



**2022 REPORT**

# Common Course Numbering Landscape Scan

California Community Colleges Chancellor's Office | Daisy Gonzales, Ph.D, Interim Chancellor





California  
Community  
Colleges

**DAISY GONZALES, Ph.D**  
Interim Chancellor

December 16, 2022

The California Community Colleges Chancellor's Office is pleased to share this landscape scan on the implementation of student-facing common course numbering system.

This landscape scan is designed as a learning resource to inform the work of the Task Force for [Assembly Bill No. 1111 Postsecondary Education: Common Course Numbering System](#). The bill requires The California Community Colleges to adopt a common course numbering system for all general education requirement courses and transfer pathway courses, and for each community college campus to incorporate common course numbers from the adopted common course numbering system in its catalog. These changes are important steps to easing the transfer process from community college to a four-year college or university, a goal laid out in the California Community Colleges [Vision for Success](#).

This landscape scan was produced by [Sova](#) on behalf of the California Community Colleges Chancellor's Office (Chancellor's Office). It is the culmination of six months of interviews and listening sessions with more than 100 stakeholders across California and the nation including states that have implemented common course numbering; a survey of stakeholders from the California Community Colleges (115 colleges were surveyed and 112 responded; online college Calbright was not included); and reviews and analysis of existing research.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Daisy Gonzales".

Daisy Gonzales, Ph.D, Chancellor

Enclosure: Report

**Chancellor's Office**

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***Common Course Numbering is an historic opportunity for California to create a structure that maximizes credit mobility for all students, strengthening equitable transfer and student success.***

A LANDSCAPE SCAN TO INFORM IMPLEMENTATION OF THE STUDENT-FACING COMMON COURSE NUMBERING SYSTEM

October 2022

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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Adopted in 2021, [Assembly Bill No. 1111](#)<sup>1</sup> (hereafter “AB 1111”) requires the implementation of a student-facing common course numbering (CCN) system across the California Community Colleges and presents an historic opportunity, as well as a daunting challenge, for the largest system of higher education in the nation.

While not a “magic bullet,” this reform can serve as a critical piece of a larger puzzle in the work of eliminating barriers to student progression and completion. By creating much-needed clarity for students and other critical institutional stakeholders such as counselors, common course numbering can support students in areas such as building cohesive academic plans and reducing excess units to degrees, understanding how required courses transfer and apply to completion, and making informed course selections that support degree completion.

While implementation of common course numbering can be a complicated issue, research shows that the principles of academic freedom are not undermined by the effort to provide much-needed clarity to students. Several examples across a wide variety of state higher education systems demonstrate that common course numbering is a foundational part of the transfer puzzle that can improve the student experience and contribute to student success. Research also demonstrates that faculty experience is critical to these efforts.

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**Assembly Bill No. 1111** (AB 1111) states the following:

- (a) (1) To streamline transfer from two- to four-year postsecondary educational institutions and reduce excess credit accumulation, on or before July 1, 2024, both of the following shall occur:
  - (A) The California Community Colleges shall adopt a common course numbering system for all general education requirement courses and transfer pathway courses.
  - (B) Each community college campus shall incorporate common course numbers from the adopted common course numbering system in its catalog.
- (2) The common course numbering system shall be student facing...and ensure that comparable courses across all community colleges have the same course number.

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While common course numbering presents a tremendous opportunity, the challenge of implementation will be significant and should be approached with clear eyes. Implementation of common course numbering is an incredibly difficult endeavor in the best of times. In 2022, California’s community colleges are understaffed, under-resourced, already pursuing a host of structural transformation efforts (e.g. guided pathways and equitable placement), and still grappling with the global COVID-19 pandemic. This reform also hits at the heart of the tension between the necessity of prioritizing student interests versus-long

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<sup>1</sup> California Legislative Information. 2021. Assembly Bill No. 1111. [Postsecondary Education: Common Course Numbering System](#).

standing expectations of autonomy on the part of institutions and academic faculty. For this effort to achieve its intended aims in California, effective implementation will necessitate coordinated engagement from many stakeholders, including faculty, staff, and system officials; the time and resources to implement well; and the dedication of significant faculty and staff time focused on implementation.

Lastly and perhaps most important, for common course numbering to achieve its goals, it must not be confined to the community college segment alone. If a primary goal of common course numbering is to support transfer student success, then it must entail collaboration across the segments to ensure that California community college who have taken all necessary steps and have set their goals on completing a bachelor’s degree at a California State University (CSU) or a University of California (UC), have a transfer experience that is supported seamlessly and with minimal to no credit loss.

## ABOUT THIS LANDSCAPE ANALYSIS

This Executive Summary of the landscape scan describes key findings as well as next steps and recommendations. The scan reflects a research project conducted by Sova, which included six months of interviews and listening sessions with more than 100 stakeholders across California and the nation; a survey of over 850 stakeholders representing 112 of the 116 California community colleges; and reviews and analysis of existing literature and research.

Item 6870-101-0001 of Section 2.00 of the Budget Act of 2021, as referenced in AB 1111, establishes “a workgroup that supports the development and implementation of a common course numbering system for the community college system.”<sup>2</sup> The Assembly Bill 1111 Postsecondary Education: Common Course Numbering Task Force (hereafter “AB 1111 Task Force”) serves as this workgroup. This landscape scan is designed to serve as a learning resource, describing both the opportunity afforded by common course numbering, and the challenges ahead that the AB 1111 Task Force will have to tackle.

### Why start with a landscape scan?

This is the fourth time California has tried to implement a student-facing common course numbering system. The current approach, known as the Course Identification Numbering System (C-ID), was the third effort. C-ID offers critical lessons and a valuable starting point, but C-ID is primarily designed to support institutional actors. C-ID is not intentionally designed to center the student experience and be student-facing, as called for by AB 1111.

History and experience tell us that diving straight into implementation—without paying attention to thoughtful engagement of critical stakeholders and seeking to understand what challenges need to be addressed—is a recipe for failure. This landscape scan seeks to maximize the likelihood that AB 1111 will be successful by highlighting items that will determine success, such as the themes that the AB 1111 Task Force will need to address and the roles that will need to work in concert to implement the plan developed by the AB 1111 Task Force.

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<sup>2</sup> California Legislative Information. 2021. Senate Bill No. 129. 2021. [Budget Act of 2021](#).

## KEY FINDINGS

**Finding #1. All students, particularly students who have been historically and persistently marginalized, are not served well by many of the anachronistic course structures of the California Community Colleges, with more than 100 different course numbering systems and catalogs and just over 130,000 credit, degree-approved courses.<sup>3</sup> These historic structures are confusing, especially when attempting alignment between colleges, and ultimately are barriers to student mobility and success.** Survey respondents noted that this leads to “miscommunication issues,” leaves students “confused and frustrated,” and that California Community Colleges faculty and staff similarly struggle.<sup>4</sup> Ultimately, while outcomes for students who transfer are determined by many factors, they remain too low and need to be addressed. Among the students who intend to transfer:

[O]nly 19 percent transfer within four years, and 28 percent within six years. Transfer rates are especially concerning for California’s low income, first generation, Black, and Latinx students. Latinx students represent over half of the students who declare a transfer goal, yet only 35 percent transfer within four years. Black students declare transfer goals at a much lower rate, only seven percent, and only five percent successfully transfer.<sup>5</sup>

Common course numbering is an attempt to intentionally prioritize student needs and interests, and it has been recognized as one essential piece of a set of critical equity-minded, student-centered measures to improve transfer and student success. Increasing availability and transparency of information for students can have multiple upsides. A common course numbering system can give students more foresight when building their academic plans, help students understand how required courses transfer, and shorten their time to completion. When student interests are prioritized, common course numbering is an essential piece of a larger puzzle. Where it has been implemented, common course numbering is viewed as a “necessary but not sufficient” reform for transfer and student success.

**Finding #2. The complexity of changing current approaches to support students who would benefit from improved transfer and credit mobility feels overwhelming to many. At the same time, current approaches– “the way it’s always been done” — are producing inequities in student outcomes and many feel there is ample room for addressing the barriers and biases that impede credit mobility.** California is the most populated state, and the California Community Colleges is the largest higher education system in the nation. The system faces outdated technologies, inequitable funding, insufficient connections and a lack of interoperability. Many stakeholders feel, however, that questions about how to implement common course numbering should not undermine the will to take it on to better serve students.

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<sup>3</sup>The California Community Colleges Chancellor’s Office Curriculum Inventory System. 2022. [“Course List - COCI 2.0.”](#)

<sup>4</sup>California Community Colleges Chancellor’s Office. March 2022. Common Course Numbering Survey.

<sup>5</sup>Of note, the majority of California community college students are part time (12 or less units per term), which extends time to transfer and completion. As quoted in Assembly Committee on Higher Education Hearing. April 22, 2021. “Postsecondary Education: Common Course Numbering System.” Note: Latest transfer data can be sourced at the California Community Colleges Chancellor’s Office Management Information Systems Data Mart.

**Finding #3. Common course numbering is not just a simple numbering system. It is an opportunity to create common understanding and transparency across 116 colleges, which will require engaging faculty to determine expected course content within the commonly numbered courses, aligning on the elements of a course, and establishing consistency with naming principles. Successful implementation will require an intensive, time-consuming, and coordinated effort.** The aggressive timeline outlined in AB 1111 is viewed by most as unrealistic, and fears of this being an ‘unfunded mandate’ abound. Implementing common course numbering successfully requires an intensive process of engaging faculty to ensure equivalency. Simply putting the same numbers on courses will not achieve the intention. Implementation will require phased activity on multiple fronts. It also must proceed in synchrony, since the course catalogs must all match with the new descriptors, names and numbers across the 116 colleges, while also accommodating for local context (e.g., some colleges operate on a semester system and some on a quarter system). Successful implementation will depend on carefully designed implementation on a realistic timeline and on institutions being provided with appropriate resources. Despite fears of this being an unfunded mandate, improving transfer and community college student success in general is a priority for California, and AB 1111 was passed as a part of a Recovery with Equity set of reforms with significant funding of \$10 million approved in the 2021-22 spending plan<sup>6</sup> and an additional \$105 million approved in the 2022-23 budget.<sup>7</sup>

**Finding #4. To achieve its intended goal, common course numbering implementation should be an intersegmental effort. Policymakers should build in ways to incentivize or require intersegmental implementation that includes the California State University and University of California systems.** In nearly every interview conducted for this scan, respondents noted that this legislation will not achieve its potential of improving transfer if only the community college segment is implicated. Most states with common course numbering have implemented it across segments because transfer is an intersegmental and cross-system issue. Given the complexity of the four-year landscape, which includes the notable fact that the UCs are constitutionally exempt from legislative mandates while the CSUs are not, cultivating the engagement of the four-year segments will itself likely entail a phased approach tailored to the needs of each segment and aimed at evolving their overall relationship to one another in service to a shared commitment to leveling the playing field for today’s learners.

**Finding #5. Language in AB 1111 encourages the California Community Colleges to build from the existing Course Identification Numbering System (C-ID), but the C-ID foundation alone is unlikely to catalyze the level of change needed and called for by this legislation.** While there are important lessons to be learned from C-ID about existing transfer articulations, collaboration with the CSU system, and faculty roles, a true student-facing common course numbering system cannot be simply layered on top of the current

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<sup>6</sup> Legislative Analyst’s Office. 2021. “The 2021-2022 California Spending Plan: Higher Education.”

<sup>7</sup> Assembly Budget Committee. 2022. “Floor Report of the 2022-2023 Budget”; California Governor’s Council for Post-Secondary Education. 2021. [Recovery With Equity: A Roadmap for Higher Education After the Pandemic](#). Taskforce Report.

C-ID infrastructure. For example, C-ID does not include all general education courses, as the legislation requires, and while it can be accessed by students, it was not intentionally designed to be student-facing (e.g., with a “student as user” UX design experience).

**Finding #6. No other state with common course numbering can serve as a “model” for replication, but there are important lessons to learn that are highly relevant to California.** California is a uniquely large and diverse state, and the California Community Colleges is the largest higher education system in the nation. But there are 28 states with common course numbering in place, and while none looks just like California, all offer key lessons and useful ideas that can be used selectively to feed the creative process.

**Finding #7. In recent years, transfer has received a great deal of policymaker attention, ranging from the passage of AB 928 and AB 1111 to the Governor’s Recovery with Equity Taskforce. Common course numbering should not be implemented in isolation; it must be aligned with and responsive to other critical activities in the California transfer ecosystem.** The history of reform in higher education makes clear that process design – including the timing and sequencing of work and meaningful engagement of critical stakeholders – can make-or-break its success. AB 1111 was signed into law alongside other important legislation such as [Assembly Bill No. 928](#) (hereafter “AB 928”) which establishes the Associate Degree for Transfer Intersegmental Implementation Committee, and calls for strengthening the Associate Degree for Transfer and establishing a singular lower division general education pathway that meets the academic requirements necessary for transfer admission to both the California State University and University of California. Interviewees raised the timing of these mandated reforms as a critical factor to implementation. One survey respondent commented, for example, “It seems a student-facing common course numbering system should be the final product of a new intersegmental articulation model and that we’re starting at the wrong end of the work needed to achieve the goals of this legislation.”

**Finding #8. Successful implementation of common course numbering will have implications for essentially all stakeholders in the California Community Colleges, and will therefore require leadership, collaboration and hard work from across the system. No one group can or should lead this effort alone.** This effort must leverage the systemness of the California Community Colleges and lean into established participatory governance norms and principles, with the goal of equitably serving students.<sup>8</sup> As evidenced by the official letter of the Academic Senate for California Community Colleges in opposition to AB 1111, as well as the listening sessions and survey conducted for this scan, this reform hits at the heart of an increasingly visible tension between the necessity of prioritizing student interests, and longstanding expectations of autonomy on the part of institutions and academic faculty. As noted earlier, however, research shows that the principles of academic freedom can be upheld while providing much-needed clarity to students. Success will hinge on a commitment to centering the student experience and participation by key stakeholders—including instructional faculty, the system, registrars and counselors. All have a role to play.

