Vision 2030 Learner Mobility and Bachelor's Attainment Study

Executive Findings Memo

A study of bachelor's degree attainment among Tri-C students who transferred to five partner universities, 2014–2024.

Summary

Tri-C's transfer pathway to its five major partner universities is performing at meaningful scale, and at completion rates well above what is typical for community-college-to-university transfer. Among the 12,562 students who transferred to one of the five focus universities between 2014 and 2018, 67.9 percent earned a bachelor's degree from the partner institution within six years and 72.5 percent earned one from any institution. The aggregate result supports Vision 2030's framing of Tri-C as a mobility engine for Northeast Ohio.

Within that result, completion rates differ meaningfully across the five partners and across student groups. Cleveland State and Kent State together receive two of every three Tri-C transferees to a focus institution and serve the largest populations of Pell, Black, Hispanic, and adult-learner students; outcomes at those two universities therefore have the largest absolute impact on Tri-C's overall profile. The single strongest predictor of bachelor's completion is whether a student moves directly from Tri-C to a partner university without first attending another institution. This is also the factor Tri-C is best positioned to influence. Substantial completion gaps appear by race, Pell status, and age at transfer, and a portion of those gaps appears to be associated with what happens after students arrive at the partner institution rather than whether they reach it.

Three areas of action follow from these findings: making direct, dual-admission transfer the standard pathway for students bound for a partner university; concentrating sustained completion support on the populations whose outcomes show the greatest opportunity for improvement, anchored at Cleveland State; and establishing a regular outcomes-data exchange with each of the five partners so that progress can be reviewed and adjusted in close to real time.

Purpose

This report examines how effectively Tri-C serves as a starting point for students who go on to earn a bachelor's degree at one of five major partner universities. It addresses five questions: how many Tri-C students enroll at these institutions, how many persist and earn a bachelor's degree, which pre-transfer factors most strongly predict success, where inequities exist in transfer and completion outcomes, and which institutional actions Tri-C should take in the next twelve months. The analysis describes patterns in the data; it is not a causal study, and it is intended to inform strategic decision-making.

Method

The analysis covers 30,792 Tri-C students who transferred to one of the five partner universities — The Ohio State University, Cleveland State University, Kent State University, Baldwin Wallace University, and Case Western Reserve University — between 2014 and 2024. After excluding 1,977 students who already held a bachelor's degree before

transfer, 28,815 records remain. Completion rates are calculated on the 12,562 students who transferred between 2014 and 2018, the cohorts old enough to have a full six-year follow-up window. Post-Tri-C enrollment and degree information come from National Student Clearinghouse records combined with Tri-C's own data. A separate Methods Appendix documents data sources, definitions, and limitations in full.

Findings

Volume and reach

Across the ten calendar years from 2014 through 2024, 30,792 Tri-C students transferred to one of the five focus institutions, a meaningful population at the scale of Cuyahoga County's post-secondary system. Cleveland State received 38.3 percent of these students, Kent State 25.8 percent, Ohio State (main and regional campuses combined) 21.6 percent, Baldwin Wallace 10.2 percent, and Case Western Reserve 4.0 percent. Cleveland State and Kent State together account for roughly two of every three Tri-C transfers to a focus institution. Any improvement at those two universities will move the largest absolute number of Tri-C students.

The table below summarizes the full pathway for each partner.

Partner institution	Ever enrolled	2014–18 n	Direct transfer	Indirect transfer	1-yr persist.	BA at partner	BA any	Time to transfer (yrs)	Time to degree (yrs)
The Ohio State University	6,500	2,310	76.4%	23.6%	94.5%	83.7%	87.0%	0.3	2.3
Cleveland State University	11,717	5,045	65.6%	34.4%	81.2%	63.4%	68.2%	0.7	2.3
Kent State University	7,929	3,277	67.2%	32.8%	84.6%	63.9%	69.7%	0.7	2.3
Baldwin Wallace University	3,121	1,411	79.6%	20.4%	88.9%	76.4%	79.5%	0.3	1.3
Case Western Reserve University	1,525	519	56.6%	43.4%	86.5%	42.8%	48.6%	0.7	2.3

Ever enrolled is the count of all Tri-C students who transferred to that partner between 2014 and 2024 (30,792 total across the five partners). Other columns are calculated on the 2014–2018 cohorts, which are old enough to have a full six-year follow-up window. Direct transfer means the student went straight from Tri-C to the partner without first attending another institution and without a long break. Indirect transfer covers all other paths — a delay before resuming, enrollment at another college first, or a combination.

