



SHEEO

State Higher Education
Executive Officers Association

Quarterly Policy Review Winter 2024

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The State Higher Education Executive Officers Association (SHEEO) serves the executives of statewide governing, policy, and coordinating boards of postsecondary education and their staffs. Founded in 1954, SHEEO is celebrating its 70th anniversary in 2024. SHEEO promotes an environment that values higher education and its role in ensuring the equitable education of all Americans, regardless of race/ethnicity, gender, or socioeconomic factors. Together with its members, SHEEO aims to achieve this vision by equipping state higher education executive officers and their staffs with the tools to effectively advance the value of higher education, promoting public policies and academic practices that enable all Americans to achieve success in the 21st century, and serving as an advocate for state higher education leadership.

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INTRODUCTION

In response to the growth of state initiatives across a range of issue areas, SHEEO will be providing quarterly updates on member policy initiatives spanning key areas such as economic and workforce development, college affordability, value, completion, and other timely topics. These updates are drawn from SHEEO agency press releases, news articles, and other sources.

If you would like to include an item in a future report, please send it to Tom Harnisch, vice president for government relations, at tharnisch@sheeo.org.

ECONOMIC AND WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT

For the second year in a row, economic and workforce development topped the list of state priorities for state higher education executive officers (SHEEOs) in 2024. SHEEOs have been active on a range of economic and workforce development tailored to the needs of industry in their respective states. One theme that has emerged has been the continued interest in providing one-on-one assistance to students and prospective students as they seek to navigate the range of workforce development programs, job opportunities, and available resources. SHEEOs have worked with a wide range of federal, state, local, and private funders to develop programs in their states.

HEALTH CARE WORKFORCE EXPANSION

In September, **Arizona** Gov. Katie Hobbs announced [new investments](#) in the Arizona Board of Regents' [AZ Healthy Tomorrow Initiative](#). This initiative is a collaboration between the state's three public universities aimed at addressing the state health care workforce shortage, from physicians to nurses and other health care professionals. It includes a new engineering-focused medical school at Arizona State University, a new medical school at Northern Arizona University focused on serving rural and tribal communities, and expansion of the University of Arizona's medical campuses.

ONLINE HUB FOR EDUCATION AND TRAINING PROGRAMS

In January, **Indiana** Gov. Eric Holcomb [unveiled](#) a new website, [OneStoptoStart.IN.gov](https://onestoptostart.in.gov), which centralizes information for individuals and employers to learn more about state job training and grant programs. In addition, it matches state residents and employers with navigators who can help them navigate the process and make connections. The program is led by the Governor's Workforce Cabinet and the Indiana Economic Development Corporation in coordination with several state agencies, including the Indiana Commission for Higher Education.

FREE JOB TRAINING

In November, the University of **Hawaii** [announced](#) that more than 2,630 residents have enrolled in free training programs through the Good Jobs Hawaii initiative. The trainings, which are provided by the University of Hawaii Community Colleges, provide opportunities to upskill and earn credentials in health care, clean energy, skilled trades, and technology industries. More than \$5.5 million in tuition aid is available for the program, which provides a 100% tuition subsidy for most programs. Each participant is also paired with a Good Jobs Hawaii Navigator, providing them one-on-one support on advising, connections to employers, financial aid advising, and other services. Good Jobs Hawaii is funded through an array of federal, state, local, and private sources.

RESEARCH COMMERCIALIZATION

The University of **Hawaii** System's Office of Innovation and Commercialization [launched](#) the [Patents2Products](#) initiative last September to foster the next generation of technology innovators from the state's Ph.D. programs. This program will provide intellectual property and industry mentorship for Ph.D. candidates in the state with an emphasis on the blue economy. The project is one of three programs funded as part of a [\\$2.4 million federal grant](#) from the Office of Naval Research.

MICRO-CREDENTIALS

In September, the **Montana** Office of the Commissioner of Higher Education [unveiled](#) a partnership with Education Design Lab and the state's public two-year colleges to provide micro-credentials. The 12 participating institutions in the "Year to Career" initiative will establish 12-20 "micro-pathways" that can be achieved in less than a year. Students will be put on an academic path leading to an associate degree or job in high-demand fields, including but not limited to construction, allied health, and information technology. Initial funding for this program has been provided by the Dennis and Phyllis Washington Foundation, Walmart, the Charles Koch Foundation, and the Carnegie Foundation.