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<sup>8</sup>See, for example, National Association of System Heads. n.d. “[Systemness](#).”

“Systemness is the coordination of multiple components that, when working together, create a network of activity that is more powerful than any action of individual parts on their own.”<sup>9</sup>  
 –Nancy L. Zimpher, Chancellor Emeritus of The State University of New York

**Figure 1: Research Synthesis: What Common Course Numbering Is & Is Not**

**Common Course Numbering Is Not**

- Isn’t a magic bullet, isn’t itself going to fix the problems.
- Isn’t easy to do. It is easier to do poorly, and has a storied history in California.
- Isn’t simple. It is a contentious issue in part because it hits at the heart of one of the deepest, largely unacknowledged tensions in higher ed reform work in general.
- Isn’t just for 2-yr institutions.

**Common Course Numbering Is**

- Is an essential piece of the puzzle and an historic opportunity.
- Is important to do right, and is unfair to students to do poorly.
- Is going to require honesty addressing the tension between the imperatives of equity-grounded innovation and deeply entrenched expectations related to faculty and institutional autonomy.
- Is going to require clear-eyed engagement of 4-yr institutions despite the focus on CCCs in the legislation.

**Figure 2: Roles in Implementation**



<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

## RECOMMENDATIONS: HOW THIS LANDSCAPE SCAN CAN INFORM THE WORK OF THE AB 1111 TASK FORCE

The California Community Colleges will charge a task force with developing an implementation plan to ensure that the mandate of AB 1111 is fulfilled with integrity. As the AB 1111 Task Force develops its implementation plan, the research and Key Findings of this scan call for attention to the following areas:

**Recommendation #1: A “Students First” Lens. In order to establish a student-facing common course numbering system, the student experience and student interests must be at the center of the design and implementation process.** As noted earlier, students currently have to navigate over 100 different course numbering systems and catalogs and just more than 130,000 credit, degree-approved courses.<sup>10</sup> Common course numbering is an attempt to intentionally prioritize student needs. One key and necessary way to do this is to ensure that students are included in the Task Force and at each step of the process. In addition, we recommend that the Task Force’s work be informed by finely disaggregated student-level data, which can support an understanding of how students currently experience the system and where inequities are found. A “students first” lens should be cultivated as the common ground on which all stakeholders agree to stand together as the hard work is undertaken.

**Recommendation #2: Prioritize data and evidence. It will be critical to question assumptions, interrogate the evidence to see where biases and inequities exist, and be courageous in the face of change. Changing “the way it’s always been done” is hard, but not impossible, and will benefit students.** As this scan says many times, the challenges ahead are real. That is not, however, a fair reason to not pursue change for students. By interrogating the data, reflecting on where biases and inequities exist, and elevating evidence about student outcomes, the AB 1111 Task Force can make decisions that consistently prioritize a “students first” lens.

**Recommendation #3: More time. Successful examples of common course numbering system implementation across the nation, and California-based attempts at district-level implementation, demonstrate that successfully implementing common course numbering across all 116 colleges will require more time than the legislation currently allows (a minimum of five years with clear yearly milestones including how the roll-out of CCN will impact the student experience).** Given the level of stakeholder engagement needed, the changes required in course catalogs, the technology and operations work entailed, as well as the variation in reform already evident from existing reforms, accomplishing a synchronous implementation of common course numbering that is not disruptive to students will need a minimum of five years to accomplish. The timeline should be amended to allow for this, and efforts should be taken to work with policy makers to set appropriate timelines with scaffolded milestones that include a lens on how the roll-out of CCN will impact the student experience. Successful implementation requires the real support of individuals at multiple levels within and across institutions – and honest acknowledgment

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<sup>10</sup>The California Community Colleges Chancellor’s Office Curriculum Inventory System (COCI). 2022. [“Course List - COCI 2.0.”](#)

of the compound effects that are beleaguering community college professionals, including initiative fatigue, pandemic burnout, and the effects of the “Great Resignation.” For this initiative to achieve its potential, policymakers and leaders need to be clear-eyed about the tremendous array of student-focused reform work already underway across the California Community Colleges. Further, the Task Force should consider common course numbering as it relates to implementation of Guided Pathways, [AB 705](#), and [AB 928](#) to ensure all dots are connected and no effort is wasted. It is especially important that the Task Force’s implementation plan dovetails with the work of AB 928.

**Table 1: Key Findings and Recommendations**

<b>Key Findings</b> <b>What did the research tell us?</b>	<b>Recommendations</b> <b>What does that mean for the work of the AB 1111 Task Force?</b>
<p><b>Finding #1.</b> All students, particularly students who have been historically and persistently marginalized, are not served well by many of the anachronistic course structures of the California community colleges, with more than 100 different course numbering systems and catalogs and just over 130,000 credit, degree-approved courses. These historic structures are confusing, especially when attempting alignment between colleges, and ultimately are barriers to student mobility and success.</p>	<p><b>A “Students First” lens:</b> In order to establish a student-facing common course numbering system, the student experience and student interests must be at the center of the design and implementation process.</p>
<p><b>Finding #2.</b> The complexity of changing current approaches to supporting students who would benefit from improved transfer and credit mobility feels overwhelming to many. At the same time, current approaches—“the way it’s always been done”—are producing inequities in student outcomes and many feel there is ample room for addressing the barriers and biases that impede credit mobility.</p>	<p><b>Prioritize data and evidence:</b> It will be critical to question assumptions, interrogate the evidence to see where biases and inequities exist, and be courageous in the face of change. Changing “the way it’s always been done” is hard, but not impossible, and will benefit students.</p>

<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Key Findings</b> What did the research tell us?</p>	<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Recommendations</b> What does that mean for the work of the AB 1111 Task Force?</p>
<p><b>Finding #3.</b> Common course numbering is not just a simple numbering system. It is an opportunity to create common understanding and transparency across 116 colleges, which will require engaging faculty to determine expected course content within the commonly numbered courses, aligning on the elements of a course, and establishing consistency with naming principles. Successful implementation will require an intensive, time-consuming, and coordinated effort.</p>	<p><b>More time:</b> Successful examples of common course numbering system implementation across the nation, and California-based attempts at district-level implementation, demonstrate that successfully implementing common course numbering across all 116 colleges will require more time than the legislation currently allows (a minimum of five years with clear yearly milestones including how the roll-out of CCN will impact the student experience).</p>
<p><b>Finding #4.</b> To achieve its intended goal, common course numbering implementation should be an intersegmental effort. Policymakers should build in ways to incentivize or require intersegmental implementation that includes the California State University and University of California systems.</p>	<p><b>Intersegmental:</b> The California State University and University of California must be included for this effort to be successful and to seize this historic opportunity to reform postsecondary education across the state.</p>
<p><b>Finding #5.</b> Language in AB 1111 encourages the California Community Colleges to build from the existing Course Identification Numbering System (C-ID), but the C-ID foundation alone is unlikely to catalyze the level of change needed and called for by this legislation.</p>	<p><b>C-ID engagement:</b> C-ID is offering important lessons and a baseline of course equivalencies. This effort should engage key C-ID stakeholders to elevate lessons being learned, benefit from knowledge held by C-ID stakeholders, identify what the appropriate role is for C-ID ongoing, and address the misconception that CCN should be “easy” because of the base or model that C-ID provides.</p>
<p><b>Finding #6.</b> No other state with common course numbering can serve as a “model” for replication, but there are important lessons to learn that are highly relevant to California.</p>	<p><b>Lessons from other states:</b> The Task Force will benefit from drawing lessons learned and ideas for the “nuts-and-bolts” of common course numbering from other states, and selectively applying those to design and implementation of CCN in California.</p>

<b>Key Findings</b> <b>What did the research tell us?</b>	<b>Recommendations</b> <b>What does that mean for the work of the AB 1111 Task Force?</b>
<p><b>Finding #7.</b> In recent years, transfer has received a great deal of policymaker attention, ranging from the passage of AB 928 and AB 1111 to the Governor’s Recovery with Equity Taskforce. Common course numbering should not be implemented in isolation; it must be aligned with and responsive to other critical activities in the California transfer ecosystem.</p>	<p><b>A holistic view:</b> To cement California’s role as the nation’s leader in public higher education, this effort must be positioned, supported and resourced as a key facet of systemic, student-focused reform, and a holistic view of implementation will be needed. For example, CCN efforts must be aligned with the activities around AB 928.</p>
<p><b>Finding #8.</b> Successful implementation of common course numbering will have implications for essentially all stakeholders in the California Community Colleges, and will therefore require leadership, collaboration and hard work from across the system. No one group can or should lead this effort alone.</p>	<p><b>Everyone has a role to play:</b> Common course numbering is an opportunity for the California Community Colleges to leverage its role and reach to achieve silo-spanning collaboration across a wide array of critical internal and external stakeholders implicated in successful implementation and maintenance of an effective CCN system.</p>

**Recommendation #4: The California State University and University of California must be included for this effort to be successful and to seize this historic opportunity to reform postsecondary education across the state.** California can not only learn from but can improve upon other states’ efforts and set an example not only for their own students and state but also for the nation by implementing this as an intersegmental reform. The boldest vision would be for all three segments of California’s postsecondary systems – inclusive of the California State University and the University of California – to lean into this reform with courage. This courage should be supported by the equity-focused incentives and goals for the UCs and CSUs, given the complexities of postsecondary governance and financing in California.

**Recommendation #5: C-ID is offering important lessons and a baseline of course equivalencies. This effort should engage key C-ID stakeholders to elevate lessons being learned, benefit from knowledge held by C-ID stakeholders, identify what the appropriate role is for C-ID ongoing, and address the misconception that CCN should be “easy” because of the base or model that C-ID provides.** The Task Force will need to understand what key lessons have been learned in areas ranging from intersegmental alignment, to governance, collaboration with the CSU and course equivalencies. The implementation plan should reflect those lessons learned and pay due respect to the long history of C-ID, without treating C-ID as “the answer” to meet the complexities of learning in a state as large and diverse as California in the 21st Century.

**Recommendation #6: While no other state serves as a model for replication for California, the Task Force will benefit from drawing lessons learned and ideas for the “nuts-and-bolts” of common course numbering from other states, and selectively applying those in design and implementation.** This landscape scan includes ideas from other states as a learning resource, designed to support idea generation and offer new perspectives and ideas. The California Community Colleges can learn from these examples as well as their own effort with C-ID, and go further to create a common course numbering system that is both suited to the unique needs and scale of California and the best example yet of common course numbering.

**Recommendation #7: To cement California’s role as the nation’s leader in public higher education, this effort must be positioned, supported and resourced as a key facet of systemic, student-focused reform, and a holistic view of implementation will be needed.** The vision set forth by the AB 1111 Task Force should focus on how to best serve California’s students by building an infrastructure responsive to the learners of the 21st Century. This will include attention to how the implementation plan intersects with other key activities in the transfer ecosystem, such as the Associate Degree for Transfer and the singular general education pathway called for by AB 928. The complexities of, and progress to date on, transfer reform and postsecondary success should continue to be held up by the Chancellor’s Office, Board of Governors and trustees to ensure policymakers understand the level of work and investment required for success. Furthermore, there are real fears about how CCN will touch innumerable processes and result in cascading unintended consequences, such as losing parts of student records; mismatched unit/number changes related to previously taken courses; tensions with re-enrollment and course retake policies; and ensuring past and future courses can be incorporated. As a result, some have voiced that CCN is a “huge lift” that won’t actually improve transfer student outcomes but will divert energy away from other critical work that needs doing. The AB 1111 Task Force’s implementation plan will need to line up attention to implementation on all of those fronts and call for a disciplined focus on strategic project management that ensures time is well-spent, meetings are well-organized, progress is documented, and successes are celebrated.

**Recommendation #8: Common course numbering is an opportunity for the California Community Colleges to leverage its role and reach to achieve silo-spanning collaboration across a wide array of critical internal and external stakeholders implicated in successful implementation and maintenance of an effective CCN system.** The AB 1111 Task Force must engage faculty experience and reflect their critical role in curricular development and delivery, and it must ensure that the wide array of staff implicated in common course numbering are viewed and treated as valued professionals whose experiences are essential for students to be served well by this reform. At the same time, it must be understood that the Chancellor’s Office is accountable for implementation. The California Community Colleges is guided by a process of participatory governance, and the Board of Governors sets policy and provides guidance for the 73 districts and 116 colleges that constitute the system. Guidelines for determining whether a district has implemented common course numbering with integrity should be clearly established, and monitoring should be a resourced element of implementation. An incentive structure for demonstrated collaboration and compliance will be necessary to prevent passive noncompliance. Financial consequences for noncompliance have been legislated or mandated in other states and could be reserved by the legislature

should noncompliance become a concern. Helping all stakeholders understand the relationship between experience, responsibility, and accountability around the many facets of this complex reform will be important for ensuring stakeholder expectations for engagement are aligned. Aligning expectations is key to ensuring all stakeholders are empowered to collaborate in the work effectively on behalf of students from their respective positions.

## CONCLUSION

AB 1111 is now the law, and the state has already appropriated \$115 million toward its implementation.

The challenges ahead are real; the AB 1111 Task Force will need to proceed holistically and carefully to develop an implementation plan for a common course numbering system capable of achieving the goals of the legislation.

