MASSTRANSFER STEERING COMMITTEE

MEETING MINUTES
Meeting: Friday, May 15, 2026
1:00PM
via Zoom

QUORUM
The fourth meeting of the MassTransfer Steering Committee for the 2025-2026 academic year was held on Friday, May 15, at 1:00PM via Zoom.

The Following Committee Members were present:
Reyes Coll-Tellechea
Ryan Madison
Barry Maloney
Susan Martin
Midori Morikawa
Cristian Orellana
Nef Walker

The following representatives from the Department of Higher Education ("DHE" or "Department") were present:
Rick Riccardi, Deputy Commissioner for Academic Affairs and Student Success and Chair of the Committee
Art Esposito, Director for Academic Affairs and Student Success

CALL TO ORDER
Committee Chair Rick Riccardi, DHE's Deputy Commissioner for Academic Affairs and Student Success ("Chair Riccardi"), called the meeting to order at 1:05pm EST. He postponed approval of the Committee's February 2026 meeting minutes in the absence of a quorum.

Encouraging an open dialogue, Chair Riccardi stated that the meeting's objective was to gather feedback on possible revisions focused on streamlining transfer processes, reducing barriers for students, and improving student success outcomes.

PRESENTATION AND DISCUSSION

Rationale for Revision
Art Esposito, DHE's Director for Academic Affairs and Student Success (Director Esposito), explained that the proposed revisions to MassTransfer practices sought to improve practice and implementation rather than change Board policy or legislative language. He added that the proposed revisions were also intended to improve student support without requiring significant new financial or staffing resources.

Director Esposito stated that MassTransfer originally focused on student affordability, as the program presumed that students would save money by beginning their postsecondary educational pathways at lower-cost community colleges before transferring to a four-year, baccalaureate institution. He stated, however, that MassTransfer may now shift its primary focus from affordability over to student progression and success because recent affordability initiatives administered through the Office of

Student Financial Assistance such as MassEducate have made public higher education much more affordable.

Director Esposito continued by pointing out another early goal of MassTransfer: system universality across all 28 Massachusetts public undergraduate institutions. He explained that the Commonwealth's public institutions of higher education function as a federation of independent institutions rather than as a centralized university system with 28 satellite campuses. He concluded by pointing out that, while this independence provides necessary flexibility and institutional identity, it also creates challenges for universal course alignment and transfer pathways.

Director Esposito also stated that, as MassTransfer evolved, additional benefits and programmatic layers unintentionally created greater complexity. He noted that existing tools and website structures are often institution-centered, staff-centered, and regulatory in nature rather than student-centered and descriptive.

Director Esposito concluded the case for revising MassTransfer by emphasizing that the program is fundamentally built on faculty collaboration around course equivalencies. He noted that faculty and academic leadership have not been centrally involved in MassTransfer discussions in recent years and that re-engaging them would be critical moving forward.

Associate-to-Bachelor's (A2B) Pathways: Challenges

Director Esposito discussed the history and ongoing challenges associated with Associate-to-Bachelor's (A2B) pathways, which were originally developed as part of the MassTransfer initiative and became publicly available in 2012 to help students understand how community college coursework transfers into specific bachelor's degree programs. He stated that there is currently a limited number of mapped pathways, which limits student awareness of possible areas of study across the segments.

Director Esposito distinguished between mapped pathways, which include articulated coursework and detailed guidance on their applicability, and linked agreements, which function more as traditional articulation agreements between one community college and one baccalaureate institution ("institutional dyads") without clearly identifying how individual courses transfer or are applied. He noted that institutional dyads have chosen to adopt a far larger number of linked agreements than they have mapped agreements, which limits transparency.

He also explained that universal adoption across all institutions has been difficult because each campus defines major requirements differently, making it challenging to identify universally accepted lower-division coursework. Finally, Director Esposito discussed the evolution of the "transfer as a junior" concept, noting that while students may transfer with junior registration status, many pathways emphasize general education coursework over major-specific progression, which can lead to transfer students falling out of lockstep with non-transfer juniors within their major.

Proposed Revisions for A2B Pathway Maps

Director Esposito indicated that the proposed revision for building A2B pathway maps would be to focus on regional partnerships in order to designate a larger number of courses in the major. He argued that under the regionally connected dyad model, students "transferring a junior" would be less likely to lose credits.

Committee Feedback
Nef Walker, Senior Vice President of Academic Affairs; UMass President's Office, asked whether the Department had considered technological interventions to address dissonance between A2B pathways and articulation agreements.

Chair Riccardi responded that the Department had recently discussed these possibilities with the Department's Chief Innovation Officer and Innovation Hub. He noted that "credit mobility" initiatives are being explored, including potential uses of AI to analyze transfer equivalencies, support pathway development, and assist in mapping student learning outcomes. He referenced practices from other states, including examples where AI tools were being used to assist in large-scale articulation analysis. Finally, he emphasized that credit mobility extends beyond MassTransfer and includes Early College Credits and other forms of academic mobility.

Committee member Reyes Coll-Tellechea raised concerns about the feasibility of broad alignment across majors, suggesting that rigid systemwide alignment may only work effectively in highly regulated fields such as Health sciences, Engineering, and certain sciences.

Chair Riccardi responded that this dynamic nature of curriculum actually reinforced the need for more flexible, institution-based partnerships rather than rigid statewide structures. He noted that institution-to-institution relationships may better accommodate ongoing curricular evolution.