LOAN REPAYMENT

In January, **Ohio** Department of Higher Education Chancellor Mike Duffey [announced](#) a program that will help newly licensed attorneys with student debt if they work in underserved areas of the state. The [Rural Practice Incentive Program](#) provides loan relief of \$10,000 annually for a total of up to \$30,000 over three years, and can request to serve four or five years.

TEACHER WORKFORCE

In August, **Ohio** [announced](#) the addition of K-12 teachers to the list of registered apprenticeships in the state. Candidates in the program will be eligible to apply for Grow Your Own Teacher scholarships, which provides up to \$7,500 annually for four years in exchange for committing to teach in the state for four years. The project is a partnership of the Ohio Department of Higher Education (ODHE), Ohio Department of Education (ODE), and Ohio Department of Job and Family Services (ODJFS).

ADULT STUDENT ACCESS

In February, **Rhode Island** Gov. Dan McKee and Postsecondary Commissioner Shannon Gilkey [opened](#) the RI Reconnect visitor center, where students and prospective students over the age of 24 can receive help in pursuing and completing higher education, including providing career guidance and wraparound services. [Rhode Island Reconnect](#) is funded through a mix of state and federal resources and received initial support from the Lumina Foundation.

CAREER CERTIFICATES

Last August, **Pennsylvania** Gov. Josh Shapiro [announced](#) a partnership between the Pennsylvania State System of Higher Education (PASSHE) and Google that will enable PASSHE students to earn a Google career certificate during their regular undergraduate program. The career certificates include skills training in demand-fields such as cybersecurity, data analytics, digital marketing, and e-commerce. PASSHE will also be able to offer these credentials to the public through non-credit courses and workshops.

TUITION DISCOUNT

The **South Dakota** Board of Regents [announced](#) in December that state employees will receive a 50% discount for online programs starting in the Spring 2024 semester. Prior to this announcement, state employees only received the discount if they attended in person. State employees can receive the discount at the state's six public universities subject to course capacity.

PUBLIC-PRIVATE PARTNERSHIPS

In December, the **Washington** Student Achievement Council, in collaboration with the Employment Security Department, and Career Connect Washington (CCW) [unveiled](#) the recipients of the Washington Jobs Initiative Sectoral Partnerships. Nearly 3,000 state residents will receive training to help them secure jobs in construction, health care, advanced manufacturing and aerospace, clean technology and energy, and information technology and cybersecurity. The Washington Jobs Initiative is funded through a \$23.5 million [Good Jobs Challenge Grant](#) from the U.S. Department of Commerce.

COLLEGE AFFORDABILITY AND BASIC NEEDS

More than 90% of SHEEOs identified college affordability as important or very important (ranked fourth of the top 10 policy issues). Although meeting students' basic needs did not fall in the top 10 policy issues for 2024, nearly 70% of SHEEOs identified meeting these needs as an important or very important policy concern. While separate issues, they overlap in important ways, as the ability to pay for tuition and fees is only one facet of being able to afford to attend college – there are numerous costs and support services that can be barriers to student success and the ability to even participate in higher education. States, systems, and institutions have taken on roles in addressing access to food, housing, childcare, and medical or mental health services, among others through state funded programs and partnerships.

MAKING BASIC NEEDS RESOURCES PUBLICLY ACCESSIBLE

Through a partnership with New Jersey's Office of Innovation, the **New Jersey** Office of the Secretary of Higher Education (OSHE) launched an online resource for addressing students' basic needs. This website, [BasicNeeds.NJ.gov](#), provides students with information about housing, food, transportation, childcare, and other on- or off-campus supports. Students can also find eligibility and processes for seeking additional state aid on this website.

