SHEEO

State Higher Education Executive Officers Association

Building a Comprehensive Student Success Agenda: Evidence and Emerging Policy Efforts Across States

Kelsey Kunkle and Dustin Weeden

November 2024

SUGGESTED CITATION:

Kunkle, K., & Weeden, D. (2024). *Building a Comprehensive Student Success Agenda: Evidence and Emerging Policy Efforts Across States*. State Higher Education Executive Officers Association. https://sheeo.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/11/Student-Success-White-Paper.pdf

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 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. For more information, visit **sheeo.org.**

TABLE OF CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION

Students pursuing postsecondary education opportunities are increasingly considering the return on investment (ROI) that these opportunities provide. Students are seeking higher wages and additional career opportunities that are associated with the accumulation of human capital. However, pursuing postsecondary education can also be a risky endeavor for students who stop out before earning a credential. Data from 2024 indicates that nearly 37 million adults have earned college credit but not a credential.[1] For these students, their investment in postsecondary education may have a negative return and leave them worse off than if they had never enrolled, especially for the students who incurred debt. Recent research has shown that students accumulating debt and stopping out have worse financial outcomes than students who did not pursue postsecondary education and are more likely to qualify for public assistance benefits.[2] This downward social mobility is the opposite outcome that states hope to achieve with their postsecondary education systems, and many have begun implementing initiatives designed to improve student outcomes.

With limited human and financial resources, states need to be selective in which student success initiatives they adopt. Implementing well-intentioned but ineffective programs will not improve student outcomes, and could leave students and states worse off than if the intervention had never been adopted. Fortunately, the evidence base for effective programs is growing and can help states make policy decisions that improve student outcomes and grow economies. This brief is designed to guide states exploring the most effective student success strategies.

Research has consistently found that comprehensive approaches to student success that address multiple needs — such as financial, academic, and institutional barriers as well as work-life balance and navigating the complexity of college — and sustained over time are the most effective programs. While these approaches tend to be the most effective, they also tend to be costly to implement. In the sections below, we explore these comprehensive strategies as well as emerging strategies that are beginning to show a base of research evidence that can be built into a comprehensive student success policy agenda.

1. National Student Clearinghouse Research Center. (2024). *Some college, no credential: A 2024 snapshot for the nation and the states*. National Student Clearinghouse Research Center. https://nscresearchcenter.org/some-college-no-credential/

2. Lockwood, J., & Webber, D. (2023). "Non-Completion, Student Debt, and Financial Well-Being: Evidence from the Survey of Household Economics and Decisionmaking," FEDS Notes. Washington: Board of Governors of the Federal Reserve System. https://doi.org/10.17016/2380-7172.3371

DESIGNING A COMPREHENSIVE STUDENT SUCCESS POLICY AGENDA

When designing a comprehensive, evidence-based student success policy agenda, state leaders and policymakers should consider several related focus areas. Examples of major areas affecting student success that are worth exploring for inclusion in a state's policy agenda are access and awareness, affordability, meeting students' basic needs, and advancing work-based learning. Best practices and efforts from existing state programs in each of these areas are outlined in the sections below.

ACCESS AND AWARENESS

Institutions and states have long been interested in removing and working to address barriers to college access. Some states have taken intentional steps to create policies and access-focused programs that target specific groups, such as adult learners with college credit but no degree. Targeted campaigns to nudge former students who left postsecondary education without a credential, especially when a financial incentive such as a course waiver is offered, have been proven to increase the likelihood of students who have dropped out to re-enroll.[3] Ohio is one state in particular that has made efforts to re-enroll adult learners in recent years through the Ohio College Comeback Compact. This program, which started as a one-year pilot in 2022, specifically targets non-traditional students with postsecondary education debt and includes the financial incentive of institutional debt forgiveness. To engage a wider range of adult learners, the program's definition of a non-traditional student has been kept fluid rather than fixed to account for different life experiences, full- and part-time work, having dependents, and age. To increase awareness and accessibility, the Compact partnered with ReUp Education and Ithaka S+R to employ robust outreach and student engagement efforts.[4]

In addition to tapping community organizations, industry groups, employers, and unions to bring awareness and encourage potential students to participate, the Compact connects students with navigators who are considered to be trusted individuals providing a variety of services. The Ohio College Comeback Compact program has also implemented wraparound services that help students navigate their institutions, the surrounding community, and workforce industries. These student-facing components of the intervention can help prevent participants from needing to seek services from several offices.

