



SHEEO

State Higher Education
Executive Officers Association

Quarterly Policy Review Summer 2024

Rachel Burns, Sean Baser, Sakshee Chawla, Jessica Colorado,
Gus Gluek, Kelsey Heckert, Kahlea Hunt-Khabir, Kelsey Kunkle,
John Lane, and Dustin Weeden

September 2024

IN THIS ISSUE

INTRODUCTION	3
ECONOMIC & WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT.....	4
ACCESS, PREPARATION, & ENROLLMENT	9
COLLEGE AFFORDABILITY & STUDENT BASIC NEEDS	10
VALUE, ROI, & TRANSPARENCY.....	12
STUDENT SUCCESS & COLLEGE COMPLETION.....	13
STATE BUDGETS & PUBLIC POLICY	17
STATE SPOTLIGHT: WASHINGTON STUDENT ACHIEVEMENT COUNCIL.....	19
CIVIC ENGAGEMENT, FREE SPEECH, & PUBLIC PURPOSES	20

Suggested Citation: SHEEO. (2024). *SHEEO quarterly policy review, summer 2024*. State Higher Education Executive Officers Association.

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.

© 2024 State Higher Education Executive Officers Association

INTRODUCTION

As the 2024 election season takes shape, legislatures have passed and enacted a wide range of bills this summer affecting the higher education community. With a growing economy and state budget revenues relatively stable, lawmakers have been able to expand on existing investments in higher education. These include, but are not limited to, new laws to make community college free, expand access to student financial aid, and address student basic needs. While the fall election is not expected to change the control of governor's office in most states, it could affect the partisan balances of some state legislatures and policy priorities for 2025.

Beyond this, SHEEO agencies have taken initiative to advance a range of new programs on economic and workforce development, college access, and student success. This quarterly report provides a review of state- and system-level activity around the country during Summer 2024. 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 & WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT

ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE

The **Oklahoma** State Regents for Higher Education [approved](#) the state's first undergraduate artificial intelligence (AI) degree programs. These include an Associate of Science in AI and Machine Learning at Rose State College, along with Bachelor of Science degrees in AI at Southwestern Oklahoma State University and the University of Oklahoma.

The **Idaho** State Board of Education [launched](#) a fellowship to explore generative AI applications in higher education, awarding two professors \$15,000 stipends to lead efforts in integrating AI into academic practices and policymaking across the state's public institutions.

In **New York**, Governor Kathy Hochul [celebrated](#) the creation of the Empire AI Consortium, a collaboration involving seven public and private institutions aimed at positioning the state as a leader in AI education, research, and innovation. The Consortium [received](#) a \$275 million, 10-year state investment to establish a cutting-edge AI Computing Center at the University at Buffalo. Additional support will be used to [develop](#) four State University of New York (SUNY) INSPIRE centers to scale AI research and scholarship, new AI and society departments, and chatbot programs to enhance student support.

The **Louisiana** Board of Regents [established](#) an Artificial Intelligence Committee to address AI challenges and opportunities in higher education and to ensure state leadership in technological advancements and talent development.

In the **Northern Mariana Islands**, the Northern Marianas College Board of Regents [adopted](#) a new [AI policy](#) to enhance educational outcomes. The policy [focuses](#) on improving personalized learning experiences, ensuring the ethical use of AI, fostering research and innovation, and promoting workforce development through training and digital literacy initiatives.

RESEARCH & INNOVATION

The University of **North Carolina** System has [awarded](#) three grants totaling \$4.5 million to research teams as a part of the 2025 Research Opportunities Initiative (ROI). The winning ROI projects for 2025 will research clean energy storage and transportation, solar cells, and coastal land-sea habitats. ROI grants, which are funded by the North Carolina General Assembly, aim to encourage innovation and collaborative research projects in six priority areas: advanced manufacturing, data science, energy, marine and coastal science, military and security issues, and pharmacoengineering.

The **Ohio** Innovation Hub has [\\$125 million in grant funding](#) available as seed money for Ohio's manufacturing industry to support existing jobs and create new ones. The Northwest Ohio Innovation Consortium was recently [awarded](#) \$31.4 million of this funding to produce stronger, lighter, and cleaner glass at Toledo's four glass manufacturers. Universities and companies will provide a \$10.5 million match for research and development and hire graduate students and researchers in glassmaking technology.

The State University of **New York** (SUNY) has [launched](#) the Upstate Biotech Ventures, a venture capital fund for startups and other small businesses on SUNY campuses. Funding for Upstate Biotech Ventures includes \$3 million from the Empire State Development's Community and Regional Partner Fund and \$3 million from Upstate Medical University. Funding is expected to support up to 20 companies, with preference given to founders from traditionally underrepresented groups.

The **Wyoming** Innovation Partnership's Creative Economy Start Up Challenge has **selected** its first 10 recipients of \$25,000 grants. The **10 awardees** will use the funds for startup efforts in areas such as film production, sound recording, ethnography, literature, and visual arts.

The University of **Wyoming Bitcoin Research Institute** is the first academic institution whose purpose is to study Bitcoin. The institute will improve the quality and impact of Bitcoin research through the creation of faculty positions, incentivization of Bitcoin research, engagement of young scholars, and provision of workshops.