Committee Member Barry Maloney, President of Worcester State University, sought to amplify Committee Member Walker's encouragement to embrace technology-forward solutions. He also agreed with the call to reengage faculty, noting that this was the approach taken at the beginning of MassTransfer initiatives and faculty were pleased to be asked to participate.

Committee Member Maloney emphasized that general education curricula are also evolving rapidly. He noted growing emphasis on experiential learning, internships, and co-op models. He also stressed the importance of treating general education as a dynamic and foundational component of transfer policy.

Director Esposito acknowledged that the Gen Ed Foundation had not been comprehensively reviewed since 2012 and agreed that revisiting it was necessary. He reiterated the importance of re-engaging faculty and academic leadership in these conversations.

Before the Committee moved onto a new topic, Committee Member Maloney also raised concerns about potential implications on general education from the push for reduced-credit bachelor's degree, emphasizing the importance of preserving strong general education foundations.

The Commonwealth Commitment ("ComCom")
Director Esposito explained that the Commonwealth Commitment ("ComCom") program was established in 2016 through a memorandum of understanding among the higher education segments and then-Commissioner of Higher Education Carlos Santiago. He pointed out that program's addition of financial incentives to existing MassTransfer benefits both increased complexity of programmatic implementation and made eligibility requirements more stringent. He stated that the full-time enrollment requirement may unintentionally disadvantage many community college students given that most are enrolled part-time. He further stated that implementation had become more regulatory and compliance-driven rather than transfer-student centered.

Proposed Recommendation: Reframing Commonwealth Commitment
Director Esposito proposed reshaping ComCom into a more flexible joint admission partnership. The key elements of the redesign would be:

- the student's commitment to a transfer pathway between their community college and a State University or UMass campus as early as possible in the first 30 credits of study
- partner institutions would coordinate services and messaging for the student to support degree completion at each institution as well as the seamless transfer of credit
- eligibility would be based on the student's completion of an associate degree bearing the MassTransfer GenEd Foundation.

Director Esposito shared that revisions to ComCom and MassTransfer more broadly would reduce rigid pathway and enrollment requirements, increase student participation, improve early academic planning, enhance partnerships between the dyad institutions, and increase degree completion at both community college and state universities.

Committee Feedback
Committee Member Maloney noted that ComCom was developed before Free Community College programs existed and questioned whether the program still served its original purpose. He suggested that it might instead be focused on workforce-critical disciplines such as nursing.

Committee Member Maloney also emphasized that insufficient marketing and communication limited student awareness and participation. He argued that students often do not understand the financial benefits of accelerated completion pathways.

Chair Riccardi agreed and proposed adding marketing resources and Director Esposito emphasized the need to communicate transfer opportunities more effectively and acknowledged longstanding frustration regarding lack of student awareness. He also discussed the importance of flexible enrollment structures that account for summer coursework and the availability of inter intersessions to support the needs of part-time students.

Committee Member Ryan Madison suggested implementing AI agents or chatbots within MassTransfer websites to provide more engaging and responsive student support.

Director Esposito responded positively and referenced the broader initiative to expand AI capabilities across the executive branches of state government.

Chair Riccardi noted that coordination across institutions would be essential to ensure consistency of information among departmental and campus-based AI systems.

Committee Member Walker reiterated the importance of student-centered communication and shared preliminary findings from UMass transfer student research. Offering to share their research with the DHE, she pointed out that, according to their findings, many transfer students demonstrated limited understanding of MassTransfer programs and benefits.

Committee Member Midori Morikawa raised questions about how joint admission partnerships would function operationally from the student perspective. She asked whether the partnership model would

require rigid completion commitments or allow flexibility based on student circumstances, suggesting the latter as the truly student-centered approach.

Director Esposito emphasized that academic advising has increasingly adopted student-centered frameworks focused on lived experiences and individualized planning. He stressed the importance of early academic planning and career exploration as well as longitudinal advising support for success and completion and the provision of flexible pathways.

Chair Riccardi added that current Commonwealth Commitment language already frames the arrangement as a mutual commitment between students and the Commonwealth.

Common Course Numbering

Director Esposito shared that the FY2025 Massachusetts budget directed DHE to implement common course numbering, building upon the existing internal "MAST" system. He stated that while DHE, like many other states, previously favored a searchable course equivalency database over fully standardized numbers, that system lacked faculty input and was designed only for the community colleges. Director Esposito stated that, in response to the legislature's mandate, DHE recommends convening faculty across the public higher education segments to collaboratively map course equivalencies based on learning outcomes and content.

Chair Riccardi then noted that some disciplines had already organically aligned courses through faculty collaboration. He stressed that the true issue is not identical numbering but meaningful equivalencies.

Committee Member Susan Martin noted that variations among prefixes, numbering systems, and course credits create challenges. She acknowledged the time-sensitive nature of building trust and alignment among faculty, adding that conversations around equivalencies often require extensive negotiation and relationship building.

Director Esposito agreed and emphasized the importance of respecting faculty expertise and disciplinary knowledge.

Committee Member Maloney suggested that pilot projects may be the best approach for testing new models before broader implementation.

Chair Riccardi agreed that more regulated disciplines might provide useful starting points because they already contain stronger curricular guardrails.

Director Esposito concluded by reiterating the importance of flexible, bottom-up approaches that allow "systemness" to emerge organically from successful institutional partnerships rather than from top-down mandates.

Adjournment

The meeting adjourned at 3:30

Documents used during the meeting are available at:
https://www.mass.edu/strategic/masstransfer_committee.asp