Bachelor's attainment

For the 12,562 students who transferred between 2014 and 2018, 67.9 percent earned a bachelor's degree from the partner institution they transferred to within six years, and 72.5 percent earned a bachelor's degree from any institution within the same window. One-year persistence at the partner institution is 85.6 percent overall, indicating that students who reach a partner institution generally stay long enough to make the early transition. Among students who eventually completed a bachelor's degree, the median time from partner-institution transfer to bachelor's award is approximately 2.3 years, consistent with a population arriving with substantial Tri-C credit.

The aggregate 67.9 percent rate is well above what national community-college transfer outcomes would lead one to expect. It also masks meaningful differences across the five partners: Ohio State at 83.7 percent (highest), Baldwin Wallace at 76.4 percent, Kent State at 63.9 percent, Cleveland State at 63.4 percent, and Case Western Reserve at 42.8 percent. The Case Western rate reflects a meaningfully different student population, discussed further in the section on each partner below.

Time-window detail

The two tables below show how quickly students transfer to a partner after their last Tri-C term, and how quickly they complete a bachelor's degree after transferring. Transfer timing is calculated across all 28,815 transfer events. Completion timing is calculated on the 12,562 students in the 2014–2018 cohorts, so that the same group of students appears in every column.

Partner institution	n	Transferred within 1 yr	Within 3 yrs	Within 5 yrs	Within 8 yrs
The Ohio State University	6,235	75.3%	93.7%	98.0%	99.2%
Cleveland State University	11,042	66.1%	88.5%	94.2%	97.8%
Kent State University	7,433	66.3%	87.0%	92.5%	96.7%
Baldwin Wallace University	2,951	79.0%	94.2%	96.6%	98.2%
Case Western Reserve University	1,154	53.7%	78.9%	89.7%	94.9%
All five partners	**28,815**	**69.0%**	**89.4%**	**94.7%**	**97.7%**

Share of all transferees who reached a partner university within the time window shown. The 2014–2016 cohorts have a full eight years of follow-up; later cohorts have only partial follow-up.

The completion table shows the share of the 2014–2018 cohort who had earned a bachelor's at the partner within each time window. The final column repeats the six-year rate used elsewhere in this report.

Partner institution	n	BA within 2 yrs	Within 4 yrs	Within 6 yrs	Six-year rate
The Ohio State University	2,310	26.7%	74.9%	82.5%	83.7%
Cleveland State University	5,045	21.6%	53.4%	61.0%	63.4%
Kent State University	3,277	26.2%	56.0%	61.7%	63.9%
Baldwin Wallace University	1,411	48.7%	73.6%	75.8%	76.4%
Case Western Reserve University	519	17.9%	39.5%	42.0%	42.8%
All five partners	**12,562**	**26.6%**	**59.7%**	**66.0%**	**67.9%**

Bachelor's degrees earned at the partner university, by the time elapsed since transfer. The final column is the headline six-year rate referenced throughout this report.

Because the data run through 2024, the eight-year transfer window cannot be fully measured for the most recent cohorts; the eight-year row should be read as close to a complete picture rather than a final one. Eight-year completion rates are not reported because they would require data extending to 2026.

What predicts who finishes

Several factors are associated with higher bachelor's completion. These are patterns in the data, not proven causes.

Pre-transfer factor	6-yr completion	What the comparison shows
Transferred directly to the focus institution	77.7%	The strongest pattern in the data. Students who attended another college before reaching the partner complete at 40.1%; the gap grows with longer delays.
Tri-C GPA 3.0 to 3.49	73.6%	Students with a GPA of 2.0 to 2.49 complete at 59.5%. The 3.50–4.00 band completes at 72.5%, slightly below the 3.0–3.49 band — consistent with high-GPA students including a number of brief-stay College Credit Plus students.