FEDERAL TECHNOLOGY HUBS

The Biden-Harris administration **announced** a \$504 million investment in 12 Regional Technology Hubs to strengthen economic and national security by advancing key sectors such as semiconductors, clean energy, biotechnology, artificial intelligence, and quantum computing. These hubs bring together state, local, and Tribal governments, higher education institutions, companies, labor unions, and nonprofits to foster regional economic growth. Several SHEEO agencies are partners in these hubs and have received funding through this investment. The **Wisconsin** Biohealth Tech Hub **focuses** on advancing personalized medicine, which tailors health care based on a patient's genetic code, medical record, and environment. Within this hub, the University of Wisconsin-Madison **leads** the Wisconsin Health Data Hub project, establishing a cyber-secure repository that provides comprehensive health data to accelerate the biohealth product development lifecycle. The Elevate Quantum Tech Hub in **Colorado** **focuses** on advancing quantum information technology across Colorado, **New Mexico**, and **Wyoming**, with the University of Wyoming **allocating** \$250,000 to support quantum-related curriculum development.

HEALTH CARE PROFESSIONAL WORKFORCE

In **New York**, Governor Kathy Hochul **announced** \$8 million in annual funding for SUNY's 30 community colleges to support health care and mental health initiatives. Additionally, she **unveiled** the New York State Healthcare Workers for Our Future Scholarship, covering the full cost of attendance for about 500 students pursuing degrees in critical health fields at SUNY, CUNY, or other New York state accredited colleges.

The **California** State University is actively addressing the nursing shortage by **developing** innovative bachelor's degree pathways in nursing and **convening** institutions and partners to strategize on strengthening the state's nursing workforce.

The **Illinois** Board of Higher Education **awarded** 76 nurse educators the Nurse Educator Fellowship, a program that aims to retain well-qualified nursing faculty at higher education institutions offering degrees leading to registered nurse licensure.

In the first year of the CT Health Horizons initiative, **Connecticut** State Colleges and Universities **hired** 10 additional faculty and awarded \$1 million in scholarships to 200 nursing and social work students attending Central, Southern, and Western Connecticut State Universities and Charter Oak State College. Supported by the American Rescue Plan Act, the initiative creates a partnership with educational and health care organizations to expand faculty and develop innovative programs.

TEACHER PREPARATION & WORKFORCE

The Universities of **Wisconsin** have **selected** the 2024-25 Wisconsin Teaching Fellows & Scholars (WTFS) from Wisconsin's 11 comprehensive universities and UW-Milwaukee. In its 25th year, WTFS provides participants with professional development, collaboration opportunities, and guidance on improving student learning.

The **Ohio** Department of Higher Education and the Ohio Department of Education and Workforce have **awarded** \$3 million in grants to five educational service centers. The five awardees will use grant funds to support teachers as they obtain additional credentials to teach college courses under the College Credit Plus program.

The **New Mexico** Higher Education Department is **offering** \$5 million in debt forgiveness for teachers through the Teacher Loan Repayment Program. Licensed teachers working in high-need fields (e.g., bilingual, early childhood, and special education; STEM and CTE; and at low-performing schools serving economically disadvantaged students) in the state are eligible for up to \$6,000 per year for two years toward debt and interest on federal student loans for teacher education. Forgiveness is available for teachers who earned their degrees prior to the passage of the Teacher Preparation Affordability Scholarship in 2024.

The **Minnesota** Office of Higher Education **began** the Aspiring Teachers of Color (ATC) Scholarship Pilot Program in 2021 to provide financial assistance to undergraduate and graduate students in teacher preparation courses. Students must have demonstrated financial need and belong to racial or ethnic groups that are underrepresented in Minnesota's teacher workforce. Students are eligible for up to \$10,000 per year, with a lifetime maximum of \$25,000. The ATC Scholarship received a one-time appropriation for the 2024-25 academic year.

The **Colorado** Educator Recruitment and Retention Financial Assistance Program has been **expanded** to include educators across the state, not just in rural areas. The program will provide stipends of up to \$10,000 for educators teaching under alternative licenses as they earn degrees. The goal of the program is to address the current teacher shortage in the state. Colorado also announced its sixth annual **Future Educator Honor Roll**, celebrating 66 candidates from the state's educator preparation programs. Honorees included 25 students from the Teacher Recruitment Education and Preparation program, which enables students in educator career pathways to concurrently enroll in college courses at no cost for up to two years following high school graduation.

The **Kansas** Board of Regents has **appointed** a new director of the **Blueprint for Literacy**, which is intended to prepare teachers with evidence-based approaches to teaching reading and achieving literacy proficiency for all students. The program aims to promote the science of teaching students how to read.

The **Indiana** Commission for Higher Education **awarded** more than 300 **Next Generation Hoosier Educators Scholarships** in its eighth year of operation. The scholarship awards up to \$10,000 per year (up to \$40,000 total) to students who agree to teach for five years at eligible Indiana schools. In the 2024-25 academic year, 945 students applied—a 58-percentage point increase from the prior year.

The state of **Hawai'i** has been **awarded** a \$4.9 million State Apprenticeship Expansion Formula grant from the U.S. Department of Labor to create the state's first statewide Registered Apprenticeship program for K-12 teachers. The program will provide tuition-free bachelor's degrees to 140 education students. University of Hawai'i at Manoa will serve as one of the institutions to provide degrees and licensure to aspiring teachers. The apprenticeship program will combine on-the-job learning with training instruction and will enable teachers to gain skills while earning wages.

INTERNSHIPS & WORK-BASED LEARNING EXPERIENCES

The State University of **New York** (SUNY) offers internships through the Summer Research Excellence Fund, which **supports** students in artificial intelligence research and other academic pursuits, and the SUNY Climate Corps, which **provides** immersive experiences in environmental sustainability at various state agencies.