The Compact program also aids institutions in providing awareness related to time, cost, and value of earning a credential. In 2023, the state passed House Bill 27 requiring institutions to provide a financial cost and aid disclosure forms starting in 2025. This information is particularly important for adult learners since the sticker price to attend an institution can deter this debt-adverse group. As the Ohio Department of Higher Education (ODHE) works with institutions to develop these forms for future implementation, the Compact contributes to transparency efforts by providing institutions data and helping them answer students' questions to bring awareness and make informed decisions.

Other states, like Virginia, have leveraged cross-agency networks to implement several efforts to focus on college access and building awareness. The State Council of Higher Education for Virginia (SCHEV) and the Virginia Department of Education (VDOE) partnered to create the Level Up Virginia initiative to develop a college access campaign that includes events for schools to receive training, engaging with high school stakeholders working with an external consultant to develop responsive marketing materials, and creating a student and family-facing website. As part of this program, institutions can earn access

3. Ortagus, J. C., Tanner, M., & McFarlin, I. (2021). Can re-enrollment campaigns help dropouts return to college? Evidence from Florida community colleges. *Educational Evaluation and Policy Analysis*, 43(1), 154-171.

4. Pearce, B. & Dressel, J. (2024, October 28). *Turning debt into credentials: The Ohio College Comeback Compact Continues to benefit adult learners*, institutions, and Northeast Ohio. Ithaka S+R. https://sr.ithaka.org/blog/turning-debt-into-credentials/

recognition badges to acknowledge their efforts and signal accessibility to prospective students and families. The state has also implemented and leveraged the Virginia College Access Network which brings college access professionals, high school counselors, and higher education professionals together to find ways to break down barriers. These efforts not only address accessibility but also further awareness so students understand the opportunities available to them.

AFFORDABILITY AND MEETING BASIC NEEDS

Affordability is a widely shared concern among students, higher education leaders, policymakers, and the general public. However, this barrier is not easily resolved due to state budget constraints and varying levels of tuition reliance across institutions. Although per-student appropriations to higher education have slowly recovered from the 2008 Great Recession in most states, the proportion of revenue used to educate students derived from student tuition dollars remains above 40%.[5] This means students and families are still expected to foot nearly half the bill of attending a public college or university. In a systematic review of 81 rigorous causal studies on state support of higher education published in the 2010s, Cummings, Laderman, Lee, Tandberg, and Weeden (2021) found several effects of declines in state appropriations.[6] First, they found that four-year universities tended to raise tuition and recruit more out-of-state and international students to increase tuition to make up for the loss of state funding. They also found broad access institutions tended to reduce institutional expenditures, with the largest impact on academic support, student services, and instruction. The funding cuts also affected enrollment, as states saw declining in-state enrollment, and even some students seeking out for-profit institutions. Consequently, degree and certificate attainment and graduation rates declined. Cummings and colleagues also found evidence of positive post-collegiate outcomes when state appropriations increased. Not only did they find that increases in state appropriations reduce debt outcomes, but increases also improved the likelihood of other positive post-graduation outcomes such as owning a car, having a higher credit score, and having a higher income.

Cummings and colleagues also systematically reviewed 91 casual research studies centering on student financial aid. Ultimately, what they found from these studies is that student grant aid programs are more successful in determining where students enroll rather than if they enroll or not. They also found that grant aid programs with easy applications and advising and mentoring components are most successful in helping students enroll. Continuing to receive aid was found to keep already enrolled students in college, and increases in grant aid have been found to increase students' probability of graduating. Unsurprisingly, they found evidence that students with the most need are most likely to benefit from grant aid, and programs with support beyond financial awards are most successful. What is more, they found that the literature shows that students and states experience significant returns on investment in state aid, except for state merit aid, as merit-based programs have not been found to keep students in-state for employment after graduation. Together, findings from their systematic review of nearly more than 170 studies resulted in several policy recommendations:

- Increase state support to higher education, with the caveat of not increasing support to operating budgets at the expense of state financial aid.