Pre-transfer factor	6-yr completion	What the comparison shows
Earned a Tri-C associate degree before transfer	71.7%	Students without an associate at transfer complete at 67.0%. The associate's effect is most visible when paired with timely transfer; the credential and the transfer reinforce each other.
Completed both gateway courses (college math and English)	68.3%	Students who completed neither gateway complete at 64.6%. College math alone (69.2%) shows a slightly stronger association than college English alone (68.3%).
Pell recipient at Tri-C (aid receipt)	60.1%	Non-Pell students complete at 70.6%, a 10.5-point gap. This gap is one of the three largest in the data, alongside age and race.
Tri-C credits earned: 45+	70.2%	Examined as a possible predictor; the relationship with completion is uneven. Students with 1–12 earned credits also complete at 70.1%, while the 13–36 credit bands complete at 64–65%. Students with zero earned credits complete at 42.9%.
Course load: full-time at Tri-C	70.4%	Examined as a possible predictor; full-time enrollment is not among the strongest patterns. Three-quarter-time and half-time students complete at 61.7% and 60.2% respectively. Less-than-half-time students complete at 72.3%, a result driven largely by short-stay College Credit Plus students taking individual courses while still in high school.
Age 20 to 24 at transfer	73.4%	Students aged 25 to 29 complete at 49.2%; aged 30 to 39 at 45.4%; 40–49 at 44.8%. Age at transfer is the largest single gap of any kind in the data.

The route and timing of transfer is the single strongest pattern in the data, and it is the factor Tri-C is best positioned to influence. GPA, earning a Tri-C associate degree, completing college-level math and English, and aid receipt are each clearly associated with stronger completion. Two factors that might be expected to matter — total credits earned at Tri-C and full-time enrollment status — were examined and did not show a strong relationship with completion at the population level.

Equity patterns

Bachelor's-completion differences across student groups are substantial, appear at every partner university, and are not fully explained by differences in academic preparation before transfer. They reflect the conditions students encounter before, during, and after the transfer itself.

Group	n	Bachelor's rate	Gap vs. reference
White students (reference)	8,649	72.3%	—
Black students	2,071	49.7%	−22.5 pp
Hispanic students	500	69.2%	−3.0 pp
Asian students	578	69.7%	−2.5 pp
Non-Pell (reference)	9,342	70.6%	—
Pell recipients	3,220	60.1%	−10.5 pp
Age 18–19 (reference)	2,831	77.2%	—
Age 25–29 at transfer	1,483	49.2%	−28.0 pp
Age 30–39 at transfer	1,035	45.4%	−31.8 pp

The age gap is the largest of the three, reflecting the realities of adult-learner transfer — balancing work, family, financing, schedule constraints, and the need for a clear return on time invested. The Black–White completion gap is

substantial and concentrates at the partner institutions enrolling the largest absolute numbers of Black Tri-C transferees. The Pell gap reinforces the importance of financial-aid continuity and avoiding excess-credit accumulation. Part of these completion differences is associated with what happens after students arrive at the partner university, not only with whether they reach it. Students who make it to the second year still show meaningful differences in whether they ultimately complete. Equity work that stops at the moment of transfer is therefore likely to be less effective than work that continues into the upper-division years.

Trends across the ten-year window

Three trends are visible across the ten-year window. First, annual transfer volume to the five partners has held roughly steady, with no consistent year-over-year decline. The Tri-C pipeline to these universities is not shrinking. Second, one-year persistence at the partner universities has been remarkably stable at about 85 percent across cohorts, indicating that the early-transfer transition has been working consistently well. Third, and most importantly for the recommended actions, the share of students who reach the partner directly — without a delay or an intervening institution — has slipped modestly over the period. Because direct movement is the single strongest predictor of completion in the data, this is worth watching, and it is the kind of indicator a regular outcomes review with partners is well-suited to track.

Institutional implications

Each partner serves a meaningfully different Tri-C population, and the right approach to each is different.