The State Council of Higher Education for **Virginia** [released](#) a report analyzing credit-bearing internships, noting a decline in credit activity during the pandemic that has since recovered. This report supports the Virginia Talent + Opportunity Partnership (V-TOP) initiative, which seeks to enhance work-based learning opportunities in collaboration with local employers and aims to create 100,000 new internship positions by 2033.

The **North Carolina** Governor's HBCU Internship Program [announced](#) the latest cohort of 37 interns from the state's historically Black colleges and universities. This program, established in 2015, connects students to Fortune 500 companies in North Carolina, providing them with paid, full-time summer internships to support professional development and future employment opportunities.

California State University [continues](#) to enrich its experiential learning opportunities through the CSU Student Research Competition, where students present innovative academic projects, and the CSU Startup Launch, which awards funding to student-led startups.

WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT

A recent mental health workforce pilot at six universities in **Virginia** showed early signs of success: staff burnout at counseling centers was reduced and staff were better able to meet the student demand for mental health counseling. The two-year Higher Education Mental Health Workforce Pilot [received](#) \$1 million from the Virginia General Assembly to expand mental health services for students and increase the pipeline to the mental health workforce. Funding was used to provide salary and benefits for graduates in therapy licensure programs, with the agreement that each hosting institution would hire the trainees at student counseling centers until licensed.

Colleges and universities in **Virginia** will [offer](#) a Google Career Certificate in Cybersecurity. The six-month part-time certificate program can be completed online and does not require a prior degree or experience.

The University of **Hawai'i** Community Colleges [offer free courses](#) in high-demand creative fields through the [Good Jobs Hawai'i](#) initiative. The initiative is a collaboration with the Hawai'i State Department of Business Economic Development and Tourism Creative Industries Division. These courses will provide free upskilling for Hawai'i residents with the goal of meeting industry needs in areas such as esports, film and television production, 3D creation, and design.

The **Indiana** Commission for Higher Education has [awarded](#) \$25 million in Career Coaching Grants to 28 organizations through a competitive selection process. These organizations will assist high school students in Indiana with college and career decisions, including career coaching sessions, support, and events.

The **Missouri** Department of Higher Education & Workforce Development and the Missouri Chamber of Commerce [awarded](#) high school students with \$1,000 Missouri STEM Signing Day Scholarships. Students receiving the award will commit to studying science, technology, engineering, or math at a Missouri college in the fall.

The **Oregon** Higher Education Coordinating Commission [will award](#) a combined \$40 million to the third and final round of the Future Ready Oregon Workforce Ready Grants. Grants will be used to recruit and retain a diverse workforce in health care (\$18 million), manufacturing (\$12 million), and technology (\$10 million). Future Ready Oregon was created in 2022 to award \$200 million in grants to close gaps in educational attainment and employment by improving the workforce system and expanding access to and success in workforce education and training. Grants prioritize individuals from historically underserved and underrepresented populations.

The **Oregon** Higher Education Coordinating Commission and the Workforce and Talent Development Board **released** the Oregon Talent Assessment 2024. The assessment presents analysis and findings on Oregon's economic and workforce landscape, the supply and demand for skills in target occupations, and Oregon's position in a competitive talent pool and workforce development system.

The **Minnesota** Office of Higher Education **awarded** \$5.4 million in Dual Training Grants to 84 Minnesota employers to fund dual training programs for 958 employees in high-demand industries such as manufacturing, agriculture, health care services, information technology, childcare, transportation, and legal cannabis. The aim of the initiative is to assist employers with meeting their workforce needs through earn-and-learn programs for employees.

The University of **Maine** System (UMS) **announced** a partnership with Hannaford Supermarkets to provide savings to associates of the grocery stores who are pursuing postsecondary education through Maine's public institutions. Hannaford associates will receive a 10% discount on all graduate and undergraduate courses in UMS, including online and law courses. The program is an expansion of Hannaford's Groceries to Grads reimbursement program, which offers up to \$5,250 in tuition reimbursement annually at any accredited college or university.

The **Missouri** Department of Higher Education & Workforce Development (DHEWD) **received** a \$4 million Apprenticeship Building American grant from the U.S. Department of Labor to help Missourians find high-wage jobs in high-demand industries. DHEWD will partner with the Missouri Works Initiative and BioSTL to use the funding to launch the Missouri Strategies for Training and Apprentice Readiness (MO-STAR) project. MO-STAR will promote long-term employment in skilled, high-wage jobs for 625 Missourians through pre-apprenticeship programs. The program will provide training in advanced manufacturing, bioscience, data science, and cybersecurity, among other high-demand occupations.

The **Washington** Student Achievement Council has **awarded** \$3.1 million from the Regional Challenge Grant to form five new partnerships. Funding was prioritized for partnerships focusing on returning and adult learners. The Regional Challenge Grant program, which was established in 2022, awards competitive grants to regional partnerships seeking to expand postsecondary attainment and completion and close opportunity gaps for all students in Washington.

ACCESS, PREPARATION, & ENROLLMENT

DIRECT ADMISSIONS

The Universities of **Wisconsin** [launched](#) the Direct Admission Wisconsin program, starting with the high school graduating class of 2025, where qualified students from participating schools are automatically admitted to up to 10 out of the 13 public universities without having to apply. Admissions offer letters are delivered through high school students' email accounts and via U.S. mail.