- Take an adequacy approach to distributing appropriations to institutions of higher education, with special attention to institutions that have fewer options for alternative revenue sources and enroll traditionally underserved student populations (e.g., broad access institutions).

5. SHEEO (2024). *State higher education finance: FY 2023*. State Higher Education Executive Officers Association. https://shef.sheeo.org/

6. Cummings, K., Laderman, S., Lee, J., Tandberg, D., & Weeden, D. (2021). *Investigating the impacts of state higher education appropriations and financial aid*. State Higher Education Executive Officers Association. https://sheeo.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/05/SHEEO_ImpactAppropationsFinancialAid.pdf

- Conduct equity audits to examine current trends and race- and income-based gaps in institution-level allocations and increase transparency by making results publicly available.

- Employ simple financial aid messaging through investment in marketing efforts.

- Target student financial aid to populations using an equity lens to ensure funds are reaching the student groups for which grant aid will have the greatest impact.

In addition to concerns about students' abilities to pay for college, state leaders are increasingly aware of and attempting to address financial barriers related to basic needs such as housing, transportation, food, health care, childcare, technology, and more. According to the Hope Center, one in four undergraduate students experience food insecurity, and 1.4 million students are experiencing homelessness.[7] Although degree attainment lowers the likelihood of having difficulty meeting basic needs, experiencing basic needs insecurity while working to earn a degree has serious consequences that can prevent students from reaching that goal. However, some promising interventions have been identified. This includes policy changes in California that have expanded the interpretation of employment for Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) eligibility and require public colleges to use Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) data to identify and reach out to students who meet the SNAP income requirements.[8] States like Oregon have also collected and used data on parenting students to advocate for more resources and institutional support that address needs, such as affordable child care and staff to help navigate campus and community resources with the intent of increasing student-parent persistence and completion.[9] Finally, the Office of Sixty by 30 in the Michigan Department of Lifelong Learning, Education, Advancement, and Potential (MiLEAP), which was recently established in late 2023, developed competitive grant awards for institutions that included $5 million toward barrier removal initiatives that address students basic needs and establish or enhance emergency aid programs.

ADVANCING WORK-BASED LEARNING

Economic and workforce development is a salient policy issue across the country, especially among state policymakers and higher education executive officers in 2024.[10] As governors and legislators look toward higher education to help fill in-demand jobs among ongoing workforce shortages, state higher education agencies have made efforts to directly connect students with the job market during, rather than at the end of their postsecondary education. Internships, apprenticeships, cooperative education (co-op), and similar work-based learning models have been highlighted as high impact practices for students to participate in as they complete their degree; however, post-graduation outcomes vary by experience type, and access to participate in such opportunities is uneven across student groups.[11,12] While most first-year students — approximately 70% — express interest in completing an internship, less than half do.[13] What is more, 64% of students who desired an internship were unable to participate in

7. McKibben, B., Wu, J., & Abelson, S. (2023, August 3). *New federal data confirm that college students face significant—and unacceptable—basic needs insecurity.* The Hope Center. https://hope.temple.edu/npsas

8. McKibben, B. (2023). *Strategies for states and colleges to reduce food insecurity among students.* The Hope Center. https://hope.temple.edu/policy-advocacy/closing-college-snap-gap

9. Rios, L. (2023, August 2). *Child care is crucial for supporting parenting students in North Carolina—and everywhere.* The Hope Center. https://hope.temple.edu/parenting-students-north-carolina-everywhere

10. SHEEO (2024). *State priorities for higher education in 2024.* State Higher Education Executive Officers Association. https://sheeo.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/12/Policy-Issue-Survey.2024.pdf

11. Hora, M, Chen, Z., Parrott, E., & Her, P. (2019). *Problematizing college internships: Exploring issues with access, program design, and developmental outcomes in three U.S. colleges.* (WCER Working Paper No. 2019-1). University of Wisconsin–Madison, Wisconsin Center for Education Research. http://www.wcer.wisc.edu/publications/working-papers

12. Torpey-Saboe, N., Leigh, E., & Clayton, D. (2022). *The power of work-based learning.* Strada Education Foundation. https://stradaeducation.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/06/031522_PV-report.pdf