While the challenges are many, the opportunity is a powerful one and, if done well, the benefit to students is undeniable. Stakeholders across the state believe that students will benefit if common course numbering is implemented with integrity. This landscape scan points to the work ahead for the Task Force (and any work groups it calls upon), as it builds an implementation solution and plan that:

- Centers equity and the student experience;
- Allocates the resources (e.g., time, people, technology) necessary for an implementation of this magnitude;
- Engages the UC and CSU;
- Benefits from knowledge held by C-ID stakeholders;
- Draws on experiences from other states to inform the “nuts and bolts” of CCN;
- Takes a holistic view of implementation that accounts for a range of concerns (e.g., outdated technologies, counseling needs, etc.); and
- Leverages the California Community Colleges and its resources, role and reach as the largest postsecondary system in the nation that can set a new standard for transfer student success.

# LANDSCAPE SCAN: FULL REPORT

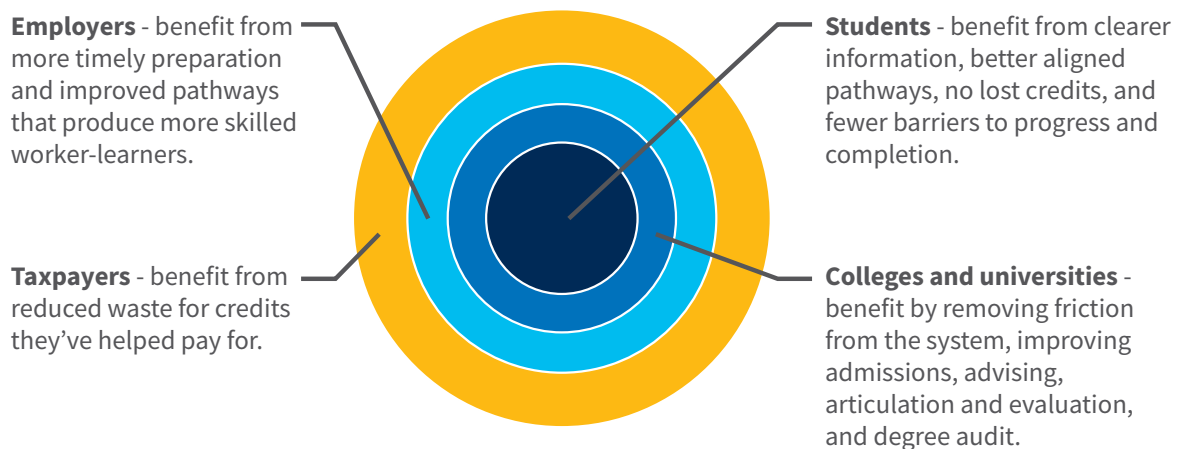
## VISION: THE POTENTIAL OF IMPLEMENTATION WITH INTEGRITY

Imagine this is 2030. You are speaking with a group of students who recently completed their degrees and certificates at various California community colleges. You hear about their experiences across these colleges. Most of them were the first in their family to pursue a postsecondary education. Several began accruing credits toward their postsecondary credential in high school. A majority of them benefitted from the Associate Degree for Transfer, and were able to smoothly apply their community college credits to a four-year program. Many students earned their certificate and went straight into the workforce. Some students took classes at more than one college during their time - some of them attending as many as three at one time to satisfy degree needs and to fit with their work schedule. You hear the experiences of several who transferred to a California State University, some to the University of California.

One thing you *do not* hear about is how hard it was for them to determine which courses would satisfy their degree requirements, even though they took courses at multiple colleges simultaneously and transferred to a CSU outside their district. You *do not* hear how they wasted their valuable time and money by taking the same course twice because they could not decipher the difference between a course description from one California community college to the next. You do not hear about unexplained and confusing credit loss.

This hypothetical could become a reality if common course numbering were implemented with integrity in California.

### Figure 3: Benefits of Implementing Common Course Numbering



## **Vision for Success: 5-Year Systemwide Goals<sup>11</sup>**

If successfully implemented, common course numbering could have positive effects on nearly all—if not all—of the *Vision for Success* goals.

1. Increase completion of degrees, credentials, certificates, and job-specific skill sets by 20% between 2017 and 2022
2. Increase transfers to UC and CSU by 35% between 2017 and 2022
3. Decrease the average number of units accumulated by associate’s degree earners to 79 units by 2022 (down from an average of 87 units in 2017)
4. Increase the number of exiting CTE students employed in their field of study to 76% by 2022 (up from 60% in 2017)
5. Reduce equity gaps by 40% across all the above measures by 2022, and fully close those gaps by 2027
6. Close regional gaps across all of the above measures by 2027

## **INTRODUCTION**

In 2021, in the throes of the global COVID-19 pandemic, the California legislature passed and Governor Newsom signed legislation requiring the California community colleges to implement a student-facing common course numbering system. The goal of this legislation was to improve access to higher education by “eliminating equity gaps and increasing opportunities at our universities to make those dreams a reality for more California students.”<sup>12</sup> Common course numbering was one of several reforms recommended by the Recovery with Equity Taskforce that was established through the Governor’s Council for Postsecondary Education. The Task Force’s mandate was to define “strategies, policies and practices to help California’s postsecondary institutions emerge from the pandemic stronger and better poised to serve all students.”<sup>13</sup> The Taskforce asked its members “to help California’s economy recover with a postsecondary ecosystem that is more equitable, more resilient, and more coordinated”<sup>14</sup> and developed the report ***Recovery with Equity: A Roadmap for Higher Education After the Pandemic***, which called for eleven actionable recommendations, and envisaged that:

*By 2030, learners will have clear, easy-to-navigate pathways into and through postsecondary education, as well as admission and transfer processes facilitated by an integrated technology platform, dual admission, and common course numbering.*

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<sup>11</sup> California Community Colleges. July 2021. [Update to the Vision for Success: Reaffirming Equity in a Time of Recovery](#).

<sup>12</sup> California Office of the Governor. October 6, 2021. [Governor Newsom Signs College Affordability and Accessibility Legislation, Highlights \\$47.1 Billion Higher Education Package](#) [Press Release].

<sup>13</sup> Ibid.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid.

*All students, but particularly Black, Latinx, Indigenous, Asian Pacific Islander, and adult learners, will benefit from the availability of college-going pathways that guarantee seamless integration of early college credit, dual admission, transfer, and reverse transfer to support the timely completion of their postsecondary goals. Anchored by an integrated technology platform, learners will be supported along their individual pathways in anticipation of a college journey in which they take classes from at least two postsecondary institutions. Once established, this system will offer more effective planning for prospective students, guidance counselors, outreach programs, and admission professionals, and will also increase collaboration among institutions.<sup>15</sup>*

This recommendation by the Recovery with Equity Taskforce was then incorporated into Assembly Bill No. 1111 (AB 1111) by Assembly Member Berman, with the focus on student success that was referred to in the report’s language, with the intent to require the California Community Colleges to adopt a common course numbering system to be student-facing, and align to all community college courses “so that students transferring to four-year institutions know, as they are pursuing their courses, that they are meeting the requirements of the receiving institutions.”<sup>16</sup> It acknowledged that “many community college students take courses at multiple community colleges within a district or even across districts” and “without a student-facing common course numbering system and comprehensive transfer policies, students struggle to transfer credits between institutions and to plan out a coherent roadmap to earning their degree.”<sup>17</sup>

Common course numbering was passed with an accompanying budget of \$10 million to fund implementation as part of the historic \$47.1 billion higher education package. According to the Government of California, this is the most ever invested in higher education in modern history.<sup>18</sup> Governor Newsom’s 2022-23 budget includes an additional \$105 million for college implementation of common course numbering.<sup>19</sup>

While common course numbering was a legislated reform, it is entirely in alignment with the student-success and equity-focused goals within the *Vision for Success* of the California Community Colleges. Common course numbering in various forms has been considered and attempted over several decades in California. Some community college districts have attempted, and succeeded to some extent, their own district-wide common course numbering system, such as the San Diego Community College District. Other districts have achieved common course numbering within specific disciplines.

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<sup>15</sup> California Governor’s Council for Post-Secondary Education. 2021. [Recovery With Equity: A Roadmap for Higher Education After the Pandemic](#). Taskforce Report.

<sup>16</sup> California Legislative Information. 2021. Assembly Bill No. 1111. [Postsecondary Education: Common Course Numbering System](#).

<sup>17</sup> Ibid.

<sup>18</sup> California Office of the Governor. October 6, 2021. [Governor Newsom Signs College Affordability and Accessibility Legislation, Highlights \\$47.1 Billion Higher Education Package](#) [Press Release].

<sup>19</sup> Ed Source. 2022. [“2022-23 Governor’s Budget Summary: Higher Education.”](#)

In the mid-2000s faculty led the effort to create the Course Identification Numbering System, also known as C-ID. C-ID was started to provide identification of course equivalencies for courses in the top 20 transfer majors. While C-ID can be accessed by students, it is not intentionally student-facing and guided by UX design that centers the student experience. It does not, therefore, directly provide students with clear information. While C-ID offers critical lessons and a starting point, the legislation calls for the California Community Colleges to design a system that centers students. The author of AB 1111, Assemblyman Marc Berman, D-Menlo Park, stated that “the current system is unnecessarily confusing for students.”<sup>20</sup>

It is unsurprising that the catalyst for a comprehensive, systemwide implementation of student-facing common course numbering has only come about through legislation. Implementation will require tremendous effort across the community colleges, and systemness across the highly independent 116 colleges and 73 districts. It will also require willingness to engage at the local and system level on the part of many actors such as faculty, including articulation officers and counselors, curriculum specialists, classified staff, institutional researchers and technologists. In addition, achieving the vision of equitable transfer student success requires collaboration with the California State University and University of California, neither of which are required nor funded to do this work.

Continuing the hard work toward equity in transfer student success remains necessary. For example, among the students who intend to transfer:

*[O]nly 19 percent transfer within four years, and 28 percent within six years. Transfer rates are especially concerning for California’s low income, first generation, Black, and Latinx students. Latinx students represent over half of the students who declare a transfer goal, yet only 35 percent transfer within four years. Black students declare transfer goals at a much lower rate, only seven percent, and only five percent successfully transfer.<sup>21</sup>*

This landscape scan, which has been conducted on behalf of the California Community Colleges Chancellor’s Office (Chancellor’s Office) to inform the implementation efforts and serve as a learning resource for the AB 1111 Task Force, will explore the ways in which other states have approached common course numbering systems and how they employ them as part of a set of postsecondary reforms, as well as how stakeholders in California are considering the implementation and what critical issues must be addressed. Throughout, the scan will explore the ways in which this legislation presents an historic opportunity for the California Community Colleges to remove yet one more barrier to students’ successful navigation through and beyond their education, while being clear about the challenges inherent in this implementation effort.

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<sup>20</sup> Larry Gordon. April 30, 2021. “[What’s in a College Course Number? Lots of Confusion](#)” EdSource.

<sup>21</sup> Of note, the majority of California Community College students are part time (12 or less units per term), which extends time to transfer and completion. As quoted in Assembly Bill Policy Committee on Higher Education Hearing. Analysis. “Assembly Committee on Higher Education, AB 1111 (Berman) – As Amended March 23, 2021.” Date of Hearing: April 22, 2021. “Postsecondary Education: Common Course Numbering System.” Note: Latest transfer data can be sourced at the California Community Colleges Chancellor’s Office Management Information Systems Data Mart.

## DEFINITION OF COMMON COURSE NUMBERING

Common course numbering is described in the legislation by several parameters of what problems it should address, what goals it should achieve and what it could and should include.

The requirements are that:

- The California Community Colleges “shall adopt a common course numbering system for all general education requirement course and transfer pathway courses,”<sup>22</sup>
- “Each community college campus shall incorporate common course numbers from the adopted common course numbering system in its catalog”, and
- “The common course numbering system shall be student facing” and “ensure that comparable courses across all community colleges have the same course number.”<sup>23</sup>

Drawing upon the legislation, this scan proposes the following definition of common course numbering, based on a simple and straightforward interpretation of the legislation. A key responsibility of the AB 1111 Task Force will be to review and revise this definition. For these purposes, the working definition of common course numbering is as follows:

Common course numbering uses the same course identification number for all comparable courses systemwide.

Common course numbering has direct implications for:

- Course Descriptions
- Course Outlines
- Course Catalogs

A commonly numbered course results in equivalent transfer-level pathway / major preparation and/or equivalent general education course outcomes, across all institutions where that course is taught.

As the Task Force considers the definition of common course numbering that will support implementation integrity and ensure equitable outcomes for California community college students, there are several examples from which to draw. Twenty-eight U.S. states have implemented common course numbering across at least one segment of their postsecondary systems. The following national landscape will explore these as well as other elements of common course numbering systems for consideration.

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<sup>22</sup> California Legislative Information. 2021. Assembly Bill No. 1111. [Postsecondary Education: Common Course Numbering System.](#)

<sup>23</sup> Ibid.

# NATIONAL LANDSCAPE

## METHODOLOGY, INPUTS & SOURCES

The national section of this landscape scan is based on both original and existing research and participatory interviews with key stakeholders working nationally on postsecondary reform and student success, experts in transfer, and faculty, system and college leaders who have led the implementation of common course numbering or are managing or overseeing common course numbering systems. It draws upon national research and state examples. Participatory interviews were conducted with individuals who have worked with the following systems, colleges and universities: Texas A&M Commerce, Florida College System, Florida Virtual Campus, City University of New York, the University of Washington, Centralia College, Tennessee Higher Education Commission, University System of Georgia, Colorado Mountain College, and the New Mexico Department of Higher Education. Interviews were also held with national education organizations including HCM Strategists and the Education Commission of the States.