FAFSA COMPLETION

The U.S. Department of Education's FAFSA Student Support Strategy program [funded](#) more than 75 projects to help increase the capacity of organizations providing efforts to boost FAFSA completion over the summer:

- The **Arizona** FAFSA Coalition, led by the Board of Regents, (\$1 million award) [boosted](#) in-person assistance at regional FAFSA support sites and expanded communication channels, including targeted outreach in Latino/a and Indigenous communities.
- The **Idaho** State Board of Education (\$203,850 award) conducted outreach to students who have not submitted, staffed in-person [FAFSA office hours](#) throughout the state, and provided various incentives for students who attend events and for schools who increase their completion rate.
- The State University of **New York** (\$500,000 award) [funded](#) staff for additional time and travel costs to conduct and expand FAFSA completion outreach, partnered with community-based organizations for providing multilingual support and credible messengers, offered bookstore gift cards to student returnees, and conducted a summer digital marketing campaign.

Pennsylvania's State System of Higher Education [announced](#) a summer initiative where four universities customized a FAFSA outreach strategy to the unique needs of their geographic region (north central, east, south central, west). Targeted activities included offering reminders, support information, and direct assistance with submitting the form.

The **Tennessee** Higher Education Commission [launched](#) a FAFSA Frenzy campaign in July to strongly encourage and support students and families in completing the FAFSA. This communications initiative directed Tennesseans to [CollegeforTN.org](#) for step-by-step resources and information regarding in-person events across the state. As a reminder to complete the FAFSA by August 1 for the Tennessee Promise, key Tennessee landmarks glowed green during the final 10-day countdown.

The **Utah** Board of Higher Education [approved](#) roughly \$8.5 million from proceeds from the Higher Education Student Success Endowment to support students affected by FAFSA delays. The majority of these funds supplemented financial aid programs, like the Utah Promise Grant (need-based), Talent Development Grant (high demand, high wages), Technical Education Scholarship (high demand technical industries), and One Utah Service Fellowship (combine state and federal funding into an AmeriCorps program).

COLLEGE AFFORDABILITY & STUDENT BASIC NEEDS

ADDRESSING BASIC NEEDS

The **Arizona** Board of Regents (ABOR) [released](#) its 2024 Student Food and Housing Insecurity Report, which includes the annual reports from a tri-university work group aimed at guiding how to address issues of student basic needs insecurities at each of the ABOR campuses. The report contains highlights and updates since the initial formation of the workgroup in 2021 and provides next steps and priorities for the coming academic year.

New Jersey [announced](#) it has expanded its partnership with the mental health platform Uwill, providing free, 24/7 teletherapy and wellness services to college students across the state through April 2026. This initiative, which has already benefited over 10,000 students, aims to address the growing mental health crisis among youth by offering accessible support outside of traditional campus hours. The program's success is reflected in increased student engagement and positive feedback from both students and staff, highlighting its role in improving student well-being and academic outcomes.

COLLEGE SAVINGS

Rhode Island [incentivized college savings](#) by offering the first 250 new CollegeBound Saver accounts a \$300 bonus to honor 529 Day. This initiative, a partnership between the Office of the General Treasurer, the Rhode Island Foundation, and the Office of the Postsecondary Commissioner, aims to encourage families to start saving early for higher education expenses. The program is part of a broader effort to promote financial preparedness for college, ensuring that more residents can afford postsecondary education in the future.

FINANCIAL AID & SCHOLARSHIPS

The **Colorado** Department of Higher Education [awarded](#) the Colorado Opportunity Scholarship Initiative with more than \$13 million in grants to support higher education for Colorado residents. These funds are distributed across several programs, including scholarships for over 2,600 students, support services for both pre-collegiate and postsecondary students, and mentorship programs.

Nebraska's Coordinating Commission for Postsecondary Education [announced](#) the launch of the "Door to College" scholarship program, providing up to \$5,000 per year in scholarships to students who attended or graduated from a Nebraska Youth Rehabilitation and Treatment Center.

FREE TUITION

Pennsylvania's State System of Higher Education (PASSHE) [announced](#) that it will offer free tuition for 22 community college transfer students as part of a new initiative to support higher education access. This program targets high-achieving students from partner community colleges, allowing them to complete their bachelor's degrees at a PASSHE university without the burden of tuition costs.

LOAN FORGIVENESS

The University of **Vermont** (UVM) [announced](#) the expansion of the Green Mountain Job and Retention Program, a collaboration between the State of Vermont, UVM, and the Vermont Student Assistance Corporation. This program offers up to \$5,000 in student loan forgiveness for graduates of Vermont colleges and universities as part of a new initiative to reduce student debt. It is available to eligible students who have graduated within the last five years and aims to alleviate financial burdens for those pursuing advanced degrees.

OPEN EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES

The **California** State University's [multi-year compact](#) with California Governor Gavin Newsom has set a goal of reducing instructional costs by 50% by 2025. The [Affordable Learning Solutions](#) (AL\$) initiative has saved students millions in textbook costs by promoting the use of free and low-cost educational resources across its campuses. By leveraging digital textbooks and open educational resources, the program has significantly reduced the financial burden on students, enhancing access to affordable education.

TAX BENEFITS

The **Maryland** Higher Education Commission [announced](#) the opening for applications for the 2024 Student Loan Debt Relief Tax Credit Program. The program is for eligible Maryland taxpayers who have incurred undergraduate and/or graduate student loan debt.

TUITION

Pennsylvania's State System of Higher Education (PASSHE) [announced](#) that it has frozen tuition rates for the seventh consecutive year, maintaining its commitment to keeping higher education affordable for students. This decision reflects PASSHE's efforts to ease financial burdens on students and families amid rising costs in other sectors. The freeze applies to in-state undergraduates across the system's 10 universities.

