

STATE BOARD OF COMMUNITY COLLEGES
Exploring AAS Degrees as Transfer Pathways
FY 2025-26

Exploring AAS degrees as Transfer Pathways

Request: The State Board of Community Colleges (SBCC) is requested to approve up to \$25,000 in State Board Reserve Funds to support an initiative to streamline the transfer process for students pursuing an Associate of Applied Science degree. Traditionally, graduates of these programs are not expected to transfer; however, data suggests that an increasing number of students are completing these degrees and transferring into baccalaureate degree programs. In the process, they can experience significant credit loss and require more time to complete the bachelor's degree. These funds will allow the Program and Student Services area to execute a plan intended to provide additional guidance to advisors, support students through the journey, make targeted, data-informed curriculum changes to support transfer-ready AAS programs aligned with the Propel NC business model.

Strategic Plan References: Goal 2: Enrollment

Increase access and enrollment at North Carolina community colleges to meet the state's educational attainment goal and expand postsecondary opportunities.

Strategies: 2.3.1 & 2.4.2

Goal 4: Economic and Workforce Development

Provide education, training, and credentials to develop the most competitive workforce in the nation.

Strategies: 4.1.1 & 4.3,1

Background/Rationale: Data supplied by the UNC system and reviewed by the Belk Center (https://belk-center.ced.ncsu.edu/wp-content/uploads/sites/128/2025/06/2025.06.02_AAS-Transfer-Brief_v7.pdf) has identified that, though Associate of Applied Science (AAS) degrees were not designed for transfer, these students consistently make up almost 20% of all community college transfers to University of North Carolina (UNC) institutions. The same data identified discrepancies in time to transfer, bachelor degree attainment, and credit loss between AA/AS students and AAS students. These alarming statistics quantify an ongoing, but fixable problem.

These funds will be used to explore barriers, identify opportunities, and implement solutions. Activities include, but are not limited to (a) convening a group of career counselor and academic advisors to develop new tools and resources for working with AAS students who wish to transfer, (b) engaging faculty to develop transfer pathways (e.g. Criminal Justice Technology AAS degree programs) to better align AAS curriculum standards with bachelor's degree requirements, and (c) promoting new AAS to bachelor pathways for adult students.

SBCC

07/18/2025

Funds will be used to cover travel and meeting costs for the various working groups. We anticipate at least two in-person meetings of the advisors/counselors, and a two-day workshop for the targeted discipline faculty. Attendees will be reimbursed for mileage from their home campuses, and food and lodging will be provided as appropriate. Money will also be spent to meet with our network of institutions and programs for the Adult Student Program, with costs to include travel and printed materials.

This project would be a joint initiative spearheaded by staff within the Programs and Student Services area. College engagement would include faculty and staff representation in working groups, curriculum changes, and any additional outcomes or projects identified because of the work. Within the year, the project should yield tangible results and measurable outcomes, e.g. one transfer-ready pathway, an advising toolkit, or other printed marketing and reference materials.

Fund Source and Availability: FY 2025-26 funding is available from the State Board Reserve from July 1, 2025, through June 30, 2026. G.S. 115 D-5(j) provides that "[t]he State Board of Community Colleges shall use its Board Reserve Fund for feasibility studies, pilot projects, start-up of new programs, and innovative ideas." The State Board Reserve is a recurring funding source with \$250,000 annually. Of the remaining balance, this request would allocate \$25,000.

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