



Admissions Redesign **Decision Points**

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ADMISSIONS REDESIGN DECISION POINTS

Admissions redesigns are emerging rapidly in states and postsecondary systems. Policymakers and/or postsecondary systems administrators have opportunities to enhance admissions processes and policies to ensure an accessible and inclusive experience for students, particularly student populations that have historically found these processes challenging. To facilitate the adoption and implementation of admissions redesigns, we offer decision points for states and systems to consider in determining what policies they might want to develop to lessen the barriers in the admissions process to a postsecondary education.

Decision Point 1.

At what postsecondary governance level will the admissions redesign be adopted?

Admissions redesign can take place at the state, system, or institutional level. Deciding which level makes sense can be influenced by multiple factors, including the postsecondary education governance and coordination structures in the state, the level of existing collaboration across postsecondary education agencies and systems, and the overall goals of the redesign. For example, Arizona's three large universities operate independently, despite the Arizona Board of Regent's oversight role, and Northern Arizona University's Universal Admissions program is not required through state statute, so the university adopted the admission redesign at the institutional level, coordinating with interested community colleges. In contrast, California has three postsecondary systems (California Community College System, California State University (CSU) System, and University of California (UC) System), leading to admissions reforms at the system level. Finally, Idaho Campus Choice provides an example of a statewide admissions redesign as it is required under [State Board Policy IIIQ](#) and managed by the Office of the Idaho State Board of Education (OSBE).

Questions to Consider:

- Does your state have a statewide coordinating board/agency or governing board?
- Does your state have one or more systemwide coordinating or governing board(s)?
- To what degree do your state's postsecondary institutions act independently or in a coordinated way?



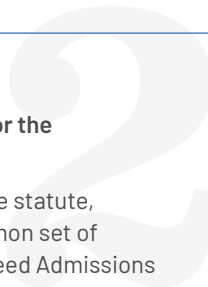
Decision Point 2.

What, if any, policy authorization is needed for the admissions redesign?

Some admissions redesigns are based on state statute, regulation, or board policy that include a common set of requirements across campuses (e.g., Guaranteed Admissions programs require institutions to accept students who meet the shared eligibility criteria) while other redesigns that simply streamline the process may not require policy change (e.g., System Admissions redesign allows students to apply to multiple institutions with a single application). A policy mandate can incentivize institutional participation in redesign efforts and may provide funding to support reform, but legislative processes are often time-consuming and not always successful, which may slow reforms or stop them all together. At the same time, states and systems lacking policy mandates will need to develop clear guidance and generate buy-in among stakeholders.

Questions to Consider:

- Does the state's current political climate include support for postsecondary admissions redesign?
- Are there existing political leaders at the state or system level who would champion such reform?
- Would the state or system be able to build the necessary buy-in across institutions to create redesign without a policy mandate?



Decision Point 3.

What will be the scope of the redesign?

The scope of admissions redesigns vary by 1) the range of *school districts or individual high schools* included (all or only participating school districts or high schools), 2) *the types of postsecondary institutions* included (public and/or private two-year institutions and/or four-year institutions) and 3) whether participation in the program is available to all students in participating schools districts or high schools or only those who chose to opt-in). A number of other factors can influence the scope of the redesign, including the requirements of any state or system policies in place and the degree to which individual student data on high school achievement is available to state postsecondary agencies or system offices.

Questions to Consider:

- Are there state or system policies in place that will influence the scope of the redesign? If so, what are their requirements?
- What data systems and cross-sector agreements are in place that might facilitate a broader scope for the redesign?
- Does the state or system want to include public and/or private two and/or four-year institutions? What portion of school districts or high schools would be included?

Decision Point 4.

What admissions criteria will be used?

In order to notify students about either their eligibility for or acceptance to a college or university, systems and states need to determine 1) whether eligibility indicators and thresholds will be consistent or vary across four-year institutions and 2) what the eligibility indicators will include (e.g., high school GPA, class rank, standardized college admissions exam scores, high school coursework), as well as thresholds (e.g., 3.5 GPA).

Questions to Consider:

- What academic success indicators related to high school students are available and required across school districts in the state?
- Can institutions participating in admissions redesign agree on a common set of eligibility indicators and thresholds, or will they need to vary by institution?

Decision Point 5.

How can the student data be accessed?

In order to determine whether a student is eligible for admission, the state agencies or system offices involved in the admission redesign need access to individual student achievement data and develop data sharing agreements with the parties involved. States and systems utilize several different data sources, including:

- » **State longitudinal data systems**, such as the Idaho System for Educational Excellence;
- » **State financial aid agencies**, such as the Indiana Commission for Higher Education which administers all state financial aid programs and manages the Scholar Track database;
- » **High school districts** in states like Florida that request information on student eligibility to be collected, analyzed and provided to the state or system; and
- » **Applications or self-reported data**, which are used in many redesigns such as guaranteed and system admissions.

In contrast, Direct Admissions Minnesota works with **multiple K-12 data vendors** that facilitate the connection between individual school district records and the program.

Questions to Consider:

- Does the state or system have access to data needed to proactively notify students of their eligibility and/or acceptance to state or system postsecondary institutions?
- Would the state or system need to develop data sharing agreements to collect the data required, and if so, with whom?
- Would the state or system need to rely on individual high school districts, opt-in processes, or student application data in order to move ahead with admissions redesigns?