13. Strada. (2024). *Building better internships: Understanding and improving the internship experience.* Strada Education Foundation. https://stradaeducation.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/06/Building-Better-Internships-Full-Report-Updated-June-2024.pdf

one because of a lack of opportunities in their field, insufficient pay for the internship, and scheduling conflicts with work and/or school.[14]

While students who receive paid internships have positive post-graduation outcomes, such as higher wages and career satisfaction, across fields of study, gender, and race/ethnicity, access to paid internships is unequal across racial, gender, and income groups. Latino and Black students, women, first-generation, and low-income students are less likely to participate in a paid internship while in college.[15] Given ongoing concerns around the cost of attending college, students — especially adult learners, parenting students, and students receiving SNAP benefits — have to make difficult choices about which jobs or work opportunities they can realistically take to meet their and their family's needs.

Research from Strada and other experts suggests that effective work-based learning programs should be paid, embedded in a course or for course credit, include mentorship and coaching, center skills and competencies that align with students' education and career goals, and be designed with a focus on equity and accessibility.[16] Some states have taken steps to make work-based learning a more cohesive, widely available component of undergraduate education. In Virginia, the General Assembly appropriated funds to SCHEV to aid institutions in developing partnerships for their students to obtain paid internships in 2018. This effect expanded to the Innovative Internship Fund and Program in 2019 and has since grown into the Virginia Talent + Opportunity Partnership (V-TOP) to increase availability and participation in paid, high-quality, and credit-bearing internship and work-based learning opportunities through collaboration with employers.

14. Hora, M, Chen, Z., Parrott, E., & Her, P. (2019). *Problematizing college internships: Exploring issues with access, program design, and developmental outcomes in three U.S. colleges*. (WCER Working Paper No. 2019-1). University of Wisconsin–Madison, Wisconsin Center for Education Research. http://www.wcer.wisc.edu/publications/working-papers

15. Torpey-Saboe, N., Leigh, E., & Clayton, D. (2022). *The power of work-based learning*. Strada Education Foundation. https://stradaeducation.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/06/031522_PV-report.pdf

16. Strada. (2024). *Building better internships: Understanding and improving the internship experience*. Strada Education Foundation. https://stradaeducation.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/06/Building-Better-Internships-Full-Report-Updated-June-2024.pdf

CREATING A PATH FORWARD

To accomplish the goals of creating an evidence-based, comprehensive student success policy agenda, partnerships must be formed within and across state agencies, postsecondary institutions, and communities. Like with many other policy efforts, coalition building for a student success agenda is critical. As outlined by the National College Attainment Network (NCAN), coalition building can bring strength in numbers, expand resources, capacity, expertise, ideas, and diverse viewpoints, and enhance visibility along with opportunities for collective action – all of which can contribute to increasing political clout.[17]

Several states have made coalition-building efforts to increase visibility and collective action in developing a student success agenda. In Louisiana, the Board of Regents applied the Momentum Approach to develop the Meauxmentum Framework as a component of their master plan, Louisiana Prospers. To increase postsecondary attainment across the state to 60% by 2030, the Board of Regents designed this framework based on three foundational strands and four structural threads. The foundational strands focus on people and equity ("everyone"), access to resources, and non-academic factors that affect persistence and attainment ("affordability"), and creating a sense of belonging and value in academic studies ("learning mindset"). While the Board of Regents suggests these strands should be woven into policies, processes, organization structures, and strategic plans across institutions, the structural threads are considered to be the policy drivers. These threads are built on the idea of institutions addressing students' choices, pathways, milestones, and engagement, each with three stages that involve creating institution-level policies and processes.

To operationalize the framework and aid institutions in enacting these threads, the Board of Regents actively engaged executive leadership teams from institutions across the state. The primary effort to create buy-in and build coalition among institutional leaders was inviting the executive leadership teams to a Meauxmentum Summit in which teams met with facilitators and content experts, attended workshops that focused on the intersection of the four structural threads, and aided leaders in expanding implementation of the framework from the executive leadership level to the campus level. In further efforts to engage campus communities and identify those championing this framework beyond executive leadership, the Board of Regents recruited Meauxmentum Scholars, faculty members who have made exceptional strides in implementation.