Cleveland State University (n=5,045; 63.4% completion)

Tri-C's largest pathway by volume and the most demographically representative of the five. CSU receives the largest share of Pell, Black, Hispanic, and adult-learner transferees of any partner, and the Cleveland State transferee population most closely resembles Tri-C's overall student body. The Black–White completion gap of 48.2 percent versus 68.3 percent is the largest in absolute terms in the dataset, both because of the size of the difference and because of the volume of students it affects.

Several formal transfer agreements already exist between Tri-C and Cleveland State, including Degree Link dual admission, A2CSU 2+2 articulation, automatic completion of CSU's Inquiry Core for AA/AS graduates, and the Pathways to Practice program for educator preparation. The direct-transfer share at Cleveland State is 65.6 percent, below the rates at Ohio State and Baldwin Wallace; this means a meaningful share of CSU transferees are arriving only after a delay or after attending another college. Because Cleveland State is the highest-volume partner, work concentrated there has the largest impact on Tri-C's overall numbers.

Kent State University (n=3,277; 63.9% completion)

Tri-C's second-largest pathway, with a younger and lower-Pell transferee population than Cleveland State and a comparable six-year completion rate. The race-specific completion pattern at Kent State closely tracks the Cleveland State pattern, with White completion at 68.5 percent and Black completion at 47.8 percent.

The most distinctive feature of the Kent State data is that only 8.7 percent of Kent State transferees earned a Tri-C associate degree before transferring, the lowest such share among the partners. Most students appear to use Tri-C as

a place to bank credits rather than to earn a credential, even though the Ohio Guaranteed Transfer Pathways framework would make the associate-to-bachelor's transition straightforward. The most useful emphasis at Kent State is reducing the share of Kent-bound students who arrive only after a delay or after attending another college. A complementary second emphasis is encouraging Kent-bound students to complete a Tri-C associate degree before they leave.

The Ohio State University (n=2,310; 83.7% completion)

Demographically distinct from every other partner. About a quarter of Tri-C's OSU transferees attended Tri-C as College Credit Plus students — that is, as high-school students taking college courses for credit. Pell receipt is the lowest of any partner, average age at transfer is the youngest, and the average number of Tri-C credit hours earned before transfer is comparatively low. The OSU pipeline functions largely as a head-start route for high-school-aged students rather than as a traditional community-college transfer destination. The strong completion outcome — 83.7 percent, the highest of the five partners — appears to reflect the population that OSU serves more than a unique advantage of the OSU pathway itself.

The Black–White completion difference at OSU is the smallest of the five partners, and one-year persistence is the highest. Because the OSU population is reached primarily through College Credit Plus rather than through traditional transfer, the most useful work with OSU centers on access rather than completion: strengthening College Credit Plus partnerships with Cleveland-area high schools, and explicitly building OSU-bound CCP cohorts among underrepresented populations, would expand access to a high-completion route for students who are not currently reaching it.

Baldwin Wallace University (n=1,411; 76.4% completion)

Sits between Cleveland State and Ohio State on most demographic dimensions, with stronger pre-transfer academic preparation than Cleveland State and a meaningful associate-completion share. Baldwin Wallace produces the second-highest bachelor's completion rate among the five partners, and both direct transfer and associate-degree completion appear to operate strongly here. The A2BW articulated pathway and Baldwin Wallace's Phi Theta Kappa Transfer Honor Roll designation are visible in the strength of these outcomes.

Baldwin Wallace transferees also finish their degrees faster than transferees at the other partners: 48.7 percent of those who transferred between 2014 and 2018 had earned a bachelor's within two years, roughly twice the share at any other partner over the same window. The combination of strong six-year completion, faster time to degree, and smaller numbers makes Baldwin Wallace the most natural pilot site for the named-cohort program proposed in the second action below — shared advising, financial-aid support, and explicit upper-division supports tested with a defined group of Tri-C students. Results would arrive sooner than at any other partner. The value of a Baldwin Wallace pilot is in speed and replicability, not scale.

Case Western Reserve University (n=519; 42.8% completion)

The smallest of the five partners, and meaningfully different from the others in ways that affect how the completion numbers should be read. The 519 students who transferred to Case Western between 2014 and 2018 did not all arrive through a single, conventional transfer pathway. A substantial share came through program-specific arrangements such as the Cleveland Humanities Collaborative and STEM articulation agreements, which operate

more like joint-enrollment programs than traditional transfers. Standard six-year completion rates are an imperfect fit for this population.