ADDRESSING FOOD INSECURITY AND THE COST OF TEXTBOOKS

The **Louisiana** Board of Regents (BOR) has approved of all public colleges and universities and private four-year colleges in the state as eligible to be designated [hunger-free campuses](#). To qualify for this designation, institutions must establish a Hunger-Free Task Force and provide a variety of resources, ranging from providing information about SNAP benefits, holding anti-hunger awareness events, and participating in or establish an on- or off-campus food pantry.

Additionally, the Louisiana BOR and Louisiana Library Network received a \$2.125 million federal grant to create the [Open Textbooks Pilot Program](#) as part of their Building a Competitive Workforce project, which is part of an even larger initiative ([Affordable Learning LOUISiana](#)) aiming to reduce the financial burden of instructional materials. The costs of textbooks can be a significant financial barrier to affording college. The Open Textbooks Pilot program is expected to save students more than \$6 million each year.

MENTAL HEALTH PARTNERSHIPS

The University of **Georgia** System (UGS) has renewed its partnership with the mental health and well-being support service, Christie Campus Health, for the third consecutive year. The UGS Mental Health Initiative has both seen utilization increases and received positive feedback. In fact, a [recent survey](#) of students who used Christie's services across the 26 public colleges and universities indicated that this partnership helped 87% of them stay enrolled.

The **New Jersey** legislature has built upon its recent [partnership](#) with Uwill to provide tele-mental health services to all public and private institutions that receive state operating aid by [passing an amendment](#) to the Madison Holleran Suicide Prevention Act. Institutions are now required to have all faculty and staff, including resident assistants (RAs), trained to understand the warning signs and risk factors for depression and suicide, as well as how to refer students to the appropriate support services.

VALUE PROPOSITION OF HIGHER EDUCATION

The value proposition of higher education (third most important policy issue) has become a topic of increasing importance among SHEEOs, state policy makers, and the public. One way states have taken to measure or show the value of higher education is by showing return on investment (ROI), as this transparency can provide additional information that students can use to make decisions about their education and career paths.

POST-GRADUATION FINANCIAL OUTCOMES DASHBOARD

In **Iowa**, the Governor recently signed legislation requiring the Board of Regents to annually report a series of financial-specific success metrics of graduates. The Board of Regents has developed a [dashboard](#) that allows users to search for post-graduation outcomes including percent of graduates with federal loan debt, student-debt spending, and median income by major.

RETURN ON INVESTMENT REPORTS

Toward the end of 2023, both the Colorado Department of Higher Education (CDHE) and the University of North Carolina (UNC) System recently published reports assessing the return on investment (ROI) of higher education, as well as specific academic programs, in each of their respective states.

CDHE [reported](#) that in **Colorado**, students have tended to take on the same amount of debt as they did in 2016; however, the percentage of students graduating with debt has declined since then, shrinking 10% for students seeking bachelor's degrees and 16% for those seeking associate degrees. Findings from the report also indicate that the weekly earnings of someone with a bachelor's degree are double that of those who graduated with a high school diploma or an associate degree and the five-year outlook for the state suggests the need for a degree to fill jobs in growing industries. Ultimately, the report [affirms that students experience a positive ROI by completing a degree](#).

In **North Carolina**, the [UNC System reported](#) that of the 1,364 programs of study available from 2015-2020, 93% had a positive ROI for students. When broken out by undergraduate and graduate programs, 94% and 91% (respectively) had a positive ROI for students. When examining programs that train students to enter jobs of critical need in the state, 100% of education programs and 96% of health professions led to a positive ROI for both undergraduate and graduate students. Additionally, nearly 90% of low-income students moved up at least one income band during their careers following graduation.

STUDENT SUCCESS AND COMPLETION

As states look to make progress toward reaching educational attainment goals and meet the needs of the modern workforce, they are implementing a wide range of student success initiatives — these initiatives ranked as the seventh most important policy issue. Many of these efforts target nontraditional students and those who have earned college credits but stopped out before earning a credential. Additionally, states are increasingly looking to improve transfer pathways to improve the efficiency of credential production.

ADULT LEARNERS/RETURNING STUDENTS

The **Colorado** Re-Engaged (CORE) initiative [celebrated](#) the first graduates of the program that launched in 2021. Under the [CORE](#) initiative, students who have stopped out of a baccalaureate program after earning 70 hours or more can be awarded an associate degree.