In states like Michigan, coalition building is more complex but critical to advancing student success. Michigan is unique in that the state does not have a state- or system-level higher education governing or coordinating body. This means that collective action to advance student success requires, as described by Michigan Community College Association (MCCA) leadership, a "coalition of the willing".[18] There are several challenges Michigan has faced due to not having a state-level staff from a governing or coordinating agency to implement policies or programs for institutions across the state. However, with support from the Kresge Foundation, MCCA developed the Michigan Center for Student Success (MCSS). The MCSS has worked to engage all 28 autonomous community colleges across the state by working with college leadership, faculty, and staff – using MCCA's communication channels to keep them consistently informed through regular MCCA college presidents' committee meetings, a weekly newsletter to the board of directors, and invited opportunities to participate in initiatives based on aligned goals. Michigan has since formed the Michigan Department of Lifelong Education, Advancement, and Potential (MiLEAP) which houses the Office of Higher Education and the Office of Sixty by 30 to help the state reach its goal of 60% of working-age adults having a credential or degree by 2030. This office received funding to solicit competitive grants aimed toward efforts that remove barriers and meet students' basic needs,

17. Brown, C. (2023). *Coalition-building: Why it matters and how to start*. National College Attainment Network (NCAN). https://www.ncan.org/news/635812/Coalition-Building-Why-it-Matters-and-How-to-Start.htm

18. Schanker, J. B., & Orians, E. L. (2023). Leveraging the coalition of the willing for student success in Michigan. In E. Cox Brand (Ed.), *Student success center network. New Directions for Community Colleges*, 201, pp. 43–52. John Wiley & Sons, Inc. https://doi.org/10.1002/cc.20559

as well as build capacity and community partnerships to increase student success. Elevated Readiness Grants for fiscal year 2024 were awarded to the Michigan College Access Network (MCAN), MCSS, and the Michigan Center for Adult Student Success (in partnership with MCCA and MCAN). These grants not only generate self-evaluation and capacity-building funding but also further coalition-building efforts by bringing multiple agencies together in shared work aimed at increasing student success.

SCALING EXISTING PROGRAMS

As an emerging area of focus in the policy space, there are examples of comprehensive student success programs that can be scaled and implemented in other states. An example of a pioneer in this work is the City University of New York's (CUNY) innovative Accelerated Study in Associate Programs (ASAP), which was implemented in 2007. In this program, students are provided financial resources such as tuition waivers, a textbook stipend, and a monthly MetroCard to assist with transportation. Students are also provided structured pathways such as a full-time course schedule, including winter and summer courses and first-year blocked courses. Finally, students receive comprehensive support through early engagement, high-touch case management, career services, and tutoring. The program has completed evaluations and used data for program management, as well as to learn that ASAP increased graduation rates by 18 percentage points compared to a control group.

Due to ASAP's success, other states have piloted this model with some modifications to adapt to local contexts. For example, Ohio implemented the ASAP model at three community colleges in 2014, keeping it as close as possible but needing to modify the transportation support from a MetroCard to a $50 gift card toward gas. After six years, a study found this program increased participants' earnings by 11%, increased graduation rates by 50%, and increased the completion of both associate and bachelor's degrees.[19] Evidence from these programs shows that this is a model that can be implemented and scaled in other states with modifications that meet local needs.

In 2020, the Montana University System's Office of the Commissioner of Higher Education (OCHE) implemented a model similar to ASAP for its Montana 10 initiative. Prior to the start of this program, roughly 50% of Pell Grant-eligible students were dropping out with debt, compared to 29% for all other students. This finding was in part the motivation behind the Montana 10 initiative. The Montana 10 program is for Pell-eligible students and is specifically designed to meet the needs of Native American, rural, and low-income students. This program is built on a framework that focuses on a) financial support through scholarships, textbook stipends, and monthly incentives, b) academic momentum through full-time course scheduling, corequisite math and writing courses, and tutoring, and c) purpose and belonging through individualized advising, career development, orientation, and a freshman seminar. One year after implementation (Fall 2021), retention of the Fall 2020 cohort of Pell-eligible Montana 10 Scholars was 17 percentage points higher than other Pell-eligible students, reaching 78%. In year two (Fall 2022), retention of the Fall 2020 cohort was 16 percentage points higher than other Pell-eligible students, reaching 62%. With the positive results, OCHE requested continued funding from the legislature to fund the program at scale, keeping scaling considerations focused on funding, institutional support, and fidelity to the program.