VALUE, ROI, & TRANSPARENCY

STUDENT DEBT

A new [report](#) by the **Kentucky** Council on Postsecondary Education (CPE) shows a significant decline in the number of undergraduate students in Kentucky graduating with debt. The proportion of students with loan debt dropped from 58% in 2017-18 to 43% in 2022-23, with an even larger decrease over the past decade. Average loan balances for those graduating with debt also fell by 9.6%. These improvements are attributed to efforts by legislators, the CPE, and public institutions to moderate tuition increases, award more financial aid, and provide financial literacy advising.

POSTSECONDARY EMPLOYMENT OUTCOMES

The U.S. Census Bureau has [expanded](#) its Post-Secondary Employment Outcomes (PSEO) data product by adding five new partners, including 93 institutions from the **Illinois** Board of Higher Education (IL); Illinois Community College Board (IL); **West Virginia** Higher Education Policy Commission (WV); Bryant University (RI); and Western Governors University (PSEO's first online-only school). This expansion increases PSEO coverage to 33% of U.S. college graduates, with data from 926 institutions. PSEO [provides](#) prospective students, policymakers, and businesses with insights into employment and earnings outcomes by degree, field of study, geography, and industry sector. The data is accessible via the PSEO Explorer tool, raw files, and the Census API.

STUDENT SUCCESS & COLLEGE COMPLETION

ADULT STUDENT SUCCESS

The University of **North Carolina** System [received](#) \$7.8 million in federal funding to enhance its campuses' technical capabilities to better serve adult learners. The funding will help to create high-demand online degree programs targeting working adults and military-affiliated students. This effort will increase access to degree programs for adult learners and ensure that North Carolinians are prepared to enter and contribute to a growing workforce and economy.

COMPLETION

Maryland Gov. Wes Moore [announced](#) Expanding Scaling Up College Completion Efforts for Student Success (SUCCESS), an initiative in partnership with MDRC, that will aim to increase the number of students of color and students from low-income families earning a postsecondary degree or credential at Maryland community colleges. Three community colleges will participate in the pilot program and receive \$125,000 to improve educational outcomes and workforce readiness, emphasizing the importance of community colleges in providing accessible education and training for in-demand jobs. The Maryland Higher Education Commission and MDRC will provide support and training to the participating colleges to launch the initiative, including data analytics to track student retention and degree completion.

Kansas has [joined](#) the Complete College America (CCA) Alliance. CCA Alliance is a national coalition of states, systems, and institutions of higher education focused on increasing college completion rates. The collaboration will help Kansas implement proven strategies to enhance on-time graduation rates and address the needs of under-resourced students.

A recent [report](#) by the **Indiana** Commission for Higher Education presents strategic recommendations to bolster Indiana's higher education HOPE (Hoosier Opportunities and Possibilities through Education) Agenda. Created to address declining trends and catalyze opportunities, the report emphasizes collaboration across five key sectors: business, education, government, non-profits, and philanthropy. The HOPE Agenda focuses on college-going rates, postsecondary attainment for diverse populations, utilization of credit for prior learning, completion of postsecondary education, and graduate retention. The report includes specific actions such as incentivizing low-income enrollment growth, expanding dual enrollment programs, supporting adult learners, and enhancing career coaching.

CREDIT FOR PRIOR LEARNING

The **South Carolina** Commission on Higher Education, in partnership with the American Council on Education, is [offering](#) a free comprehensive training program on credit for prior learning. This initiative focuses on awarding college credit for prior military learning, aiming to support military-connected students. The program emphasizes the importance of credit for prior learning as an economic imperative and providing tailored resources for faculty and administrators.

The **Utah** System of Higher Education [released](#) its annual [report](#) on credit for prior learning to streamline degree progression and increase college affordability for Utah students. The initiative helps students reduce tuition costs and accelerate degree completion by awarding college credit for relevant work, military, and life experiences. It also supports student success and contributes to making higher education more accessible and affordable.

CURRICULUM, TRANSFER, & PROGRAM REVIEW

The **Connecticut** Board of Regents for Higher Education unanimously [approved](#) the Connecticut State Colleges and Universities (CSCU) General Education Transfer Credit Alignment Policy. The new policy streamlines the transfer process by eliminating barriers to transferring general education credits between the two- and four-year CSCU institutions and offers transparency on how courses will be applied to CSCU four-year institutions' degrees.

The **Colorado** Department of Higher Education and Governor Polis [announced](#) a framework for public higher education institutions to formally recognize students who complete all Guaranteed Transfer Pathways general education curriculum. By highlighting the skills and competencies gained from general education, this credential is designed to improve transferability between institutions, recognize students' progress toward degree completion, and demonstrate the value of these essential skills to employers.

The **Utah** Board of Higher Education [approved](#) an innovative three-year bachelor's degree program, Bachelor of Applied Sciences, making it the first public higher education system in the nation to offer this accelerated pathway. This initiative aims to enhance student flexibility and reduce the time and cost of obtaining a degree. The new bachelor's degree will have a minimum of 90 credits required to complete, in comparison to the current standard of 120 credits required to complete existing four-year bachelor's degrees. This shortened time to degree will allow students to complete a bachelor's degree sooner and foster pathways into employment.

Under the leadership of the **Kansas** Board of Regents, all six state universities, 19 community colleges, and the state's municipal university, Washburn University, [adopted](#) the Systemwide General Education policy. This policy establishes clearer state oversight and simplifies the transfer process for college students.