Decision Point 6.

How will students be notified of their admission?

Some admissions redesigns (Direct, Informed, and Invitational Admissions) include *proactive notification* to students, initiated by states or systems, indicating that students are eligible for or admitted to a postsecondary institution. The other admissions redesign approaches identified in the typology still require *students to initiate* the application process. If a proactive notification strategy is adopted, states or systems will also have to determine how students will be notified.

Questions to Consider:

- Does the state or system have access to individual student contact information that allows for proactive notification?
- If the state or system will proactively notify students, what communication strategies will be used (e.g., letters, emails)? Will families and high schools also be notified?
- If students need to apply as a first step, how can the state or system eliminate barriers in the application process (e.g., allow students to apply to multiple campuses at once, minimize academic data required)?

Decision Point 7.

Are you assuring admission or eligibility for admission?

While some admissions redesigns assure students that they will be admitted to a postsecondary institution, others (e.g., Invitational Admissions) only inform students of their *eligibility* for admission without any assurance of formal acceptance. It is also common for states and systems to offer conditional acceptance, requiring students to meet additional criteria (e.g., maintain GPA).

Questions to Consider:

- Will the state or system assure qualified students of their admission to postsecondary institutions, or only invite students to apply?
- What, if any, additional conditions will students be required to meet in order to ensure admission to an institution?

Decision Point 8.

What will the application process include?

One of the key components of admissions redesigns is the simplification of the application process. While none of the programs identified eliminate the application completely, many of the Direct Admissions programs simplify the process considerably. For example, the System Admissions approach allows students to apply to multiple institutions in the same system with a single application, similar to the Common App, while others still require the traditional application process (e.g., Guaranteed Admissions).

Questions to Consider:

- What barriers exist for students in the current application processes used by postsecondary institutions in the state or system?
- How can the state or system simplify the application process to eliminate as many barriers as possible?
- If a traditional application is required, how can the state or system minimize the burden on students in completing?

Decision Point 9.

Will opt-in be required?

The Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA) protects the privacy of student education records, but also creates a barrier to the development of some admissions redesigns. As a workaround to facilitate proactive notification, many of the admissions redesigns require districts and/or students to opt-in or out of program participation. For example, admissions redesigns in Minnesota, Washington and Wisconsin require local districts or high schools *and* students to opt into program participation, while in Indiana and South Dakota, *only the district or high school* needs to opt into program participation.

Questions to Consider:

- Will the state or system need to ask districts or individual high schools to opt into an admissions redesign program? If so, what will the process involve?
- Will the state or system have to further ask individual students to opt into an admissions redesign process? If so, what will that process involve?



Decision Point 10.

Will application fees be waived?

Although waiving application fees has been identified as a key component of admissions redesign and can help to address issues of financial equity, these funds are also a revenue source for colleges and universities. While many admissions redesigns waive the application fee, there is variation across approaches, with some states and systems providing waivers for only a portion of students (e.g., students with evidence of financial need or who apply during a certain time of year).

Questions to Consider:

- Will the state or system include waivers on application fees as part of their admissions redesign?
- If so, will application fees be waived for all students, only students with particular characteristics, only during specific times of the year, or based on other student criteria?
- Will the state or system be able to help postsecondary institutions by providing transitional funding to those that have relied on application fees?

Decision Point 11.

How will implementation and continuous improvement be supported?

In order to successfully adopt and implement an admissions redesign, states, systems, and institutions undertaking these reforms need to support those engaged in the work, as well as develop systems to measure its impact to ensure ongoing evaluation and continuous improvement. More specifically: 1) a *central manager or team* is needed at the state or system and institutional levels who can devote their attention to coordinating the many aspects of the adoption and execution of the redesign; 2) *collaboration* across and within institutions participating in the redesign can create opportunities for problem solving and sharing best practices; and 3) *tracking student outcomes* related to the admissions redesign is critical to measure impact and ensure continuous improvement.

Questions to Consider:

- Has a manager or team been identified to lead the redesign? If so, will they have the capacity to coordinate the adoption and implementation? If not, who might play this role?
- Are there existing networks, communities of practice, or other working groups at the state, system, and/or institution(s) that could facilitate collaboration? If not, how might they be developed and supported?
- Are metrics and data systems in place to track student involvement in the admissions redesign? If not, how might they be developed, collect and analyze the necessary data, and utilize findings for continuous improvement?

Decision Point 12.

How will the admissions redesign be communicated to the field?

State or system postsecondary agencies need to ensure that not just high school students, but also the general public, postsecondary institutions, school districts, and other related state agencies are aware of the changes in the admissions process and their role in the reform. This is especially critical within the K12 sector; school district and high school staff involved in helping students plan for their next steps after graduation need to be well oriented to the redesigns so they can make their students aware of the opportunities available to them and provide accurate information in response to questions from students and families.

Questions to Consider:

- How will the state, system, or institution(s) communicate to the wider field about the admissions redesign? How can the messaging be customized to meet the information needs of different sectors (e.g., postsecondary, K12) and practitioners (e.g., institutional administrators, high school counselors)?
- Are there existing admissions programs similar to the redesign that might create confusion for high school counselors and college administrators, as well as students and families? If so, how can orientation campaigns ensure that practitioners and the general public clearly understand these programs and how they differ?

