



HIGHER EDUCATION REQUIREMENTS

Transitioning to Student-Centered Learning:

Policy Solutions for States

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While working with states to implement innovative student-centered learning policies and programs, ExcelsinEd has identified policies and practices that hinder new student-centered learning models. [Transitioning to Student-Centered Learning: Policy Solutions for States](#) is a policy brief series dedicated to addressing these challenges.

THE CHALLENGE OF HIGHER EDUCATION ADMISSION, SCHOLARSHIP & FINANCIAL AID REQUIREMENTS

A frequent challenge noted by educators and parents is that nontraditional transcripts can place high school graduates at a disadvantage when applying for admission to colleges and universities as well as financial aid and scholarships.

Many new learning models focus on the mastery of key concepts of skills regardless of the time, place and pace in which they are acquired. This approach often leads to the elimination—or at least blurring—of conventional age, grade, course and time-based structures. As a result, report cards and transcripts may not feature traditional elements such as grade point average (GPA) or class rank.

Despite the benefits of mastery-based learning models, many parents are justifiably concerned that nontraditional transcripts and report cards could hinder their children's prospects for college admission or render them ineligible for certain scholarships or financial aid. For educators, these concerns translate into time-intensive efforts to convert mastery-based outcomes to traditional course grades—as well as a broader wariness of exploring more innovative approaches to evaluate student achievement.

[Research from the RAND Corporation](#) noted similar challenges and recommended that “Innovative schools should have the flexibility to develop nontraditional grading systems that support the school model, and policymakers could consider limiting the need to convert grades back to a traditional letter grade for reporting purposes.”

POTENTIAL SOLUTIONS TO ENSURE FAIR & EQUITABLE ACCESS

Traditional requirements for college admission, scholarships and financial aid will need to evolve for the next generation of K-12 learning opportunities. These are practical steps states can consider now to start the transition.

1: Amending Necessary Policies to Accommodate Innovative Models & Transcripts

In-state postsecondary opportunities should not be more difficult to access for graduates of schools with innovative models or non-traditional report cards and transcripts nor should schools be required to request waivers.

Taking proactive steps to ensure fair and equitable access for applicants with nontraditional transcripts is neither difficult nor unprecedented. Many states already have policies for students enrolled in home education programs, and institutions of higher education regularly accept non-traditional transcripts and diplomas from international applicants. States should consider extending these practices and flexibilities to support the efforts of innovation schools and educators. This flexibility is necessary to ensure fair and equitable access.

2: Designing Accommodations for State Data System Requirements

Though schools implementing or transitioning to new learning models may request and be granted flexibility from policies, it is often practical data system requirements that prove to be the biggest challenge.

States often have common applications for admission to state colleges and universities or statewide systems for high schools to upload student information. These systems were created to simplify and expedite the process for students and families, as well as the institutions. However, these data system requirements have become an obstacle for schools seeking to innovate grading and reporting processes by requiring data fields innovative schools may not provide. An alternative entry process can eliminate this burden.