The **Maryland** Higher Education Commission [approved](#) bylaws for the new [Program Review Process Advisory Council](#) that will review the process for academic program approvals. Set to meet this fall, the new council will be made up of 21 people from the state's public and private colleges and universities and aims to make sure the processes are equitable, practical, efficient, and transparent.

EQUITY & INCLUSION

The **California** State University (CSU) has [chosen](#) California State University, Sacramento as the site for its new Statewide Central Office for the Advancement of Black Excellence, following a competitive review process. This office will oversee and implement the recommendations from CSU's Black Student Success [Report](#) and foster transformative practices across CSU's 23 universities and underserved communities. The office will start with a \$1.3 million investment, part of a \$10 million allocation for Black student success initiatives. The CSU has also completed its first systemwide inventory of practices supporting Black student success, allocating over \$4.5 million to fund related activities across its universities.

CSU [announced](#) the six recipients of its first-ever Black Student Success Scholarship, sponsored by the CSU Foundation. These undergraduate students, recognized for their leadership in promoting equitable access to higher education and antiracism efforts, will each receive a \$5,000 award for the 2024-25 academic year. CSU Chancellor Mildred García praised the scholars for their dedication to the Black community, highlighting CSU's commitment to fostering a supportive and inclusive environment.

CSU has [allocated](#) \$6.4 million to support campus activities under the Asian American, Native Hawaiian, and Pacific Islander (AANHPI) Student Achievement Program. This funding is part of an \$8 million annual appropriation directed by Assembly Bill (AB) 190. Awards range from \$200,000 to \$460,000 and will aid 19 CSU campuses in enhancing culturally responsive learning, advising, mental health counseling, and career services. The program aims to bolster success for underserved and first-generation AANHPI students.

Massachusetts [announced](#) over \$1.3 million in Higher Education Innovation Fund grants to advance racial equity in collaboration between all 15 Massachusetts community colleges, state universities, and private institutions. The grants will fund projects such as a new Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion certificate program, best practices for student success, the Racial Equity and Justice Institute, and a Hispanic Serving Institution conference. The funding aims to foster collaboration and innovation among the state's community colleges, state universities, and private institutions to promote equitable educational opportunities.

In honor of Pride Month, State University of **New York** Chancellor John B. King Jr. [announced](#) the Harvey Milk Award for Student Leadership, a new scholarship named after University at Albany alumnus and LGBTQIA+ rights activist Harvey Milk. This award will recognize an outstanding upper-level student who has made significant contributions to LGBTQIA+ inclusiveness on their campus. Each recipient will be honored with a scholarship and will be selected based on their commitment to enhancing LGBTQIA+ campus experiences and demonstrating leadership. Applications will open this fall, and the scholarship aims to continue Harvey Milk's legacy of championing equality and inclusivity.

FOSTER STUDENTS

The **Ohio** Department of Higher Education [launched](#) the Ohio Reach initiative to support foster students transitioning to college. By offering resources and guidance such as mentorship, financial aid information, and partnerships with institutions, the program creates a supportive environment for foster youth to succeed in higher education.

RE-ENROLLMENT

The University of **North Carolina** System's [Re-Enrollment Program](#), initiated by Project Kitty Hawk, has successfully brought back 1,791 former students to complete their bachelor's degrees since its launch in May 2023. The program, which offers free re-enrollment counseling, has been particularly effective in engaging students who had paused their education for several years. Participating institutions have seen significant increases in re-enrollment and additional tuition revenue, with over \$3 million generated in the first year. The program also supports online degree options for adult learners, further enhancing access to higher education.

STUDENT SUCCESS PARTNERSHIPS

Connecticut State Colleges and Universities (CSCU) has [partnered](#) with Let's Get Ready (LGR) to enhance college access and retention. Starting this fall, LGR will introduce a near-peer mentoring program across the CSCU system, aiming to support 10,000 students over three years. The initiative, which leverages LGR's successful national model, will focus on retaining students through personalized support and mentoring. This partnership is backed by the ECMC Foundation and will be crucial in aiding CSCU's transition to a single accredited institution and improving student outcomes across Connecticut.

STEM FIELD SUCCESS

The **Ohio** Department of Higher Education has [received](#) a \$3 million grant from the Ascendium Education Group for the Ohio Strong Start in Science (OhioSSS) program. This four-year initiative aims to improve student success in introductory STEM courses, which often hinder progress in science fields. OhioSSS will support 17 participating colleges in revising curricula, enhancing placement procedures, and providing academic assistance to help students stay on track for STEM or healthcare degrees. The program seeks to boost completion rates, reduce dropout rates, and address workforce needs in the 21st-century economy.

STUDENT PARENTS

The **Pennsylvania** Department of Education has **awarded** \$1.7 million in grants to 12 colleges and universities to support undergraduate students with children. The Parent Pathways Grant Program aims to alleviate the challenges faced by parenting students by funding scholarships, childcare, and other support services. The grants will help institutions provide resources and support to ensure that parenting students can successfully complete their degrees.

VETERAN & MILITARY STUDENTS

The **Indiana** Commission for Higher Education and the Indiana Department of Veterans Affairs have **launched** the Collegiate Purple Star of Indiana (CPSI) initiative to recognize postsecondary institutions that support military-affiliated students from application to graduation. The initiative aims to enhance Indiana's standing in veteran postsecondary attainment. The CPSI includes a Field Guide detailing 37 standards across eight categories, and institutions can apply for the award starting January 2025. The initiative is designed to make Indiana institutions more accessible and supportive for military-affiliated students.