## HISTORY OF COMMON COURSE NUMBERING

Common course numbering as an initiative to improve transfer and student success was brought into the national conversation in the early 1970s, after Florida and Texas began efforts to implement statewide. In 1976 a U.S. State Representative from Florida gave a speech on the floor of the U.S. House of Representatives titled *Education: Truth in Labeling*, which cited concerns about the “growing crisis throughout education” resulting in a “plethora of poorly advised students, innocent victims of inconsistent and sometimes arbitrary decisions concerning program requisites, course comparability, and what can and cannot be transferred.” Interestingly, it was also introduced to support the way that curriculum changes over time:

*Subject matter in some areas literally doubles each decade, with an attendant proliferation of curriculums [sic]. Faculty, responsible for overseeing and modernizing curriculums, have been hard pressed to cope with this acceleration within the constraints of time and financial resources. One reason for this has been the lack of an adequate conceptual framework, plus necessary course and curriculum analyses, from which to assess the status of education at any given time.<sup>24</sup>*

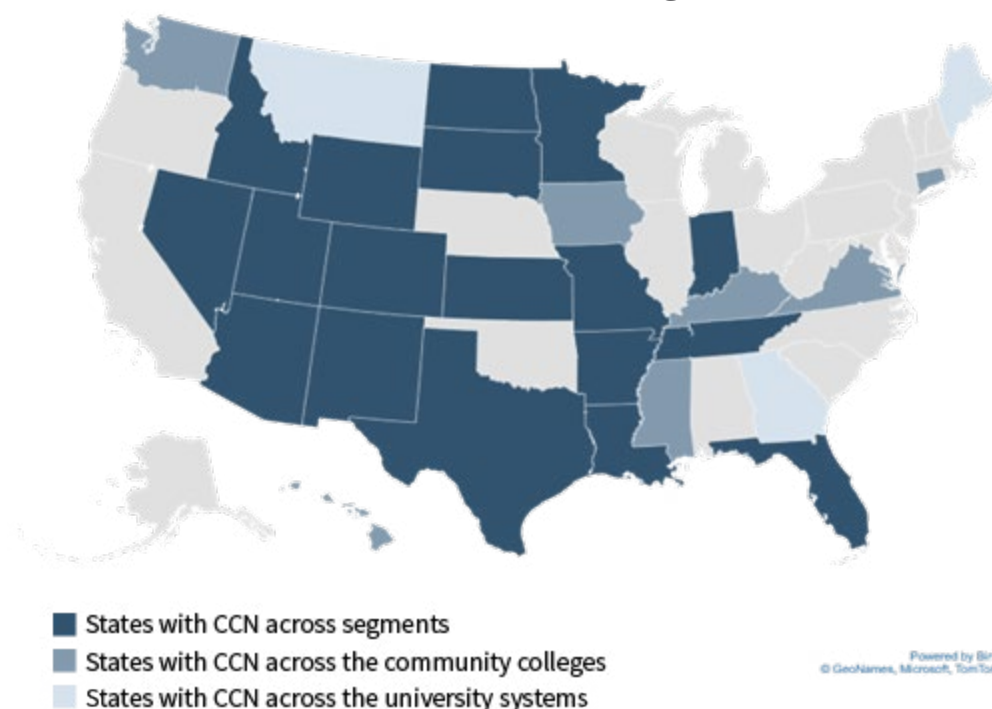
This speech generated widespread attention and interest among elected officials and leaders in education across the nation, including a Los Angeles Community College District Trustee who wrote in support and the California Community & Junior College Association Executive Director who noted that, “We in California are acutely aware of the benefits such a system would produce, and there are discussions taking place...toward the possibility of implementing such a system in California.”<sup>25</sup> While California considered it, 28 states went forward with implementing common course numbering.

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<sup>24</sup> H.R. 46. 94th Congress (1976): “*Education: Truth in Labeling*” Proceedings and Debates of the 94th Congress, Second Session. Vol. 122, No. 46.

<sup>25</sup> Correspondence Filed in Response to the Hearing: H.R. 46. 94th Congress (1976): “*Education: Truth in Labeling*” Proceedings and Debates of the 94th Congress, Second Session. Vol. 122, No. 46.

**Figure 4: States with Common Course Numbering**



**18 states have CCN across segments:** Arizona, Arkansas, Colorado, Florida, Idaho, Indiana, Kansas, Louisiana, Minnesota, Missouri, Nevada, New Mexico, North Dakota, South Dakota, Tennessee, Texas, Utah, Wyoming

**7 states have CCN across the community colleges:** Connecticut, Hawaii, Iowa, Kentucky, Mississippi, Virginia, Washington

**3 states have CCN across the university systems:** Georgia, Maine, Montana

## WHAT CALIFORNIA CAN LEARN FROM OTHER STATES' EXAMPLES

As the largest system of higher education in the nation, California community colleges – much like the state of California – are often lacking for comparable cases to guide their policy implementation. No state can serve as a model for replication for California; rather, other states serve as opportunities to learn from a wide variety of illustrative examples. The California Community Colleges can learn from these examples as well as their own effort with C-ID, and go further to create a common course numbering system that is both suited to the unique needs and scale of California and the best example yet of common course numbering.

Across states, it is evident that common course numbering was one of several initiatives undertaken by the state to improve the student experience, smooth the path to transfer, and boost progression and completion numbers. Despite the tremendous effort each state went through to implement, none of the individuals interviewed in the states saw it complicate or worsen their processes, or knew of any serious attempt to ‘undo’ common course numbering. All felt that common course numbering has had a positive effect on student outcomes. Several also noted positive spillover effects such as: discipline coordination going beyond the

common course numbering effort; proactive addressing of pre-requisites across segments; requests to join from institutions not explicitly included in initial implementation; and the interest of workforce in the courses marked for common course numbering (employers were actively seeking to increase the share of courses included since they showed clearer pathways).

The following section of this scan will focus on a small number of specific examples in four states: Florida, New Mexico, Texas, and Washington. Florida and Texas are both large states, the next two largest by population after California, and have diverse populations and large and complex systems of community colleges, state colleges and universities. Florida and Texas have both had intersegmental CCN in place for several decades, and Florida's transfer rates are often looked to as exemplary. Washington is similarly often pointed to as a state with exemplary transfer rates, yet common course numbering has only been implemented across the community colleges—in alignment with the current mandate of AB 1111. Meanwhile, New Mexico has intersegmental common course numbering, which was implemented with a goal of improving transfer from the Tribal Colleges, and has the largest percentage of Hispanic Serving Institutions in the nation.

**This landscape scan does not suggest any of these as models;** rather, it focuses on key elements of each of these examples that can support the AB 1111 Task Force in its work to design the right system for California. As noted earlier, this scan was designed as a learning resource for the AB 1111 Task Force; these examples are provided to add to the perspectives and understanding of the Task Force members.

## Florida: State Common Numbering System (SCNS) <sup>26</sup>

*“Created in the 1960s, it is a key component of Florida’s K-20 seamless system of articulation. The system provides a database of post- secondary courses at public vocational- technical centers, community colleges, universities, and participating nonpublic institutions. The assigned numbers describe course content to improve research, assist program planning and facilitate the transfer of students.” <sup>27</sup>*

### Florida Overview

#### Objectives

- Provide a framework for each discipline to categorize courses. The same framework would be used by all institutions;
- Be a joint undertaking of universities and community colleges. A state agency would manage the system and facilitate communication;
- Place responsibility for determining course equivalencies with faculty at universities and colleges who would make decisions based on detailed course descriptions or course syllabi; <sup>28</sup>
- Establish course inventories listing all courses offered at Florida’s universities and colleges and identify equivalent courses; and
- Develop statewide course descriptions, or course equivalency profiles, to be used in determining equivalencies.

#### Definition/ Taxonomy

The organizational hierarchy for a subject-matter area or component of a subject-matter area. Organized from larger to smaller units.

1. Discipline: A specific area of knowledge or skills identified in the Statewide Course Numbering System by one or more prefixes.
2. Prefix: A three-letter code used for a subject matter area or a component of a subject matter area. A prefix can accommodate up to 1000 courses.
3. Century: A major content category within a prefix. Up to 10 centuries can be accommodated in a prefix and up to 100 courses can be accommodated in a century.
4. Decade: A subcategory for courses within the major category called a century. Up to 10 different decades can be accommodated in a century and up to 10 different courses can be accommodated in a decade.

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<sup>26</sup> Eastern Florida State College. 2022. [“Florida’s Statewide Course Numbering System.”](#)

<sup>27</sup> Florida Department of Education. 2022. [Statewide Course Numbering System Handbook.](#)

<sup>28</sup> Ibid.

5. Course/Unit: Another term for a specific course as referenced in the SCNS taxonomy. The hierarchy is as follows: discipline, prefix, century, decade and unit. <sup>29</sup>

### **Logistics & Maintenance**

SCNS is part of the Department of Education’s Office of Articulation. Staff work with designated contacts who coordinate course numbering matters at each of the institutions. Each institution controls the title, credit and content of its own courses.

### **Governance**

Courses are approved by the institutional curriculum committees at the respective institutions. Course prefixes and digits are assigned by faculty members of faculty discipline committees.

### **Considerations**

Performance-based funding coupled with decline in enrollments has created intense competition for seats and may be affecting institutional incentives to support transfer sufficiently.

### **Student Experience**

The Florida Department of Education finds that “(b)ecause all public postsecondary institutions in Florida use the same course numbering system, the evaluation of students’ transcripts is easier and more efficient than in the past. The guaranteed transfer of equivalent courses has reduced the time required to complete a degree.”<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> Florida Gulf Coast University Academic & Curriculum Support. 2022. “[Statewide Course Numbering System](#).”

<sup>30</sup> Florida Department of Education. Office of Articulation. Revised December 2020. “[The Florida Statewide Course Numbering System](#).”

## New Mexico: The New Mexico Common Course Numbering System (NMCCNS)

*“The New Mexico Common Course Numbering System (NMCCNS) was developed to improve the transfer of courses between New Mexico’s public and tribal higher education institutions (HEIs). The NMCCNS includes all lower division (1000 – and 2000 – level) courses offered in the state.”<sup>31</sup>*

### New Mexico Overview

#### Objectives

- If a student completes a commonly numbered course at one New Mexico public/tribal HEI and transfers to another New Mexico public/tribal HEI, the receiving HEI shall accept the course as equivalent to the course with the same number that is offered at the receiving HEI.
- A commonly numbered course shall fulfill degree requirements when it is accepted as an equivalent course that is part of the degree requirements of a student’s chosen academic program at the receiving institution. A student who has completed commonly numbered courses that are not part of their chosen degree requirements is not exempted from course requirements for their chosen degree.

#### Definition/ Taxonomy

Commonly numbered courses have the same

1. Prefix
2. Number
3. Course name
4. Course description
5. Student learning outcomes - all of the outcomes listed in the course catalog (80 percent of total)

#### Logistics & Maintenance

NMCCNS is maintained by the State Higher Education Department. Faculty members or administrators who would like to request a change to the Course Numbering System can submit course additions, deletions, and reclassifications. Those submitted by the 15th of each month will be processed by the 30th of that month and published on the HED website by the 5th of the following month. Changes to course descriptions and student learning outcomes are forwarded to the New Mexico Curriculum and Articulation Committee for review at their next meeting.

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<sup>31</sup>New Mexico Higher Education Department. 2022. [“New Mexico Course Numbering System.”](#)

## **Governance**

NMCCNS is guided by a member council including curriculum and articulation officers, faculty and academic officers. Chaired by a system official who manages the NMCCNS and calls meetings but does not vote.

## **Considerations**

- It was mandated with no incentives, rather with funding consequences.
- Any college that fails to accept a common course in transfer can lose 3 percent of their state funding.
- Faculty have spent a lot of hours reviewing courses.

## Texas: The Texas Common Course Numbering System (TCCNS)

*“The Texas Common Course Numbering System is a voluntary, co-operative effort among 139 Texas community colleges and universities to facilitate transfer of freshman and sophomore level general academic coursework. TCCNS provides a shared, uniform set of course designations for students and their advisors to use in determining both course equivalency and degree applicability of transfer credit on a statewide basis. When students transfer between two participating TCCNS institutions, a course taken at the sending institution transfers as the course carrying the same TCCNS designation at the receiving institution.”<sup>32</sup>*

### Texas Overview

#### Objectives

- The TCCNS is a transferability guide that will aid students, counselors, advisers, and transfer staff in determining course equivalency to higher education institutions.
- All Texas public community colleges are mandated to use the ACGM course inventory in their offerings to students. This ACGM number appears in the TCCNS column in the TCCNS. Students can use the TCCNS to view the courses designed for transfer that each institution offers. Students can also use the TCCNS to view how universities will evaluate various community college courses at their particular, four-year institution.

#### Definition/ Taxonomy

All TCCNS courses are identified by a four-character course prefix representing the course type or academic discipline, followed by a four digit course number. The first digit of the course number denotes the academic level of the course. The second digit represents the credit value of the course in semester hours. The third and fourth digits establish course sequencing and/or distinguish the course from others of the same level, credit value, and prefix.

#### Logistics & Maintenance

Community colleges and universities annually review and update their inventory. They review their course offerings and update the site to reflect the current courses.

#### Governance

The committee members include registrars, admissions, enrollment services, and representatives from the state coordinating board, council of chief academic officers, and instructional administrators.

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<sup>32</sup>Texas Common Course Numbering System. 2015. [“About the Texas Common Course Numbering System.”](#)

## Considerations

Faculty did not initially want to spend time doing this. The state developed an academic transfer committee with representatives from around the state who developed minimum course learning outcomes. They strove for 50 percent but it became 80 percent once they started doing the work.

## Uses

The Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board found that “(t)he ACGM/TCCNS courses are the building blocks of several THECB initiatives intended to facilitate and improve transfer efficiency.”<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>33</sup>Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board. Fall 2018. [“Texas General Academic Institutions: Increasing Successful Community College Transfer. A report to the Texas Legislature per Senate Bill 1, 85th Legislature.”](#)

## Washington: Common Course Numbering System (CCNS)

*“Common course numbering (CCN) makes it easier for students to transfer courses between community and technical colleges in Washington state. About a quarter of all community and technical college students graduate from a two-year college with credits transferred in from another college. Common course numbering eases that process, because equivalent courses are labeled the same across all colleges.”<sup>34</sup>*

### Washington Overview

#### Objectives

Common course numbers and titles were changed to simplify transferring between community and technical colleges; not between community/technical colleges and four-year colleges and universities.

