



SHEEO

State Higher Education
Executive Officers Association

Quarterly Policy Review Fall 2024

December 2024

A large, abstract graphic in the lower half of the page consists of several overlapping, curved lines in shades of blue, green, and yellow. The lines create a sense of depth and movement, resembling a stylized mountain range or a wave. The graphic is positioned on the right side of the page, with its base extending towards the bottom edge.

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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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This quarterly report provides a review of state- and system-level activity around the country during Fall 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

California has **partnered** with NVIDIA to launch a groundbreaking artificial intelligence (AI) collaboration to accelerate research, innovation, and workforce development in AI technologies. This initiative, based on Governor Newsom's executive order, will deploy the most innovative AI infrastructure and resources across California's higher education institutions. It aims to train a diverse pool of talent, support job creation, promote innovation, and solve social challenges by using AI. The initiative includes direct collaboration with California's community colleges and its more than 2 million students by integrating AI concepts into the curriculum to identify high-demand jobs, organizing AI workshops and boot camps relevant to in-demand local jobs, and identifying faculty for AI ambassador programs and faculty development programs.

The University of **Vermont's** Board of Trustees has **approved** the establishment of the Vermont Complex Systems Institute, an interdisciplinary research center focusing on complex systems to address societal challenges. The institute aims to leverage expertise across disciplines to analyze and address issues like health, sustainability, and infrastructure by promoting data-driven solutions beyond the campus.

The University of **Wyoming** **secured** a \$4 million grant from the National Science Foundation (NSF) to install a state-of-the-art research computing system to enhance the university's capabilities in computational research. This new system provides significant computing power to support research in atmospheric science, engineering, and artificial intelligence. The investment is also expected to enhance the university's ability to attract top researchers and strengthen its position as a scientific and technological leader.

HEALTH CARE PROFESSIONAL WORKFORCE

The **California** State University (CSU) **created** the Health Professions Track, a pre-doctoral pilot program, to diversify California's health care workforce. The program aims to create a more equitable health care system that addresses the needs of a variety of Californians and establish clear degree pathways for underserved students. The CSU has also **signed** a memorandum of understanding with the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services to encourage Californians to pursue federal health careers. The memorandum outlines how collaboration between the state and the department will serve as a model for creating the health care workforce of the future.

The **New Jersey** Higher Education Student Assistance Authority is **providing** a third round of student loan redemption and incentive grants for behavioral healthcare professionals. Eligible behavioral health professionals can apply for up to \$180,000 to help repay their student debt. This round is part of a larger \$7 million program aimed to improve access to mental health care in the state through incentivizing careers in behavioral health.

In **New York**, Governor Kathy Hochul and SUNY Chancellor John B. King **congratulated** recipients of the **Health Care Workers for Our Future Scholarship**. The scholarship, which was created in April 2024 as part of a statewide effort to increase the health care workforce, provides state financial aid to fully fund health care education costs for 500 New Yorkers to advance their health care careers.

The **South Carolina** Commission on Higher Education **announced** that students at both public and independent institutions can participate in the BOLD (Better Outcomes, Less Debt) Career Pathways Nursing Faculty Loan Program. The program, facilitated by the South Carolina Student Loan Corporation, offers up to \$90,000 in tuition reimbursement for nursing students who commit to serving as faculty in South Carolina.

The **Texas** Higher Education Coordinating Board, in concert with Governor Greg Abbott, **published** a report from the Healthcare Workforce Task Force. The **report** provides recommendations for addressing the health care workforce shortages in the state and emphasizes training, resources, and education to strengthen the workforce.

The **West Virginia** Higher Education Policy Commission **announced** a series of grant awards totaling \$700,000 to support efforts to improve training for behavioral health professionals. Funding from the U.S. Department of Labor will be used to improve the behavioral health workforce pipeline in West Virginia, with a focus on underserved and rural regions of the state.

RESEARCH AND INNOVATION

The **Arizona** Board of Regents (ABOR) **produced** a report on the Technology and Research Initiative Fund. The fund, which was established in 2001 through sales tax increases, has received over \$1.8 billion to be used for university research and work-based learning, state improvement grants, ABOR initiatives, university grants, and university three-year plans focused on improving health; water, environmental, and energy solutions; security systems; space exploration and optical solutions; or higher education access for workforce development. ABOR also **announced** a new technology transfer grant that will support collaborative efforts across the state's three public universities to engage local industry, regional biotech hubs, and tribal and minority communities to address technology transfer contexts.