Ohio Department of Higher Education Chancellor Mike Duffey **announced** that two more universities were designated as Collegiate Purple Star campuses for their support of students with military backgrounds, bringing the total to 53. This designation, which Ohio first introduced in 2022, recognizes institutions that meet criteria such as having a dedicated military support office and priority registration for veterans.

STATE BUDGETS & PUBLIC POLICY

STATE OPERATING SUPPORT & FINANCIAL AID

States throughout the country made a range of new investments to increase state operating support for public colleges and universities and boost support for state student financial aid. Some highlights from the 2024 legislative sessions include:

- **Alaska** lawmakers **passed** a budget that includes a \$28.5 million increase in base operating support for the University of Alaska. The budget includes increased compensation, greater coverage for rising operating costs, enhancements to campus security, and one-time funding to support the University of Alaska Fairbanks's pursuit of R1 research designation.
- **Alabama's** state universities **will receive** a 7% increase in state funding, along with an increase in the state's student assistance programs and additional funds to encourage FAFSA completion.
- The **California** State University **will receive** a 5% increase in state funding, offset by a one-time \$75 million reduction, resulting in a net gain of approximately \$165 million in new operating budget funding.
- **Florida's** university system **received** record state operating support, including \$100 million for Performance-Based Excellence Recognition to recruit and retain faculty, \$100 million for academic and research, and \$46 million for the PIPELINE and LINE Programs.
- **Illinois** higher education **will receive** a 3% general funds appropriations increase compared to the previous fiscal year. Some of these investments include operating fund increases of \$24.6 million for public universities and \$5.9 million for community colleges, plus a \$10 million increase for the Monetary Award Program (MAP).
- **Hawai'i** has **committed** a record \$5.5 million in the upcoming budget for the Hawai'i Promise Scholarship. The funds will help cover **direct education costs** not met by other forms of financial aid, including tuition, fees, and an allowance for books and supplies.
- **New York** **approved** an historic expansion of the Tuition Assistance Program (TAP). The expansion increases the TAP minimum award from \$500 to 1,000 and raises the taxable income limit for dependent, independent single, and independent married students.
- **Oklahoma** lawmakers **increased state funding** for higher education by approximately 2% in their state budget, including targeted investments in workforce development initiatives in high-demand fields, funding to address increasing campus property and casualty insurance premiums, and financial aid and scholarship programs to support college degree completion.
- **Pennsylvania** **boosted** funding for community colleges and PASSHE institutions by 6%. Additionally, the budget allocates over \$120 million in increased funding for scholarships and grants to make college more affordable.
- **West Virginia** **approved** a doubling of the maximum award for the West Virginia Higher Education Grant. The state increased the maximum award for the needs-based grant from \$3,400 to \$6,800.

COLLEGE PREPARATION AND TRANSFER

With the [passing](#) of Senate Enrolled Act 8, all high schools in **Indiana** are required to offer the Indiana College Core, a 30-credit block of general education courses, by the 2026-2027 academic year. These transferable courses are accepted at colleges across the state, furthering the state's efforts to allow students to seamlessly transfer.

Colorado [approved](#) the Institution of Higher Education Transparency Requirements, becoming the first state to require public colleges and universities to publish an annual report outlining which courses will be accepted or rejected for transfer. This new law also requires the Colorado Department of Higher Education to establish an appeals process for wrongfully denied transfer credits and institutions to provide credit acceptance or denial within 30 days of being admitted.

FINANCIAL AID POLICY

Alaska [approved](#) legislation aimed at enhancing access to and utilization of Alaska Performance Scholarships (APS). This legislation increases the award amounts for each APS level, broadens the range of eligible high school curricula, provides earlier award notifications, removes the distinction between 'Collegiate' and 'CTE' award tracks, extends the eligibility period from six to eight years, and introduces a step-up provision allowing continuing students to increase their award level after two semesters.

Michigan [included](#) funding in its state budget to make FAFSA completion a high school graduation requirement, along with support for a pilot program for hunger-free college campuses. Michigan's budget also includes financial aid for aspiring educators.

Students from families on **Washington's** food assistance programs will [automatically qualify](#) for financial aid to attend college. A new state law guarantees state financial aid for students enrolled in the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP).

GOVERNANCE & FUNDING MODELS

As part of its fiscal year 2025 state budget, **Pennsylvania** lawmakers [created](#) the State Board of Higher Education, a new coordinating board that will provide support for all state-owned and state-related institutions. The State Board of Higher Education will include a council charged with developing metrics for a new performance-based funding model.

STUDENT SERVICES

In **Maryland**, lawmakers [passed](#) a bill requiring all state public universities to offer a formal withdrawal policy that includes mental health as a valid reason to stop out and allows students to receive a refund for the remainder of the semester.

TUITION-FREE COLLEGE

In **Colorado**, lawmakers [approved](#) legislation establishing a state income tax credit for qualifying students and their families to receive a refund for the money spent on tuition to make the first two years of college free. To qualify, students must enroll in college at a public two- or four-year college or trade school within two years of graduating high school, indicate household income of \$90,000 or less on their federal (FAFSA) and state (CAFSA) student financial aid applications, and have a GPA of 2.5 or higher for the semester in which they are claiming the tax incentive.

