COMMUNITY COLLEGE S-STEM NETWORK

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S-STEM STRATEGY BRIEF

CCSN Mission:

The Community College S-STEM Network (CCSN) connects and supports researchers and practitioners in conducting and translating research on how students navigate STEM pathways into evidence-based practices, programs, and policies.

Using National Student Clearinghouse Data to Track Community College STEM Transfer Students

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Introduction

Community colleges often want to know what happens to their students after they leave their programs. National Student Clearinghouse (NSC) StudentTracker data allow institutions to follow their students to other colleges and universities across the country, providing a more complete picture of transfer and completion than internal records alone.

Colleges use these data to demonstrate accountability, guide program improvement, and secure funding. For STEM programs, NSC data highlight which pathways and destinations support student success. For S-STEM programs, StudentTracker provides a way to follow scholarship recipients after they leave the college—making it possible to track transfer rates, degree completion, and long-term outcomes that align with program goals and reporting requirements.

With more than 97 percent of US higher education institutions reporting to NSC—including nearly all community colleges, public four-year colleges and universities, and most private not-for-profit institutions—StudentTracker is one of the most comprehensive data tools available. Many states and consortia also fund statewide NSC access, making this resource accessible to community colleges.

What can STEM and S-STEM Programs Learn from NSC Data?

At Polk State College in Florida, faculty and staff wanted to better understand the educational journeys of STEM students after they left the college. Key questions included:

- Which colleges and universities do STEM student most frequently transfer to?
- What proportion of students transfer out of state?
- Which majors or programs do transfer students choose?
- How many students graduate from their new institutions, and with what degrees?
- How many students go on to graduate and professional schools?
- How can we track students who transfer without first earning and associate's degree?

For S-STEM programs, these same questions provide critical insight into whether and how scholarship recipients continue in STEM, where they transfer, and how their trajectories align with program goals.

How NSC Data Are Reported

NSC provides student-level enrollment and degree data. Each record includes institutional details (name, state, sector), enrollment dates, and majors. Over time, records are updated to include degrees earned. Student data are reported semester by semester and follow students through graduate and professional schools.

Student ID	College Name	State	Level	Sector	Start Date	End Date	Major	Other variables are available
Sample Entry	*University of Washington*	*WA*	*4-yr*	*Public*	*Fall 2022*	*Spring 2024*	*Aerospace Engineering*	

This allows colleges to track students regardless of whether they transferred with an associate degree, stopped out and later re-enrolled, or moved across state lines.

How Colleges Use Student Tracker Data: A Case Study

At Polk State College, the institutional research office is the primary office responsible for NSC tracking, analysis, and reporting. This office partners with faculty and advising staff to develop research questions of interest and analyze specific data to answer these questions. At Polk State, NSC data have been applied in three main ways:

Advising

- Identifying which transfer destinations and majors showed the highest numbers of student transfers.
- Identifying which transfer destinations and majors showed the highest numbers and percentages of students subsequently graduating with a bachelor's degree.
- Understanding which math sequences and prerequisite courses best prepare students for specific STEM programs.
- Helping students identify "best-fit" institutions and majors based on their academic profiles.

Marketing and Communication

- Sharing transfer and completion outcomes in fast facts, factbooks, and promotional materials.
- Highlighting top transfer destinations within the state and nationwide, across both public and private institutions.

S-STEM Program Evaluation

- Tracking scholarship recipients' outcomes after leaving the college.
- Reporting how many S-STEM students transferred, where they went, and whether they earned additional degrees.
- Broadening the definition of success beyond associate degree completion to include successful transfer and persistence in STEM.

Lessons Learned

Polk State's analysis of NSC data for STEM students revealed several important insights. First, there was more geographic diversity than expected: Students transferred to a wider range of institutions—and in more states than faculty and advisors had expected. Also surprising was that more students than anticipated enrolled at private nonprofit universities after leaving the community college, leading to more outreach efforts and partnership building at those institutions.

For S-STEM grant reporting, Polk State was able to provide accurate transfer metrics in its annual reports and evaluations and demonstrate progress toward key goals focused on improving STEM transfer. These lessons encouraged faculty and advisors to help students build strong, broadly applicable skill sets to prepare them for success at a broad range of transfer institutions.

Conclusion

NSC StudentTracker is a powerful tool for community colleges. For STEM programs, these data highlight effective pathways and inform advising and curriculum decisions. For S-STEM programs, StudentTracker provides a concrete way to track scholarship recipients beyond graduation or transfer from the college—helping programs demonstrate impact, refine strategies, and tell a more complete story of student success.

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