effectiveness – for each of the members of the TAC. While the need for funding has been lessened this year due to the COVID-19 pandemic, we anticipate an increase in funding needs to meet the new reality in the aftermath of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Conclusion and TAC Recommendations

In the past six years, NCCCS and UNC System institutions have made steady progress toward seamless transfer. They continue to perfect and improve their partnerships to provide more effective advising, clear and consistent communication, and ongoing support to transfer students. As awareness and execution of the 2014 *Comprehensive Articulation Agreement* increase in North Carolina, more students are completing associate degrees at community colleges and transferring to UNC System institutions. Upon transfer, these degree-completers are performing comparably with students who started as freshmen at those same universities. The data provided in this report demonstrate that UNC System institutions are not only meeting the expectations set out in the *CAA,* but they are finding creative ways

to enhance the transfer process and to champion transfer student success. In light of this positive momentum, the TAC continues to promote ongoing support of the following efforts:

- The swift hiring of a Director of Community College Partnerships at the UNC System Office, a role critical to the success of the work of the TAC and beneficial to transfer students statewide;

- Technological and operational solutions that create greater continuity, clarity, accessibility, and transparency for advising and the processing of transfer students and informing course, program, and institution selection (e.g., a common course-numbering or common course-equivalency system, the electronic transfer of transcripts, etc.) among the NCCCS and UNC System institutions;

- An examination of policies and procedures as they relate to issues involving diversity, equity, and inclusivity among NCCCS and UNC System transfer students, with the objective of promoting equitable outcomes and ameliorating any discovered inequities;

- Co-admission initiatives and UNC System advisor residency on community college campuses to guide students toward completion of appropriate courses, programs, and institutions earlier in the transfer process; and

- Development and growth of collaborations with other key partners (e.g., NCSU's Belk Center for Community College Leadership and Research, myFutureNC, North Carolina Independent Colleges and Universities, etc.) in the work of transfer success.