#### Definition/ Taxonomy

- Common course numbering identifies equivalent community and technical college courses and labels them with the same department/division abbreviation, course number, and course title. Common course numbering does not require faculty to change or standardize their course content to be equivalent with another college’s or impact course delivery methods.
- CCN classes are designated with the ampersand (&) symbol and a common 3-digit number.
- The Professional-Technical Common Courses (P/TCC) system (P/TCCs) are designated by the first 4 letters of the department/division, the ampersand symbol “&” and the 3-digit course number (e.g., AUTO& 135).

#### Logistics & Maintenance

An annual review cycle similar to the articulation and transfer academic electives process considers CCN course proposed additions and changes.

#### Governance

The Articulation and Transfer Council has responsibility for review with final approval by the Instruction Commission. The Council has a Standing Committee to oversee the review process and involves faculty as needed.

#### Considerations

At the request of the Instruction Commission, the Workforce Education Council (WEC) created a process to help colleges develop and approve common course numbers for professional-technical courses. The professional-technical common course (P/TCC) system was launched in fall 2016.

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<sup>34</sup> Washington Community and Technical Colleges. 2022. [“Common Course Numbering.”](#)

## NUTS AND BOLTS OF A COMMON COURSE NUMBERING SYSTEM

The research for the landscape scan identified some useful advice on the “nuts and bolts” that could be considered by the AB 1111 Task Force for the process of establishing the numbering system.

It will be necessary to start with the definition of common course numbering. The Task Force can start with the working definition that has been used for the purposes of this scan as well as the draft definition used for the survey. It was recommended in the legislation, and suggested by many stakeholders interviewed and surveyed, that this effort must look at 1) what is already solved by C-ID, 2) what has been agreed to already across the California Community Colleges, and 3) what elements of commonality or equivalency are already established. The existing transfer articulations with the CSU should be considered. For example, the courses already being counted as English 101 by the CSU should be considered with respect to what in the California Community Colleges is reflected commonly within their courses and system.

Prioritizing and sequencing will be critical. The Task Force will need to consider the order in which the stages of work must be prioritized for establishing agreements on the course description, course numbering, and the course names. The setting of naming conventions for common courses is an opportunity not only for alignment but also to improve equity and consistency. Stakeholders both nationally and across California spoke to the importance of establishing consistency or equivalency so that, for example:

- English 101 at Long Beach City College is the same course as English 101 at Sacramento City College;
- Course identifiers such as “Math 1” or “Math 2” are reserved for prerequisites, and courses should not include numerals that indicate sequencing expectations if they do not need to be taken in sequence;
- Courses should not be named pejoratively (e.g., some take offense at course identifiers such as “Math for Poets”);
- Use “first year” rather than “freshman” within course identifiers to be more inclusive of returning and adult learners;
- Establish principles and consistency around the terms “early, middle, and late,” which are used widely, particularly in the humanities; and
- It is recommended that this new system start with a new digit system—new numbers that have never been used before—to limit confusion.

### Transformative Opportunities through Technology

Technology presents some potentially transformative opportunities to address the challenges in developing and maintaining a common course numbering system. For example, advances in Artificial Intelligence (AI) and Machine Learning (ML) create the opportunity to review massive amounts of course data and compare it, deriving similarities and defining differences to understand course equivalencies. These technological capabilities can address not only

the vastness of course outlines and syllabi to identify and resolve articulation but also can identify bias.

Many states and systems are now exploring and using these technologies to help administrators and faculty with the burden of course by course articulation, and to be able to conduct state-wide course mapping. Given the potential for any privacy concerns, the tools and technologies have the capacity to be ‘locked down’ by institutions and used within the bounds of institutions or systems as decided by their governance structures. The use of AI presents important questions and concerns in any area of life where its use is present or being explored, and all technologies must be reviewed with care. At the same time, concerns about technology use need to be considered alongside other important concerns (e.g., about the current ways that credit mobility, or a lack thereof, impact student experience and outcomes, and how technology might help address faculty workload concerns). These types of technological opportunities should be reviewed carefully by the Task Force as they are continuing to be developed and deployed.

## **CALIFORNIA LANDSCAPE**

### **METHODOLOGY, INPUTS & SOURCES**

AB 1111 is now the law, requiring that the California Community College implement student-facing common course numbering. Given that mandate, this section of the scan seeks to inform the work of the AB 1111 Task Force through a deep understanding of the current California landscape, covering topics such as how stakeholders feel about common course numbering and current challenges in the transfer ecosystem. The goal was to surface themes that need to be addressed for successful implementation, supporting the AB 1111 Task Force’s development of an inclusive, comprehensive, and informed implementation plan.

In that spirit, the research for this landscape involved close listening grounded in respect, nimble shoulder-to-shoulder partnership, a commitment to helping students, and a passion for supporting institutions as they take on the hard and necessary work entailed in delivering equality in opportunity and outcomes for today’s students. The scan is based on both original and existing research and participatory interviews and listening sessions with more than 90 stakeholders across California, including community college students, community college faculty, leadership of and faculty members appointed by the Academic Senate for California Community Colleges, articulation officers and administrators, the Association of Independent California Colleges and Universities, education policy experts, advocates, funders, state policy makers and faculty and administrators from the California State University and the University of California. Research built upon existing state-funded studies of common course numbering including those studies funded from SB 851 in 1983 and SB 450 in 1995. The California Community Colleges Consultation Council was also briefed twice on the progress of the landscape scan.

## 93 California Stakeholders Consulted

### Consultation / Listening Sessions

- 16 Faculty Members Appointed by the Academic Senate
- 25 Chancellor's Office Cross-Division Members
- 14 Articulation Officers

### Interviews: 23 interviews of 38 individuals

**California Community Colleges Internal:** Students, Academic Senate for California Community Colleges, California Community Colleges Board Members, California Community Colleges Student Board Members, College CEOs and Superintendents, Presidents and Chancellors, Trustees, Vice Presidents of Instruction, Counselors, Articulation Officers

**External:** California State University System Chancellor's Office, University of California System Chancellor's Office, Association of Independent California Colleges & Universities, California legislative staff, former senior policy advisor and higher education policy lead for the Office of Governor Gavin Newsom and lead, Recovery with Equity Task Force, Public Policy Institute of California, College Futures Foundation, California Acceleration Project, Campaign for College Opportunity, Education First

### Survey: 115 colleges were surveyed (excluding Calbright). 112 colleges responded. Roles of those surveyed included:

- Administrator - Academic Affairs
- Administrator - Admission & Records
- Administrator - Information Services
- Administrator - Student Services
- Articulation Officer
- Chief Executive Officer
- Chief Instructional Officer
- C-ID Reviewer
- Classified Staff
- Counseling Faculty
- Curriculum Chair / Committee Member
- Curriculum Specialist
- Department Chair

- Division Chair
- Evaluator
- Faculty Senate
- Instructional Faculty, Adjunct
- Instructional Faculty, Non-Tenured
- Instructional Faculty, Tenured
- Registrars
- Student Senate
- Student Services Professionals
- Transfer Center Director

## COMMON COURSE NUMBERING SURVEY ANALYSIS

A survey of stakeholders from the California Community Colleges (115 colleges were surveyed; (Calbright, which is only online, was not included) and over 850 representatives from 112 colleges responded) was conducted in March 2022, which provided views on the benefits and drawbacks of implementation and the work to be done on curriculum review and approval to establish the system. The survey expanded upon an informal survey of system Articulation Officers conducted in 2020.

The objectives of the survey were to gain perspectives from a broad range of faculty and staff across the system who will be among those most impacted by the implementation of common course numbering. While the survey was completed by a broad range of faculty and staff, nearly half the respondents were members of the faculty, and of that group most were tenured instructional faculty (39%), followed by counseling faculty (22%). In addition, 15% self-identified as Faculty Senate members.<sup>35</sup> Other respondents included administrators of academic affairs, admissions and records, information services, student services, articulation officers, chief executive officers, chief instructional officers, classified staff, evaluators, registrars, student senate members, student services professionals, transfer center directors, curriculum committee members, department and division chairs, C-ID reviewers, library faculty, enterprise resource analysts and deans of curriculum.

It will be important for the AB 1111 Task Force to understand the level of knowledge about, and support for, common course numbering as it considers how to develop an implementation and engagement plan for this effort, which is now the law. Some key data points to support this understanding include:

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<sup>35</sup> These were not mutually exclusive fields, thus it is possible that the same instructional faculty member who responded was also a member of the faculty senate and able to check both identification answer choices.

- A surprisingly high percentage of respondents (29%) did not know about the legislation prior to receiving the survey;
- Slightly more than half of all respondents (51%) were supportive, while 22% were opposed, and 27% were undecided;
- Two groups critical to successful implementation were less supportive than the full sample:
  - Tenured instructional faculty responded: 40% supportive, 29% not supportive, and 31% undecided; and
  - Articulation officers responded: 23%, 41% not supportive, and 36% undecided.

Meanwhile, most respondents (44%) ranked the highest benefit to be clearer information for students, providing foresight when building pathways and as they are progressing to completion and/or transfer. Most (33%) respondents cited administrative burden of local processes (e.g., technology platforms, catalog changes, etc.) as the highest drawback.

The following factors were ranked most necessary for successful implementation: 1) Adequate funding to change dependent systems (e.g., Learning Management Systems, Course Management Systems, Catalog, Program Mappers, Degree Auditing, Outreach/Advising, Media, etc.); 2) Training for those who will use the system, including students, counselors, faculty, articulation officers, etc.; 3) Institution and district representatives engaged in process development; and 4) Stakeholder communications support (what is happening, when, why and its impacts). Most respondents expected benefits to students to derive from counseling efficiencies, guided pathways mapping, articulation, and student information. Yet the majority of stakeholders expect this will not shorten or simplify local curriculum development.

The survey demonstrates broad support for the intentions of common course numbering to improve the student experience, but opposition due to the belief that—at best—it will be impossible to implement with integrity or—at worst—that it will be detrimental to local colleges’ ability to craft unique curriculum responsive to local workforce needs. Many of those opposed offered rationale in the form of a “yes, but” answer, with cautions such as “It’s a “great idea. It’s all in the implementation” and, “In theory, I think it’s a good idea, but the boots-on-the-ground implementation seems really difficult to envision.”<sup>36</sup> The need to align with AB 928, and specifically AB 928’s singular lower division general education pathway mandate, was raised, with the timing of these mandated reforms raised as a critical factor to implementation. One respondent commented, for example, “It seems a student-facing common course numbering system should be the final product of a new intersegmental articulation model and that we’re starting at the wrong end of the work needed to achieve the goals of this legislation.”<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>36</sup> California Community Colleges Chancellor’s Office. March 2022. Common Course Numbering Survey.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid.

Several respondents referenced other states with common course numbering, and the majority of those comments reflected positively on the usage of these systems. Some respondents commented on their experience teaching in states with a common course numbering system. For example: “I used to teach at a state with common course numbering and it made it much easier for transfer students.”<sup>38</sup> Another respondent noted that this will assist with military veteran evaluations.

Finally, with 51% of respondents in favor of common course numbering, the survey generated a range of both negative and positive comments about stakeholders’ feelings about this legislative mandate.

The following are some examples of negative comments:

- “It will create a lot of issues and not solve the problem it was intended to address.”
- “I don’t support the timeline. The increase of workload in order to implement this goal by 2024 is unreasonable to put on staff and faculty in such a short time period.”
- “The legislature has no idea of the practical undertaking to actually accomplish this at all 116 colleges in the state. And, if there is no buy-in and participation with the CSU and UC, our efforts will not work.”
- “The goals seem good overall. I’m concerned about how the execution will go.”
- “This will be a waste of time and resources.”
- “[D]isruptive and time consuming; could do more meaningful things for students with the time and resources allocated for this.”
- “[W]e have tried this before twice and it has not worked, too much work and too many differences.”

The following are some examples of positive comments:

- “Anything that smoothes students’ educational pathways gets my vote!”
- “As a teacher it’s even confusing which course I teach at each college even though the class is the same.”
- “Absolutely - this should have been done long ago, and should include CSU & UC.”
- “I believe anything that facilitates student progress is worth an investment of our time and labor.”
- “These courses are functionally the same, but we put students through torture to prove it. This is GOOD for students!”
- “It benefits students. Period.”

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<sup>38</sup>Ibid.

- “Makes transferring easy. No credits lost ever.”<sup>39</sup>

## CURRENT SUCCESSES, CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES

Sova’s interviews with California stakeholders for this scan unearthed a valuable storyline of successes, challenges and opportunities ahead:

- California community colleges are already working hard to improve student outcomes and meeting with success;
- There is an opportunity to see similar improvements in the transfer space;
- In addition to the equity imperative to improve student outcomes, California’s public institutions need to improve transfer student outcomes for their own sustainability and long-term health;
- C-ID offers critical lessons, but a true student-facing common course numbering system cannot be simply layered on top of the current C-ID infrastructure; and
- The challenges are amplified by the reality that California community colleges are working within a decentralized context and one that is inequitably resourced (compared to the four-year public segments).

By embracing the foundation in place in California, while being clear-eyed about the challenges, many interviewees and survey respondents see an opportunity:

*The California community colleges have an opportunity to lead California’s and the nation’s postsecondary reform with their implementation of CCN as part of their approach to transfer reform.*

The rest of this section describes this storyline in more detail.