The University of **Maine** System launched a new [Finish Strong](#) program that is designed to help adult learners who have stopped out return and earn credentials. The program provides \$300 grants, a free second course when students pay for the first course, and personalized advising.

New Jersey is expanding the state's [Some College, No Degree](#) initiative, which now includes 22 institutions who are partnering with [ReUP Education](#) to provide outreach and coaching for adult learners. The initiative's expansion also includes \$3.3 million in grants for institutions to reduce barriers for adult learners returning to higher education.

The **Ohio** College Comeback Compact will expand to a full implementation program after a successful pilot phase. The [compact](#) aims to reenroll students that had stopped out but still owed money to their former college. Under the program, institutions participating in the compact relax registration and transcript hold policies to help students settle institutional debts up to \$5,000. Students must complete qualifying activities and work with advisors.

STUDENT SERVICES

Indiana [hired](#) 31 student success coaches that will focus initially on improving student retention but plan to expand their focus to improving on-time completion, early graduation, and keeping new graduates in the state. The success coaches were funded with a one-time \$2.5 million appropriation.

The **Illinois** Board of Higher Education awarded \$1.7 million in [End Student Housing Insecurity](#) grants to higher education institutions. The grants will be used to address systemic causes of homelessness and basic-needs insecurity among students.

The State University of **New York** (SUNY) system [announced](#) that it is implementing a new academic support program for students seeking bachelor's degrees known as Accelerate, Complete, Engage (ACE) that is modeled after the [CUNY ASAP](#) program.

TRANSFER

Indiana launched the [My College Core](#) platform that serves as a tool to help students and families navigate and track progress toward meeting the requirements of the Indiana College Core (ICC) certificate. The ICC certificate indicates that students have earned 30 hours of college credit through dual enrollment and advanced placement courses in high school.

Louisiana approved a [universal transfer agreement](#) that will go into effect in the fall. Students attending community colleges will be allowed to transfer 60 credit hours of coursework in one of 24 approved programs to any public four-year institution in the state offering a related degree program.

COLLEGE ACCESS

College access is closely tied to issues that are of highest concern among SHEEOs, including college affordability (fourth most important issue), student success (seventh most important), and enrollment declines (eighth most important). Moreover, access to postsecondary education is a critical first step to ensuring students succeed once enrolled. The initiatives that states have undertaken in recent months to promote college access – including direct admissions, post-high school planning tools, in-state tuition expansion, and FAFSA completion efforts – reflect the prioritization of college access among state agencies.

DIRECT ADMISSIONS

The new [Michigan Assured Admission Pact \(MAAP\)](#) guarantees admission to 10 of 15 public universities in **Michigan** for high school graduates with a 3.0 GPA or higher. Qualifying students will be admitted in the fall 2024 admission cycle but must still apply to individual schools to be admitted.

The [Georgia Match program](#) mails letters to the state’s graduating seniors to alert them that they are guaranteed a place at a **Georgia** public college or university based on their grades if they submit a streamlined application. All of Georgia’s 22 technical colleges and 23 of the state’s 26 University System of Georgia institutions are participating.

PLANNING AFTER HIGH SCHOOL

The [Level Up Virginia](#) website assists **Virginia** high school students with planning for their continued education, including information on certificate programs, apprenticeships, trade schools, two- and four-year colleges and universities, and military options. The website includes tips for how to pursue a post-high school path, along with financing options.

The [My Texas Future](#) is a digital tool that assists **Texans** in their career goals, including returning to higher education or the workforce. Users start with a career quiz and can browse job opportunities by salary, demand, and educational and skills requirements. Prospective students can also access information about credential programs, such as tuition rates and anticipated salary after graduation.

IN-STATE TUITION EXPANSION

The **South Dakota** Board of Regents has expanded in-state tuition to students coming to South Dakota institutions from Kansas, Missouri, and Minnesota. They join the rest of South Dakota’s neighbors (Iowa, Montana, Nebraska, North Dakota, and Wyoming) as well as Colorado, Illinois, and Wisconsin. Eleven states are now a part of [South Dakota’s Advantage program](#).