Massachusetts approved a new tuition-free program called MassEducate. This program covers tuition and fees for high school graduates without a degree – regardless of income level and age – at any of the state’s community colleges, as well as a stipend for books, supplies, and other expenses of up to \$1,200 a year for some students based on household income.

Michigan passed the Michigan Guarantee, a new tuition-free college program, as part of the fiscal year 2025 budget. Since 2021, Michigan has offered free community college to returning adults through the Michigan Reconnect program. The Michigan Guarantee now expands the state’s efforts by providing two years of free community college to all high school graduates.

Policy Spotlight: Washington Student Achievement Council



Washington utilizes nutrition assistance to issue earlier promises of state financial aid

The Washington College Grant (WA Grant) — recognized as the nation’s most generous and equitable state financial aid program by The Education Trust — covers up to six years of public tuition and fees for income-eligible students pursuing bachelor’s degrees. It can also provide funding for associate degrees, certificate programs, apprenticeships, and job training. All Washington residents, regardless of age or citizenship status, can apply for WA Grant awards by completing a FAFSA or WASFA (state financial aid application). For the 2023–24 academic year, the WA Grant provided nearly \$470 million in awards to more than 97,000 students.

In recent years, the Washington Student Achievement Council (WSAC) has sought to streamline access to the WA Grant — not only to make postsecondary education more affordable but also to help ensure equitable access and success for all K-12 students and adult learners. This work is driven in part by the reality that an education or training credential beyond a high school diploma is essential to earn a living wage and achieve economic mobility. Across Washington state, WSAC has found that the most economically disadvantaged students are surpassing their parents’ income within three years after graduating with a postsecondary degree or credential.¹ Programs like the WA Grant have also helped Washington weather the storm of decreased participation during the COVID-19 pandemic, with enrollment declines at public two- and four-year institutions being mitigated for students who received need-based financial aid between fall 2019 and fall 2022.² By building an affordable and supportive educational environment, WSAC continues to spearhead efforts that help more Washingtonians enroll in programs and complete credentials.

Following Washington’s 2022 legislative session, WSAC received approval to design and administer WA Grant-Connect, a new pathway to verify income eligibility for the maximum WA Grant award through participation in a handful of public assistance programs — prior to the completion of a FAFSA or WASFA. This decision automatically qualified more than 40,000 adults for at least one year of full public tuition and fees. Hundreds of adult learners have since utilized WA Grant-Connect to pursue a postsecondary degree or credential, and nearly all of them have continued to complete a FAFSA or WASFA to access additional federal and state financial aid.

Earlier this year, WSAC successfully expanded WA Grant-Connect by helping state Rep. Vandana Slatter (D-Bellevue) champion HB 2214, a first-in-the-nation law that will automatically qualify high school students for the maximum WA Grant award based on their households’ participation in nutrition assistance programs. When the law takes effect in fall 2025, students who receive benefits from the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) or Washington’s Food Assistance Program (for documented non-citizens) will begin securing at least one year of public tuition and fees as early as 10th grade. Students remaining on nutrition assistance in 11th and 12th grades will graduate high school with up to three years of public tuition and fees guaranteed to them — and once in a postsecondary program, they may receive additional WA Grant awards by completing a FAFSA or WASFA. WSAC anticipates that 30,000–40,000 high school students will start or continue to accrue aid through WA Grant-Connect each year.

At its core, HB 2214 is a game-changing policy that enables high school students to plan for their futures without worrying about whether they will qualify for financial aid. WSAC hopes that promising financial aid earlier will encourage more students to pursue postsecondary education, make it a more attainable goal, and further remove barriers to accessing degrees and credentials beyond a high school diploma.

1. <https://wsac.wa.gov/sites/default/files/2022.InterGenEconMobilityFinAid.Snapshot.pdf>
2. <https://wsac.wa.gov/sites/default/files/2023-09-22.Fall2022.EnrollmentSnapshot.pdf>

CIVIC ENGAGEMENT, FREE SPEECH, & PUBLIC PURPOSES

CIVIC & SERVICE OPPORTUNITIES

In **New York**, state and system leaders are increasingly **focused** on civic engagement and service for students attending State University of New York (SUNY) institutions through two recent expansions in efforts. First, students can apply to be part of the new **Empire State Service Corps** program, which requires participants to dedicate at least 300 hours per year to paid community service and includes opportunities for students to convene and learn from one another's experiences beginning in the fall 2024 semester. Second, starting with the fall 2025 semester, faculty and administrators on SUNY campuses will implement a civil discourse core competency within SUNY's General Education Framework.

LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT

In fiscal year 2025, the University of **Alaska** is **launching** the Arctic Leadership Initiative led by faculty known as "**President's Arctic Professors**" to provide students with opportunities to enhance analytical and leadership skills, work with external partners to address Arctic needs and engage in internships and circumpolar exchanges for professional development and training.

In **New York**, 34 fellows made up of State University of New York (SUNY) faculty and staff **completed** the inaugural New York State Community College Leadership Academy. Funded through philanthropic support, this development program aims to increase emerging leaders' skills and knowledge to improve student outcomes and grow their campus' capacity through implementing evidence-based student success practices.

In **Georgia**, 34 faculty and staff from the University System of Georgia (USG) institutions and the system office **graduated** from the 14th USG Executive Leadership Institute (ELI) cohort, which includes personal reflection, job shadowing, cross-mentoring, and additional content.

In June, the University of **North Carolina** (UNC) System **named** 33 faculty and staff to participate in the fifth cohort of their 10-month Executive Leadership Institute (ELI), which aims to prepare a pipeline of future leaders from across the UNC System.