### California community colleges are already working hard to improve student outcomes and meeting with success

System personnel, such as instructional faculty, counselors, and administrators, should be commended for the hard work they are doing to prepare their students and improve their outcomes. Ongoing research by the Public Policy Institute of California indicates, for example, that:

*[O]ver 95 percent of first-time English takers enrolled in a transfer-level English course in fall 2019, the first term AB 705 was fully implemented. Similarly, our preliminary results suggest that more than three of four first-time math takers enrolled in a transfer-level course. This is a dramatic increase considering that four years earlier only 38 percent respectively could start in a transfer level course.<sup>40</sup>*

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<sup>39</sup> Ibid.

<sup>40</sup> Hans Johnson and Marisol Cuellar Mejia. September 2020. [“Increasing Community College Transfers: Progress and Barriers.”](#) Public Policy Institute of California.

Similarly, as was noted by Chancellor’s Office research, “the steady increase in CSU and UC applications and admission suggests an increase in perceived and confirmed preparation by the California Community Colleges.”<sup>41</sup> However, students are still not transferring and succeeding at the rate needed.

### **There is an opportunity to see similar improvements in the transfer space**

As noted earlier, outcomes for students who transfer remain a challenge. Key data points from the Public Policy Institute of California include<sup>42</sup>:

- “A large gap exists between the number of students who hope to transfer and those who do: 19 percent of students with a stated transfer goal do so within four years; 28 percent do so within six years.”
- “Equity gaps are a big concern. While Latino students represent 51 percent of students who declare a degree/transfer goal, they represent 35 percent of those who transfer within four years; African American students represent 7 and 5 percent, respectively.”

And yet given the success of those students who transfer, there is great opportunity for further removing barriers to transfer:

*The good news is that most students earn a bachelor’s degree after transferring to California public institutions: 89 percent of transfer students graduate within four years at UC and 73 percent at CSU. Improving transfer rates could boost the supply of college graduates, helping to meet economic demand and enhance the well-being of all Californians. Because community colleges reflect the full diversity of the state’s population, improving outcomes for community college students will go a long way towards improving economic and social mobility.*<sup>43</sup>

The potential economic and social mobility impact of student success reforms in California is vast. One in every four community college students nationwide are enrolled in a California community college. Three out of every ten Californians aged 18-24 are currently enrolled in a California community college.<sup>44</sup>

### **In addition to the equity imperative to improve student outcomes, California’s public institutions need to improve transfer student outcomes for their own sustainability and long-term health**

Research also suggests that as states compete for students, California may be missing out on its very own due to the lack of clarity within and across the segments. One senior California

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<sup>41</sup> Valerie Lundy Wagner. “[Equitable Transfer Pathways](#).” California Community Colleges Board of Governors Meeting, November 2021, Part B.

<sup>42</sup> Hans Johnson and Marisol Cuellar Mejia. September 2020. “[Increasing Community College Transfers: Progress and Barriers](#).” Public Policy Institute of California.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid.

<sup>44</sup> Foundation for California Community Colleges. 2022. “[California Community Colleges Facts and Figures](#).”

community college stakeholder remarked “that’s why University of Washington, and University of Nevada and Arizona State are here” competing for students in California.

More alarmingly, California public higher education stands to lose too many students to for-profit institutions. A common course numbering system that offers more accessibility to both in-person and online offerings in the California Community Colleges, with CCN across all colleges, and potentially to the UC and CSU, could be very enticing to the students who currently choose for-profits, many of which do not serve students as well as the public institutions.

As one student interviewee remarked:

*It would be helpful for the colleges to align to the universities in CA. When I was deciding where I wanted to go to college, I was struggling because I knew that I would have a hard time. And that is specifically why I tried my hardest to NOT attend [a community college,], because they are not as aligned as they should be. Arizona State University is one of the better colleges because they have aligned their courses to the colleges in CA. They have done that individually, which is a lot of work.<sup>45</sup>*

### **C-ID offers critical lessons, but a true student-facing common course numbering system cannot be simply layered on top of the current C-ID infrastructure**

The Course Identification Numbering System (C-ID) is a “faculty-driven system that was initially developed to assign identifying designations (C-ID numbers) to significant transfer courses” and was referred to in AB 1111 as a “mechanism to identify comparable courses and...a critical step to developing a student-facing common course numbering system at the California Community Colleges that would be easier for students to understand and navigate.”<sup>46</sup>

Yet C-ID is not clear or transparent to students. C-ID is used primarily as an internal reference for California community college instructional faculty and counselors to identify comparable courses.<sup>47</sup> Survey responses demonstrate that it is still a mysterious process even among many who identify as faculty. C-ID does not include all general education courses – as will be mandated by AB 1111 – and C-ID participation is opt-in (with the exception of courses listed on ADT Transfer Model Curriculum templates, so even with C-ID, students and counselors still must cross-reference courses to determine if they satisfy requisites).<sup>48</sup> C-ID, which was started to align courses in the top 20 transfer majors, was also never intended to align all

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<sup>45</sup> Interview conducted by Sheila Miller Rivera for Sova. 2022. Stakeholder Interviews for Landscape Scan to Inform Implementation of the Student-Facing Common Course Numbering System.

<sup>46</sup> Course Identification Numbering System. 2022. [“About Us.”](#)

<sup>47</sup> California Community Colleges Chancellor’s Office. March 2022. Common Course Numbering Landscape Scan Survey.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid.

courses. C-ID has developed 461 course descriptors, of which currently 22,945 courses align as comparable. While this is a vast number of courses to review, it is a fraction of the total included in the California community college curriculum inventory. (Of note, this demonstrates the enormity of the work ahead for the California Community Colleges to conduct the assessments for common course numbering).

C-ID relies heavily on curriculum alignment and stops there, whereas CCN properly designed and implemented relies on curriculum alignment as well as the institutions' support to ensure it is student-facing by applying the same course identifier into local Content Management Systems / Learning Management Systems systems, course schedules, pathway mappers, catalogs, catalog addenda and advising sheets in a manner that is easy to maintain and update over time.

**The challenges are amplified by the reality that California community colleges are working within a decentralized context and one that is inequitably resourced (compared to the four-year public segments).**

The 116 colleges have their own boards of trustees, and value institutional autonomy. Curriculum is locally controlled. Navigating local control and building consensus will be a key challenge for implementation of common course numbering. It is important to note, however, that implementation of common course numbering does not require centralized curriculum. It is nonetheless perceived by some as a threat to local and faculty autonomy. These tensions are real and must be acknowledged and addressed.

Several stakeholders within the community colleges shared the concern that they are asked to implement a disproportionate amount of reforms and initiatives, while at the same time serving their mandate of open access and working with inequitably low funding relative to the other public postsecondary systems in the state. Interviews conducted to inform the work of the Recovery with Equity task force similarly found, for example, that “(a)cross and within segments, higher education stakeholders perceive that funding is inequitable between them, and that institutions serving the highest-need students get the least funding.”<sup>49</sup>

“Per-student funding for the community college segment remains well below that of the UC and CSU. According to the Public Policy Institute of California, as of 2017-2018 per-pupil funding for the California Community Colleges was \$8,553 compared to \$9,387 for the CSU and \$13,632 for the UC. And while the California Community Colleges has increased tuition, it is “still about \$2,000 below the national average, and many students receive fee waivers.”<sup>50</sup> The community colleges are now receiving a greater share of the General Fund than they did previously, however. Following passage of Proposition 98 in the late 1980s, the California Community Colleges share of funding has increased relative to the UC and CSU shares.<sup>51</sup>”

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<sup>49</sup> Education First. 2020. Interviews to inform the Recovery with Equity Task Force.

<sup>50</sup> Public Policy Institute of California. October 2019. [“Investing in Public Higher Education.”](#)

<sup>51</sup> Public Policy Institute of California. October 2019. [“Investing in Public Higher Education.”](#)

It is evident that California is making overdue investments in the community colleges and with funds for implementation of common course numbering now available in the budget, this is not an “unfunded mandate.” It is also true, however, that the California community colleges still operate in an inequitable funding environment, while serving over 2 million of the state’s students.

**The California community colleges have an opportunity to lead California’s and the nation’s postsecondary reform with their implementation of CCN as part of their approach to transfer reform.**

Many interviewees and survey respondents know the road ahead will not be easy, but nonetheless see an opportunity. The California Community Colleges can set a new standard for transfer student success, as the largest system of higher education in the country, and the provider of transfer students to the UC and CSU. With the lessons learned from a number of other states, and the potential application of new technologies, California community colleges can set in place a CCN system that will take its students and colleges into a new era.

**RESEARCH SYNTHESIS: LEVEL SETTING ON WHAT COMMON COURSE NUMBERING IS & IS NOT**

Weaving together the lessons learned from the national and California research leads to the following synthesis of “What Common Course Numbering Is & Is Not.”

**Figure 5: What Common Course Numbering Is & Is Not**

**Common Course Numbering Is Not**

- Isn’t a magic bullet, isn’t itself going to fix the problems.
- Isn’t easy to do. It is easier to do poorly, and has a storied history in California.
- Isn’t simple. It is a contentious issue in part because it hits at the heart of one of the deepest, largely unacknowledged tensions in higher ed reform work in general.
- Isn’t just for 2-yr institutions.

**Common Course Numbering Is**

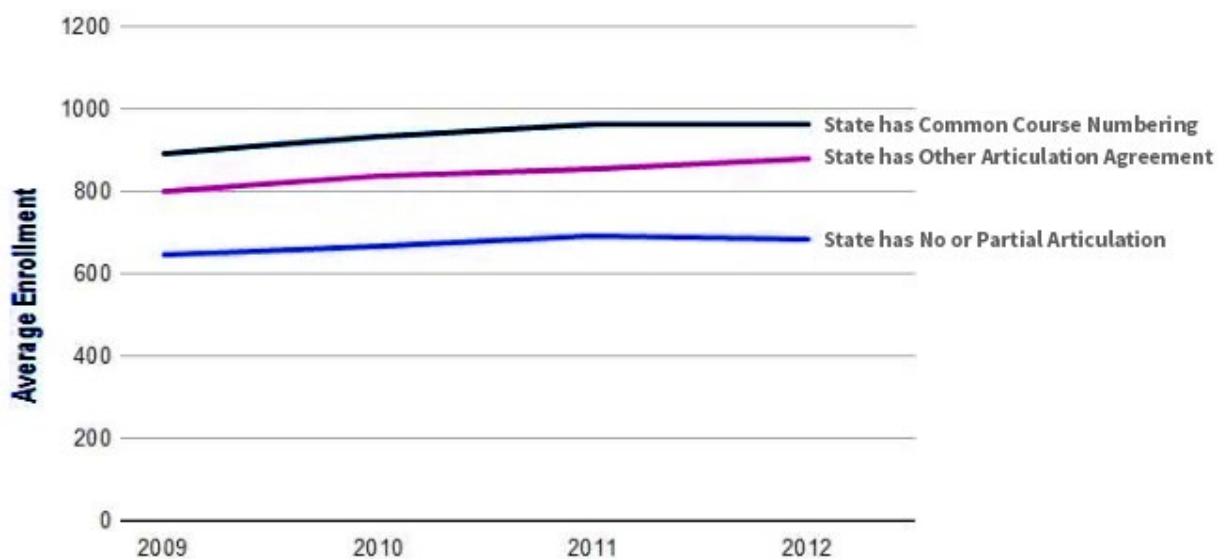
- Is an essential piece of the puzzle and an historic opportunity.
- Is important to do right, and is unfair to students to do poorly.
- Is going to require honesty addressing the tension between the imperatives of equity-grounded innovation and deeply entrenched expectations related to faculty and institutional autonomy.
- Is going to require clear-eyed engagement of 4-yr institutions despite the focus on CCCs in the legislation.

## IT ISN'T A MAGIC BULLET AND IT ISN'T BY ITSELF GOING TO FIX THE PROBLEMS. IT IS AN ESSENTIAL PIECE OF THE PUZZLE AND AN HISTORIC OPPORTUNITY.

The national landscape demonstrates that while common course numbering is not a solitary solution for increasing transfer or transforming postsecondary education, it is an essential reform to be implemented among many, and is an historic opportunity for systems, states, and most important, students. Meanwhile, despite the decades during which common course numbering systems have been in use by states, there is a thin evidence base demonstrating the support for common course numbering. One of the few but compelling pieces of research that does demonstrate the value of common course numbering is the research demonstrated in

Figure 6 by the Brookings Institution based on IPEDS data that suggests that states with common course numbering see higher transfer rates than those with other articulation agreements, or with no or partial articulation agreements.

**Figure 6: Fall Enrollment of Transfer Students<sup>52</sup>**



Source: IPEDS

BROOKINGS

As the research notes, however, this analysis is not causal, and the data does not differentiate between students attending community colleges and four-year colleges in a way that would be necessary to better understand effects on transfer rates. The Brookings study reinforces key findings for this scan, and states that:

*Common course numbering is a systemwide, structural change that may affect rates of transfer from two-year to four-year colleges. However, this policy in no way addresses*

<sup>52</sup>Adela Soliz. 2015. "Increasing community college student transfer rates." Brown Center Chalkboard. Brookings Institution.

*all of the barriers facing students entering community colleges with the intention of transferring to a four-year institution.*<sup>53</sup>

As noted earlier, in the states that have implemented common course numbering, it was one of a set of transfer-related reforms that not only improved transfer but also contributed to student success and more efficient functioning of several elements within colleges and across systems.

As Table 8 demonstrates, CCN is one of several elements or reforms pursued by states engaged in postsecondary success reforms as well as state initiatives to increase transparency and clarity in educational outcomes for the benefit of students as well as institutions and taxpayers. It is also evident that these reforms and initiatives are not all implemented or completed in sequence, and not consistently across states.