FAFSA COMPLETION CORPS

The State University of **New York** (SUNY) launched a [FAFSA Completion Corps](#) to assist prospective students with completing the FAFSA. The \$300,000 grant from AmeriCorps will pilot with 48 students at six SUNY campuses. The goal is to help the roughly half of New York students who do not complete the FAFSA despite being eligible for federal financial aid.

CAMPAIGN TO GO TO COLLEGE

A livestream webinar and informational campaign assists **Kentucky** high school students through the process of applying and paying for postsecondary education. The [GO!vember campaign](#) includes a Facebook Live event and an online student resource hub.

PERSONALIZED STUDENT LETTERS

The State University of **New York** (SUNY) and the New York City Public Schools [created a partnership](#) to send personalized welcome letters to all NYC high school seniors. The letters encourage students to consider their postsecondary opportunities and apply for college for the fall of 2024. The letters also include information about financial aid options.

UNDOCUMENTED STUDENTS

The **Massachusetts** Application for State Financial Aid (MASFA) – the state alternative to the FAFSA – allows undocumented college students who are currently enrolled in Massachusetts to apply for state need-based financial aid. This [initiative](#) follows the Massachusetts Tuition Equity Law, which permits high school graduates who completed three years of high school in the state to access in-state tuition and financial aid.

The **Maryland** Higher Education Commission (MHEC) released the [MHEC One-App](#), a streamlined financial aid application that allows students to apply for all state financial aid programs through a single application. Undocumented students who are eligible for in-state tuition are also able to use the new MHEC application and may be eligible for state financial aid programs.

ONLINE EDUCATION

The Universities of **Wisconsin** [unveiled](#) Wisconsin Online in February, a one-stop, searchable website providing users with information on every fully online program at the state's 13 public universities. The website – online.wisconsin.edu – lists more than 200 fully online programs, including associate, bachelor's, and master's degrees. In the future, the website will feature online certificate, micro credentials, and "course to career" educational opportunities.

CIVIC ENGAGEMENT

While civic engagement is not an explicit area of concern for SHEEOs based on the annual survey, research suggests that college students' engagement and education around civic issues are critical to postsecondary success. The positive impacts of civic engagement are also a reflection of the value proposition of higher education, which is a highly important issue for SHEEOs (third most important issue).

FELLOWS PROGRAM

The State University of **New York** (SUNY) announced the creation of a [Civic Education and Engagement and Civil Discourse Fellowship](#). The 10 fellows will advance SUNY's dedication to civic education and engagement, including the development of a learning convening in fall 2024. Research suggests that civic engagement by college students improves graduation and retention rates, career-related skills, and social responsibility.

STATE BUDGET AND HIGHER EDUCATION

State support for higher education was ranked as the second most important policy issue and is closely linked with state economies. Following years of robust tax revenue growth, many states are beginning to see more **modest** tax revenue collections. These revenue collections are reflected in the modest 1-3% increases in higher education funding that several governors have recommended for the 2024-25 fiscal year.

California governor, Gavin Newsom's budget **recommendation** includes a 1.1% increase in funding for higher education. This increase is primarily for the state's community colleges. Recommended base funding for the University of California and California State University systems was flat. The governor proposed deferring a 5% increase in base funding until next year due to a budget deficit. Under this proposal, each system would receive a 10% base funding increase in FY 2025-26.

Colorado governor, Jared Polis's budget **proposal** included a 2.9% funding increase for higher education.

Georgia governor, Brian Kemp's budget **proposal** includes the restoration of \$66 million in funding that was cut from public universities last year and a 4% raise for university employees.

Iowa governor, Kim Reynolds's budget **recommendation** included an approximately 2.5% increase for each of the three public universities in Iowa.

Michigan governor, Gretchen Whitmer's budget **proposal** included a 2.5% increase in funding for the state universities and community colleges. The budget proposal also included a request to increase funding for the Community College Guarantee program that covers tuition expenses for students enrolling in community colleges right after high school.

Missouri governor, Mike Parson's budget **proposal** included a 3% increase in higher education funding.