As previously noted, Ohio also implemented a pilot program called the Ohio College Comeback Compact. The Ohio College Comeback Compact aims to be a program at the intersection of accessibility, affordability, and awareness, targeting adult learners, primarily those who stopped out and have unpaid balances or institutional debt. This is an important group to target, as having unpaid institutional debt can prevent both re-enrollment and transfer due to transcript holds. Adult learners typically navigate their return to higher education alone, so the Ohio Department of Higher Education (ODHE) partnered with

---

19. Hutchins, J. (2023). *Ohio Programs Based on CUNY's Accelerated Study in Associate Programs (ASAP) Boost Earnings During the Pandemic.* MDRC. https://www.mdrc.org/news/press-release/ohio-programs-based-cuny-s-accelerated-study-associate-programs-asap-boost

other agencies to develop a self-service portal called the Ohio College Navigator. To address affordability, ODHE reviewed legal statutes related to institutional debt and worked with the attorney general to confirm that institutional debt is legally forgivable in Ohio, and then provided a roadmap to do so. To make students, particularly adult learners, aware that a postsecondary credential is within reach — even if they have unpaid institutional balances — ODHE also leveraged partnerships with national organizations such as Ithaka S+R and ReUp Education to focus on a comprehensive marketing campaign and tapped into community organizations, industry groups, and employers to spread the message as a trusted resource.

Early results from the Ohio College Comeback Compact have shown promising outcomes. Nationally, the re-enrollment rate of students with some college but no credit (SCNC) is 2.56%.[20] Of Compact-eligible students, the re-enrollment rate was over one percentage higher at 3.7%.[21] The Ohio College Comeback Compact has particularly impacted students of color and Pell-eligible students as 61% of re-enrolled Compact students identified as a person of color and 69% previously received Pell Grant aid. While there is a financial incentive for this program in the form of institutional debt resolution, more than one-third of Compact-eligible students that enrolled in the Spring 2024 — still only the second year of the program — had already resolved their debt. This speaks to Compact-eligible students' motivations to complete a credential and persist after the barrier of institutional debt has been removed. This initiative has also had valuable ROI for institutions, as the tuition revenue generated from re-enrolled Compact-eligible students was 25 times greater than the forgiven past due balances.[22] As of 2024, the Ohio College Comeback Compact has been fully implemented in Northeastern Ohio and is being replicated in other regions in Ohio through the Strategic Ohio Council for Higher Education's (SOCHE) Ohio BOLD Compact.

20. Berg, B., Causey, J., Cohen, J., Ibrahim, M., Holsapple, M., & Shapiro, D. (2024). *Some college, no credential: A 2024 snapshot for the nation and the states.* National Student Clearinghouse Research Center. https://nscresearchcenter.org/wp-content/uploads/SCNCReport2024.pdf

21. Pearce, B. & Dressel, J. (2024, October 28). *Turning debt into credentials: The Ohio College Comeback Compact Continues to benefit adult learners, institutions, and Northeast Ohio.* Ithaka S+R. https://sr.ithaka.org/blog/turning-debt-into-credentials/

22. Ibid

CONCLUSION

As the higher education landscape continues to evolve, it is imperative for states to focus on evidence-based policies to meet the evolving needs of students. Given the limited capacity state higher education agencies may have to develop or implement a comprehensive student success policy agenda, agencies can partner with other state agencies, nonprofit organizations, and communities. This can increase capacity by sharing this work across multiple stakeholders. States and institutions can also leverage their unique missions to prioritize student success as they further their efforts in preparing the workforce needed for the future growth of their economies.

By investing in evidence-based student success strategies, states can improve student outcomes, boost economic growth, and strengthen their workforce. These evidence-based strategies will improve student outcomes and reduce the risk students incur by enrolling in postsecondary education programs. This brief has outlined several key areas where states can focus their efforts: expanding access and awareness, enhancing affordability, developing policies and initiatives that help meet students' basic needs, and advancing work-based learning. By implementing comprehensive approaches that address multiple barriers to student success, states can help more students complete their education and improve the ROI students are seeking with their investments in postsecondary education.