The gap between first-year persistence and six-year completion at Case Western is the largest in the study: 86.5 percent persist through the first year — the second-highest rate among the five partners — yet only 42.8 percent finish the degree within six years. The pre-transfer Tri-C GPA among Case Western transferees is also the highest of any partner, which makes the completion rate more puzzling at first glance and more worth investigating closely. A focused review of the Case Western pathway, before any expansion of it, is a more productive next step than drawing firm conclusions from the headline rate.

Possible Recommendations

Three areas of action follow from these findings. They reinforce one another: the first strengthens the pathway before transfer, the second extends support through the upper-division years at the partner, and the third builds the data infrastructure that allows both to be monitored and improved.

1. Make direct, dual-admission transfer the standard pathway for partner-bound students

Going straight from Tri-C to a partner university, without a delay or a stop at another institution, is the single strongest predictor of completing a bachelor's degree. Making this the standard pathway — supported by the advising, registration, and credit-articulation systems already in place — is therefore the action with the largest expected effect on completion. The two largest-volume vehicles are dual admission with Cleveland State (Degree Link) and a parallel arrangement with Kent State, where the Ohio Guaranteed Transfer Pathways framework provides the articulation foundation. The most useful near-term steps are growing dual-admission enrollment, with particular attention to Black students, Pell-eligible students, and adult learners, and reducing the share of partner-bound students who arrive only after a delay or after attending another college. In parallel, expanding College Credit Plus partnerships with Cleveland-area high schools — especially those serving underrepresented students — opens a complementary route into the Ohio State pathway, where College Credit Plus students already drive much of the high completion outcome. Both approaches share the same underlying principle: bringing partner-bound students into a structured pathway as early as possible.

Vision 2030 pillar: *Align Path and Purpose.*

2. Concentrate sustained completion support on the populations with the largest gaps, anchored at Cleveland State

The three largest completion gaps in the data are for Black students, Pell-eligible students, and adult learners aged twenty-five and older. A portion of each gap persists into the upper-division years rather than closing at the moment of transfer. A named, jointly staffed completion-support program with Cleveland State — focused on these students and modeled on the existing Pathways to Practice program, broadened to additional majors — would address these patterns directly. Useful design components include cohort advising at Tri-C before transfer, named transfer coordinators on the Cleveland State side, structured supports through the second and third years after transfer, and a regular outcomes review with shared accountability between the two institutions.

Vision 2030 pillars: *Activate People and Potential; Amplify Community Impact.*

3. Establish a regular partner-institution outcomes data exchange and review

A recurring data-sharing arrangement with each of the five partner universities — covering post-transfer enrollment status, term GPA, milestone completion, and bachelor's-degree attainment — would give Tri-C and its partners a feedback loop they currently lack. A quarterly refresh, paired with a standing review meeting between Tri-C's Institutional Research office and each partner's transfer office, would make it possible to spot students who are falling behind and act sooner. The recurring report should display outcomes broken out by race, Pell status, age group, and whether the student transferred directly — routinely, rather than only on special request.

Vision 2030 pillars: *Sharper use of data; foundational to all three pillars.*

Conclusion

These three actions are best taken in sequence rather than all at once. The first six months belong to the data exchange, because it is what allows the other two actions to be reviewed against outcomes rather than against activity. Establishing a quarterly rhythm with each partner, agreeing on a shared definition of milestone completion, and producing the first joint outcomes report would close the most important gap in the current operating environment. The next six months are best spent expanding direct-transfer enrollment with Cleveland State and Kent State, and designing the named-cohort completion program with Cleveland State, drawing on the Pathways to Practice model. The data exchange is also where the slow downward drift in direct transfer can be tracked over time, so that Tri-C can see whether the share of students arriving directly is recovering, holding, or continuing to slip. A first full read on whether the work is producing visible gains is twelve to twenty-four months out, depending on cohort timing. None of this requires a perfect data environment to begin, and each step can be designed in a way that respects the College's current operating capacity.