**Table 8: States with Common Course Numbering Among Other Related Reforms**<sup>54</sup>

State	Transferable core of lower-division courses	Statewide Common Course Numbering	Statewide guaranteed transfer of an associate degree	Statewide reverse transfer	Guided Pathways reform efforts	State Longitudinal Data System
Arizona	Yes	Yes – all segments	No	No	Yes	Yes
California	Yes	No	No	No	Yes	Yes <sup>55</sup>
Colorado	Yes	Yes – all segments	Yes	Yes	Yes	No
Florida	Yes	Yes – all segments	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Indiana	Yes	Yes – all segments	Yes	No	Yes	Yes
Louisiana	Yes	Yes – all segments	Yes	Yes	No	Yes
Nevada	Yes	Yes – all segments	Yes	Yes	No	Yes
New Mexico	Yes	Yes – all segments	Yes	No	Yes	No
Tennessee	Yes	Yes – all segments	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Texas	Yes	Yes – all segments	No	Yes	Yes	Yes
Washington	Yes	CCs only	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes

<sup>53</sup> Ibid.

<sup>54</sup> Education Commission of the States. 2022. “50-State Comparisons.”

<sup>55</sup> “Yes” is the correct response. Note: the State Longitudinal Data System in California was just launched in 2021. [State of California Cradle to Career System.](#)

## **IT ISN'T EASY TO DO. IT IS EASIER TO DO POORLY, AND HAS A STORIED HISTORY IN CALIFORNIA. IT IS IMPORTANT TO DO RIGHT, AND IS UNFAIR TO STUDENTS TO DO POORLY.**

As the California landscape will demonstrate, efforts to implement common course numbering have a storied history in California. It is a complex and monumental task to undertake. Research demonstrates that common course numbering was begun in several states by college officials coming together to clarify processes and increase transparency for students and for one another's institutional efficiencies.

Texas and Florida are examples of states where CCN arose out of grassroots efforts of registrars and admissions officers - not initiated by state legislation or coordinating board initiative. Legislation and mandates have followed over the years to codify practices and to incentivize participation.

Florida sees its common course numbering system as a key component of its K-20 seamless system of articulation: "The system provides a database of post-secondary courses at public vocational-technical centers, community colleges, universities, and participating nonpublic institutions. The assigned numbers describe course content to improve research, assist program planning, and facilitate the transfer of students."<sup>56</sup>

## **IT ISN'T SIMPLE. IT IS A CONTENTIOUS ISSUE IN PART BECAUSE IT HITS AT THE HEART OF ONE OF THE DEEPEST, LARGELY UNACKNOWLEDGED TENSIONS IN HIGHER ED REFORM WORK IN GENERAL. IT IS GOING TO REQUIRE HONESTLY ADDRESSING THE TENSION BETWEEN THE IMPERATIVES OF EQUITY-GROUNDED INNOVATION AND DEEPLY ENTRENCHED EXPECTATIONS RELATED TO FACULTY AND INSTITUTIONAL AUTONOMY.**

One common concern that has been raised during the course of the deep listening conducted for this landscape scan is that states with common course numbering have centralized curricular development and approval. This is not the case. In reality, there are a variety of ways in which states with CCN approach curricular development and approval. New Mexico is an example of a state that has participatory governance for curricular development with a statewide council of curricular and articulation officials and faculty who review curriculum for ongoing functioning of the common course numbering system across all three segments.

Florida offers an example of how intersegmental common course numbering exists while allowing for institutional control. In Florida:

*[E]ach participating institution controls the title, credit, and content of its own courses and recommends the first digit of the course number to indicate the level at which students normally take the course. Course prefixes and the last three digits of the course numbers are assigned by members of faculty discipline committees appointed for that purpose by the Florida Department of Education in Tallahassee. Individuals nominated to serve on these committees are selected to maintain a representative balance as to*

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<sup>56</sup> Florida Department of Education. 2022. "[Statewide Course Numbering System.](#)"

*type of institution and discipline field or specialization.*<sup>57</sup>

## **IT ISN'T JUST FOR TWO-YEAR INSTITUTIONS. IT IS GOING TO REQUIRE CLEAR-EYED ENGAGEMENT OF FOUR-YEAR INSTITUTIONS DESPITE THE FOCUS ON CALIFORNIA COMMUNITY COLLEGES IN THE LEGISLATION.**

Common course numbering has been implemented by just over half of all states in the nation, for a variety of rationales, and with a range of incentives and consequences. Most states with common course numbering implemented it across two- and four-year segments, including Arizona, Arkansas, Colorado, Florida, Idaho, Indiana, Kansas, Louisiana, Minnesota, Missouri, Nevada, New Mexico, North Dakota, South Dakota, Tennessee, Texas, Utah, and Wyoming. Several have implemented it across the community colleges only, including Connecticut, Hawaii, Iowa, Kentucky, Mississippi, Virginia and Washington. And a handful have implemented it across their university systems only, including Georgia, Maine and Montana.

## **HOW THIS LANDSCAPE SCAN CAN INFORM THE WORK OF THE AB 1111 TASK FORCE**

This landscape scan was developed primarily to inform the work of the AB 1111 Task Force. The pages that follow seek to elevate considerations for the composition of the Task Force, describe the Key Findings, and then synthesize Key Findings into some clear Recommendations for the Task Force—grounded in the research—as it takes on the work to define the student-centered opportunity ahead and develop a long-term implementation plan.

### **TASK FORCE COMPOSITION**

The Task Force should be composed of a broad and representative group of stakeholders. Faculty engagement in this process is essential, as is representation of multiple student perspectives in an embedded and authentic way.

There is a tension between keeping the AB 1111 Task Force a manageable size to support effective facilitation, communication and decision-making, and the benefits of ensuring a diversity of perspectives and an inclusive table. The research suggests the following considerations for the Task Force membership:

- Multiple student voices, reflective of the diversity of the student population and inclusive of representation from the Student Senate for California Community Colleges;
- Multiple faculty voices, including from the Academic Senate for California Community Colleges and at least one faculty member who currently serves on a Faculty Discipline Review Group for C-ID;

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<sup>57</sup> Eastern Florida State College. 2022. "[Florida's Statewide Course Numbering System](#)"

- Registrars, including from a California community college that currently has common course numbering in place (e.g., San Diego Community College District);
- Representatives of a number of key roles with high transfer relevance, such as articulation officers, instructional officers, student services officers, admissions officers, classified staff, research, and counselors, paying particular attention to ensuring representation from a California community college with high transfer volume;
- Representatives of those who will be held accountable for strong implementation and leadership, including Chief Executive Officers, trustees and the Chancellor’s Office;
- Representatives of roles in areas such as technology and back-office processes that will be affected by the implementation; and
- Finally, as this scan notes in other areas, the California State University system and University of California must be included for this effort to be successful, and as such they should each have a representative on the Task Force.

## KEY FINDINGS

**Finding #1. All students, particularly students who have been historically and persistently marginalized, are not served well by many of the anachronistic course structures of the California Community Colleges, with over 100 different course numbering systems and catalogs and just over 130,000 credit, degree-approved courses.<sup>58</sup> These historic structures are confusing, especially when attempting alignment between colleges, and ultimately are barriers to student mobility and success.** Survey respondents noted that this leads to “miscommunication issues,” leaves students “confused and frustrated,” and that California community college faculty and staff similarly struggle.<sup>59</sup> Ultimately, while outcomes for students who transfer are determined by many factors, they remain too low and need to be addressed. Among the students who intend to transfer:

*[O]nly 19 percent transfer within four years, and 28 percent within six years. Transfer rates are especially concerning for California’s low income, first generation, Black, and Latinx students. Latinx students represent over half of the students who declare a transfer goal, yet only 35 percent transfer within four years. Black students declare transfer goals at a much lower rate, only seven percent, and only five percent successfully transfer.<sup>60</sup>*

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<sup>58</sup>The California Community Colleges Chancellor’s Office Curriculum Inventory System. 2022. “[Course List - COCI 2.0](#)”

<sup>59</sup>California Community Colleges Chancellor’s Office. March 2022. Common Course Numbering Survey.

<sup>60</sup>Of note, the majority of California community college students are part time (12 or less units per term), which extends time to transfer and completion. As quoted in Assembly Committee on Higher Education Hearing. April 22, 2021. “Postsecondary Education: Common Course Numbering System.” Note: Latest transfer data can be sourced at the California Community Colleges Chancellor’s Office Management Information Systems Data Mart.

Common course numbering is an attempt to intentionally prioritize student needs and interests, and it has been recognized as one essential piece of a set of critical equity-minded, student-centered measures to improve transfer and student success. Increasing availability and transparency of information for students can have multiple upsides. A common course numbering system can give students more foresight when building their academic plans, help students understand how required courses transfer, and shorten their time to completion. When student interests are prioritized, common course numbering is an essential piece of a larger puzzle. Where it has been implemented, common course numbering is viewed as a “necessary but not sufficient” reform for transfer and student success.

**Finding #2. The complexity of changing current approaches to supporting students who would benefit from improved transfer and credit mobility feels overwhelming to many. At the same time, current approaches—“the way it’s always been done”—are producing inequities in student outcomes and many feel there is ample room for addressing the barriers and biases that impede credit mobility.** California is the most populated state, and the California Community Colleges is the largest higher education system, in the nation. The system is imperfect, and faces outdated technologies, inequitable funding, insufficient connections and a lack of interoperability. Many stakeholders feel, however, that questions about how to implement common course numbering should not undermine the will to take it on in service to better serving students.

**Finding #3. Common course numbering is not just a simple numbering system. It is an opportunity to create common understanding and transparency across 116 colleges, which will require engaging faculty to determine expected course content within the commonly numbered courses, aligning on the elements of a course, and establishing consistency with naming principles. Successful implementation will require an intensive, time-consuming, and coordinated effort.** The aggressive timeline outlined in AB 1111 is viewed by most as unrealistic, and fears of this being an ‘unfunded mandate’ abound. Implementing common course numbering successfully requires an intensive process of engaging faculty to ensure equivalency. Simply putting the same numbers on courses will not achieve the intention. Implementation will require phased activity on multiple fronts. It also must proceed in synchrony, since the course catalogs must all match with the new descriptors, names and numbers across the 116 colleges, while also accommodating for local context (e.g., some colleges operate on a semester system and some on a quarter system). Successful implementation will depend on carefully designed implementation on a realistic timeline and on institutions being provided with appropriate resources. Despite fears of this being an unfunded mandate, improving transfer and community college student success in general is a priority for California, and AB 1111 was passed as a part of a Recovery with Equity set of reforms with significant funding of \$10 million approved in the 2021-22 spending plan<sup>61</sup> and an additional \$105 million approved in the 2022-23 budget.<sup>62</sup>

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61 Legislative Analyst’s Office. 2021. “The 2021-2022 California Spending Plan: Higher Education.”

62 Assembly Budget Committee. 2022. “Floor Report of the 2022-2023 Budget”; California Governor’s Council for Post-Secondary Education. 2021. [Recovery With Equity: A Roadmap for Higher Education After the Pandemic](#). Taskforce Report.

**Finding #4. To achieve its intended goal, common course numbering implementation should be an intersegmental effort. Policymakers should build in ways to incentivize or require intersegmental implementation that includes the California State University and University of California systems.** In nearly every interview conducted for this scan, respondents noted that this legislation will not achieve its potential of improving transfer if only the community college segment is implicated. Most states with common course numbering have implemented it across segments because transfer is an intersegmental and cross-system issue. Given the complexity of the four-year landscape, which includes the notable fact that the UCs are constitutionally exempt from legislative mandates while the CSUs are not, cultivating the engagement of the four-year segments will itself likely entail a phased approach tailored to the needs of each segment and aimed at evolving their overall relationship to one another in service to a shared commitment to leveling the playing field for today’s learners.

**Finding #5. Language in AB 1111 encourages the California Community Colleges to build from the existing Course Identification Numbering System (C-ID), but the C-ID foundation alone is unlikely to catalyze the level of change needed and called for by this legislation.** While there are important lessons to be learned from C-ID about existing transfer articulations, collaboration with the CSU system, and faculty roles, a true student-facing common course numbering system cannot be simply layered on top of the current C-ID infrastructure. For example, C-ID does not include all general education courses, as the legislation requires, and while it can be accessed by students, it was not intentionally designed to be student-facing (e.g., with a “student as user” UX design experience).

**Finding #6. No other state with common course numbering can serve as a “model” for replication, but there are important lessons to learn that are highly relevant to California.** California is a uniquely large and diverse state, and the California Community Colleges is the largest higher education system in the nation. But there are 28 states with common course numbering in place, and while none looks just like California, all offer key lessons and useful ideas that can be used selectively to feed the creative process.

**Finding #7. In recent years, transfer has received a great deal of policymaker attention, ranging from the passage of AB 928 and AB 1111 to the Governor’s Recovery with Equity Taskforce. Common course numbering should not be implemented in isolation; it must be aligned with and responsive to other critical activities in the California transfer ecosystem.** The history of reform in higher education makes clear that process design – including the timing and sequencing of work and meaningful engagement of critical stakeholders – can make-or-break its success. AB 1111 was signed into law alongside other important legislation such as [Assembly Bill No. 928](#) (hereafter “AB 928”) which establishes the Associate Degree for Transfer Intersegmental Implementation Committee, and calls for strengthening the Associate Degree for Transfer and establishing a singular lower division general education pathway that meets the academic requirements necessary for transfer admission to both the California State University and University of California. Interviewees raised the timing of these mandated reforms as a critical factor to implementation. One survey respondent commented, for example, “It seems a student-facing common course numbering system should be the final product of a new intersegmental articulation model and that we’re starting at the wrong end of the work needed to achieve the goals of this legislation.”

**Finding #8. Successful implementation of common course numbering will have implications for essentially all stakeholders in the California Community Colleges, and will therefore require leadership, collaboration and hard work from across the system. No one group can or should lead this effort alone.** This effort must leverage the systemness of the California Community Colleges and lean into established participatory governance norms and principles, with the goal of equitably serving students.<sup>63</sup> As evidenced by the official letter of the Academic Senate for California Community Colleges in opposition to AB 1111, as well as the listening sessions and survey conducted for this scan, this reform hits at the heart of an increasingly visible tension between the necessity of prioritizing student interests, and longstanding expectations of autonomy on the part of institutions and academic faculty. As noted earlier, however, research shows that the principles of academic freedom can be upheld while providing much-needed clarity to students. Success will hinge on a commitment to centering the student experience, and participation by key stakeholders—including instructional faculty, the system, registrars, and counselors. All have a role to play.

*“Systemness is the coordination of multiple components that, when working together, create a network of activity that is more powerful than any action of individual parts on their own.”<sup>64</sup>*

*–Nancy L. Zimpher  
Chancellor Emeritus of The State University of New York*

**Figure 7: Roles in Implementation**



<sup>63</sup> See, for example, National Association of System Heads. n.d. "[Systemness](#)."

<sup>64</sup> Ibid.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

The Chancellor of the California Community Colleges will charge a task force with developing an implementation plan to ensure that the mandate of AB 1111 is fulfilled with integrity. As the AB 1111 Task Force develops its implementation plan, the research and Key Findings of this scan call for attention to the following areas:

**Recommendation #1: A “Students First” Lens. In order to establish a student-facing common course numbering system, the student experience and student interests must be at the center of the design and implementation process.** As noted earlier, students currently have to navigate over 100 different course numbering systems and catalogs and just over 130,000 credit, degree-approved courses.<sup>65</sup> Common course numbering is an attempt to intentionally prioritize student needs. One key and necessary way to do this is to ensure that students are included in the Task Force and at each step of the process. In addition, we recommend that the Task Force’s work be informed by finely disaggregated student-level data, which can support an understanding of how students currently experience the system and where inequities are found. A “students first” lens should be cultivated as the common ground on which all stakeholders agree to stand together as the hard work is undertaken.

**Recommendation #2: Prioritize data and evidence. It will be critical to question assumptions, interrogate the evidence to see where biases and inequities exist, and be courageous in the face of change. Changing “the way it’s always been done” is hard, but not impossible, and will benefit students.** As this scan says many times, the challenges ahead are real. That is not, however, a fair reason to not pursue change for students. By interrogating the data, reflecting on where biases and inequities exist, and elevating evidence about student outcomes, the AB 1111 Task Force can make decisions that consistently prioritize a “students first” lens.

**Recommendation #3: More time. Successful examples of common course numbering system implementation across the nation, and California-based attempts at district-level implementation, demonstrate that successfully implementing common course numbering across all 116 colleges will require more time than the legislation currently allows (a minimum of five years with clear yearly milestones including how the roll-out of CCN will impact the student experience).** Given the level of stakeholder engagement needed, the changes required in course catalogs, the technology and operations work entailed, as well as the variation in reform already evident from existing reforms, accomplishing a synchronous implementation of common course numbering that is not disruptive to students will need a minimum of five years to accomplish. The timeline should be amended to allow for this, and efforts should be taken to work with policy makers to set appropriate timelines with scaffolded milestones that include a lens on how the roll-out of CCN will impact the student experience. Successful implementation requires the real support of individuals at multiple levels within and across institutions – and honest acknowledgment of the compound effects that are beleaguering community college professionals, including initiative fatigue, pandemic burnout, and the effects of the “Great Resignation.” For this

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<sup>65</sup>The California Community Colleges Chancellor’s Office Curriculum Inventory System (COCI). 2022. [“Course List - COCI 2.0.”](#)

initiative to achieve its potential, policymakers and leaders need to be clear-eyed about the tremendous array of student-focused reform work already underway across the California Community Colleges. Further, the Task Force should consider common course numbering as it relates to implementation of Guided Pathways, [AB 705](#), and [AB 928](#) to ensure all dots are connected and no effort is wasted. It is especially important that the Task Force’s implementation plan dovetails with the work of AB 928.

**Table 9: Key Findings and Recommendations**

<b>Key Findings</b> <b>What did the research tell us?</b>	<b>Recommendations</b> <b>What does that mean for the work of the AB 1111 Task Force?</b>
<p><b>Finding #1.</b> All students, particularly students who have been historically and persistently marginalized, are not served well by many of the anachronistic course structures of the California community colleges, with more than 100 different course numbering systems and catalogs and just over 130,000 credit, degree-approved courses. These historic structures are confusing, especially when attempting alignment between colleges, and ultimately are barriers to student mobility and success.</p>	<p><b>A “Students First” lens:</b> In order to establish a student-facing common course numbering system, the student experience and student interests must be at the center of the design and implementation process.</p>
<p><b>Finding #2.</b> The complexity of changing current approaches to supporting students who would benefit from improved transfer and credit mobility feels overwhelming to many. At the same time, current approaches—“the way it’s always been done”—are producing inequities in student outcomes and many feel there is ample room for addressing the barriers and biases that impede credit mobility.</p>	<p><b>Prioritize data and evidence:</b> It will be critical to question assumptions, interrogate the evidence to see where biases and inequities exist, and be courageous in the face of change. Changing “the way it’s always been done” is hard, but not impossible, and will benefit students.</p>
<p><b>Finding #3.</b> Common course numbering is not just a simple numbering system. It is an opportunity to create common understanding and transparency across 116 colleges, which will require engaging faculty to determine expected course content within the commonly numbered courses, aligning on the elements of a course, and establishing consistency with naming principles. Successful implementation will require an intensive, time-consuming, and coordinated effort.</p>	<p><b>More time:</b> Successful examples of common course numbering system implementation across the nation, and California-based attempts at district-level implementation, demonstrate that successfully implementing common course numbering across all 116 colleges will require more time than the legislation currently allows (a minimum of five years with clear yearly milestones including how the roll-out of CCN will impact the student experience).</p>

<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Key Findings</b> What did the research tell us?</p>	<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Recommendations</b> What does that mean for the work of the AB 1111 Task Force?</p>
<p><b>Finding #4.</b> To achieve its intended goal, common course numbering implementation should be an intersegmental effort. Policymakers should build in ways to incentivize or require intersegmental implementation that includes the California State University and University of California systems.</p>	<p><b>Intersegmental:</b> The California State University and University of California must be included for this effort to be successful and to seize this historic opportunity to reform postsecondary education across the state.</p>
<p><b>Finding #5.</b> Language in AB 1111 encourages the California Community Colleges to build from the existing Course Identification Numbering System (C-ID), but the C-ID foundation alone is unlikely to catalyze the level of change needed and called for by this legislation.</p>	<p><b>C-ID engagement:</b> C-ID is offering important lessons and a baseline of course equivalencies. This effort should engage key C-ID stakeholders to elevate lessons being learned, benefit from knowledge held by C-ID stakeholders, identify what the appropriate role is for C-ID ongoing, and address the misconception that CCN should be “easy” because of the base or model that C-ID provides.</p>
<p><b>Finding #6.</b> No other state with common course numbering can serve as a “model” for replication, but there are important lessons to learn that are highly relevant to California.</p>	<p><b>Lessons from other states:</b> The Task Force will benefit from drawing lessons learned and ideas for the “nuts-and-bolts” of common course numbering from other states, and selectively applying those to design and implementation of CCN in California.</p>
<p><b>Finding #7.</b> In recent years, transfer has received a great deal of policymaker attention, ranging from the passage of AB 928 and AB 1111 to the Governor’s Recovery with Equity Taskforce. Common course numbering should not be implemented in isolation; it must be aligned with and responsive to other critical activities in the California transfer ecosystem.</p>	<p><b>A holistic view:</b> To cement California’s role as the nation’s leader in public higher education, this effort must be positioned, supported and resourced as a key facet of systemic, student-focused reform, and a holistic view of implementation will be needed. For example, CCN efforts must be aligned with the activities around AB 928.</p>

<b>Key Findings</b> <b>What did the research tell us?</b>	<b>Recommendations</b> <b>What does that mean for the work of the AB 1111 Task Force?</b>
<p><b>Finding #8.</b> Successful implementation of common course numbering will have implications for essentially all stakeholders in the California Community Colleges, and will therefore require leadership, collaboration and hard work from across the system. No one group can or should lead this effort alone.</p>	<p><b>Everyone has a role to play:</b> Common course numbering is an opportunity for the California Community Colleges to leverage its role and reach to achieve silo-spanning collaboration across a wide array of critical internal and external stakeholders implicated in successful implementation and maintenance of an effective CCN system.</p>

**Recommendation #4: The California State University and University of California must be included for this effort to be successful and to seize this historic opportunity to reform postsecondary education across the state.** California can not only learn from but can improve upon other states’ efforts and set an example not only for their own students and state but also for the nation by implementing this as an intersegmental reform. The boldest vision would be for all three segments of California’s postsecondary systems – inclusive of the California State University and the University of California – to lean into this reform with courage. This courage should be supported by the equity-focused incentives and goals for the UCs and CSUs, given the complexities of postsecondary governance and financing in California.

**Recommendation #5: C-ID is offering important lessons and a baseline of course equivalencies. This effort should engage key C-ID stakeholders to elevate lessons being learned, benefit from knowledge held by C-ID stakeholders, identify what the appropriate role is for C-ID ongoing, and address the misconception that CCN should be “easy” because of the base or model that C-ID provides.** The Task Force will need to understand what key lessons have been learned in areas ranging from intersegmental alignment, to governance, collaboration with the CSU and course equivalencies. The implementation plan should reflect those lessons learned and pay due respect to the long history of C-ID, without treating C-ID as “the answer” to meet the complexities of learning in a state as large and diverse as California in the 21st Century.

**Recommendation #6: While no other state serves as a model for replication for California, the Task Force will benefit from drawing lessons learned and ideas for the “nuts-and-bolts” of common course numbering from other states, and selectively applying those in design and implementation.** This landscape scan includes ideas from other states as a learning resource, designed to support idea generation and offer new perspectives and ideas. California community colleges can learn from these examples as well as their own effort with C-ID, and go further to create a common course numbering system that is both suited to the unique needs and scale of California and the best example yet of common course numbering.

**Recommendation #7: To cement California’s role as the nation’s leader in public higher education, this effort must be positioned, supported and resourced as a key facet of systemic, student-focused reform, and a holistic view of implementation will be needed.** The vision set forth by the AB 1111 Task Force should focus on how to best serve California’s students by building an infrastructure responsive to the learners of the 21st Century. This will include attention to how the implementation plan intersects with other key activities in the transfer ecosystem, such as the Associate Degree for Transfer and the singular general education pathway called for by AB 928. The complexities of, and progress to date on, transfer reform and postsecondary success should continue to be held up by the California Community Colleges Chancellor’s Office (Chancellor’s Office), Board of Governors and trustees to ensure policymakers understand the level of work and investment required for success. Furthermore, there are real fears about how CCN will touch innumerable processes and result in cascading unintended consequences, such as losing parts of student records; mismatched unit/number changes related to previously taken courses; tensions with re-enrollment and course retake policies; and ensuring past and future courses can be incorporated. As a result, some have voiced that CCN is a “huge lift” that won’t actually improve transfer student outcomes but will divert energy away from other critical work that needs doing. The AB 1111 Task Force’s implementation plan will need to line up attention to implementation on all of those fronts and call for a disciplined focus on strategic project management that ensures time is well-spent, meetings are well-organized, progress is documented, and successes are celebrated.

**Recommendation #8: Common course numbering is an opportunity for the California Community Colleges to leverage its role and reach to achieve silo-spanning collaboration across a wide array of critical internal and external stakeholders implicated in successful implementation and maintenance of an effective CCN system.** The AB 1111 Task Force must engage faculty experience and reflect their critical role in curricular development and delivery, and it must ensure that the wide array of staff implicated in common course numbering are viewed and treated as valued professionals whose experiences are essential for students to be served well by this reform. At the same time, it must be understood that the Chancellor’s Office is accountable for implementation. The California Community Colleges are guided by a process of participatory governance, and the Board of Governors sets policy and provides guidance for the 73 districts and 116 colleges that constitute the system. Guidelines for determining whether a district has implemented common course numbering with integrity should be clearly established, and monitoring should be a resourced element of implementation. An incentive structure for demonstrated collaboration and compliance will be necessary to prevent passive noncompliance. Financial consequences for noncompliance have been legislated or mandated in other states and could be reserved by the legislature should noncompliance become a concern. Helping all stakeholders understand the relationship between experience, responsibility and accountability around the many facets of this complex reform will be important for ensuring stakeholder expectations for engagement are aligned. Aligning expectations is key to ensuring all stakeholders are empowered to collaborate in the work effectively on behalf of students from their respective positions.

## CONCLUSION

With the adoption of AB 1111 as state law, and the appropriation of \$115 million towards its implementation, California is moving forward with a comprehensive effort to adopt a student-facing common course numbering system across the largest system of higher education in the nation.

The challenges ahead are real; the AB 1111 Task Force will need to proceed holistically and carefully to develop an implementation plan for a common course numbering system capable of achieving the goals of the legislation and the opportunities to advance equitable transfer.

While the challenges are many, the opportunity is a powerful one and, if done well, the benefit to students is undeniable. Stakeholders across the state believe that students will benefit if common course numbering is implemented with integrity. This landscape scan points to the work ahead for the Task Force (and any work groups it calls upon), as it builds an implementation solution and plan that:

- Centers equity and the student experience;
- Allocates the resources (e.g., time, people, technology) necessary for an implementation of this magnitude;
- Engages the UC and CSU;
- Benefits from knowledge held by C-ID stakeholders;
- Draws on experiences from other states to inform the “nuts and bolts” of CCN;
- Takes a holistic view of implementation that accounts for a range of concerns (e.g., outdated technologies, counseling needs, etc.); and
- Leverages the California Community Colleges and its resources, role and reach as the largest postsecondary system in the nation that can set a new standard for transfer student success.

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