The **Idaho** State Board of Education has **unveiled** its request for proposals for the **Idaho Global Entrepreneurial Mission Initiative**. The state's four public four-year institutions are eligible to apply for research grants aligned with statewide higher education research priorities in the areas of biotechnology/biomedicine, energy, high-performance computing/AI/machine learning/cybersecurity, human-environmental interactions, and microelectronics/semiconductors. Awards range from \$400,000 to \$1.1 million.

The **Nevada** System of Higher Education (NSHE) is **creating** interstellar insights through its robotics programs. Awarded a \$750,000 grant through NASA's Established Program to Stimulate Competitive Research, NSHE will convene experts from their public universities and NASA's Ames Research Center to support NASA's Moon-to-Mars initiative.

The State University of **New York** **announced** the winners of the SUNY Startup Summer School Class of 2024 Demo Day program. The program highlights SUNY students, faculty, and staff who have developed technologies and startups. Each winner of the competitive program receives \$50,000 in seed money, alongside training and education, to help them move their innovation to the marketplace.

The University of **Wyoming** (UW) is **engaging** in research to support the carbon capture and storage industry. Bolstered by a recent \$5 million grant from the U.S. Department of Energy, UW will study ways to use former oil and gas reservoirs as carbon storage facilities.

TEACHER PREPARATION AND WORKFORCE

The **Idaho** State Department of Education has **launched** a statewide mentoring program aimed at providing support for early-career teachers. This program pairs new teachers with experienced educators to offer guidance, professional development, and emotional support during their first few years. The initiative is designed to address teacher retention challenges and improve instructional quality by offering ongoing support to educators. Idaho's mentorship program reflects a growing commitment from state higher education and education agencies to improve teacher retention and enhance education quality.

Indiana **launched** a new scholarship program designed to provide financial assistance to students interested in becoming teachers. The program offers significant financial incentives to students who commit to teaching in Indiana’s public schools after graduation. By reducing the financial burden on future educators, Indiana aims to attract more individuals to the teaching profession and address the state’s teacher shortage. This scholarship is part of a broader effort led by the state to invest in its educational workforce to ensure that Indiana’s public schools have access to qualified and dedicated teachers.

The **Minnesota** Office of Higher Education **continues** to expand support for aspiring educators through a series of financial aid initiatives and scholarship programs. These programs aim to make teacher preparation more affordable, particularly for underrepresented communities and those committed to teaching in Minnesota’s public schools. The initiative is part of a broader effort to increase diversity in the teaching workforce and ensure that future educators are equipped to meet the challenges of the classroom. Minnesota’s strategy to focus on financial support for educators highlights the state’s ongoing commitment to addressing the teacher shortage and promoting a more inclusive education system.

The **South Dakota** Board of Regents recently **announced** the launch of the Gateway Teacher Education Certificate, a new program designed to create accessible pathways for high school students interested in pursuing a teaching career. This certificate program allows students to gain foundational teaching skills through dual credit enrollment, enabling them to earn college credits while still in high school. By integrating teaching education with dual enrollment, the state is actively addressing the increased demand for teachers while providing students with the opportunity to reduce the time and cost associated with completing teacher education programs. This initiative reflects the state’s commitment to creating a more streamlined pipeline for teacher preparation while supporting workforce needs in education.

In **Washington D.C.**, Mayor Muriel Bowser **celebrated** the inaugural cohort of apprentices in a new teacher training program aimed at addressing the city’s teacher shortage. The program, developed in partnership with local schools, focuses on preparing the next generation of educators by providing them with hands-on experience and mentorship. This initiative underscores the city’s proactive approach to workforce development in education and reflects the growing need for innovative solutions to teacher shortages nationwide.

The **West Virginia** Higher Education Policy Commission has **selected** 24 students to receive its prestigious teaching scholarship aimed at attracting academic talent into the state’s public school system. These scholarships provide financial support to high-achieving students committed to pursuing careers in education. This program is a critical component of West Virginia’s strategy to address teacher shortages, strengthen the teacher pipelines, and foster future leaders in the classroom. The initiative is designed to invest in the next generation of educators and ensure that public schools have access to well-prepared teachers.

WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT

Maryland Governor Wes Moore **announced** a \$9.2 million investment in renewable energy workforce development programs targeting higher education institutions. These programs aim to prepare students for careers in the growing field of renewable energy so that the state’s workforce is ready for the green economy.

The **Michigan** and the **Ohio** Community College Associations **launched** a partnership to accelerate the efforts to address economic development opportunities in the Midwest. Using research on dual enrollment, transfers, guided pathways, and college access from leading national leaders, the initiative will prepare students for career pathways in emerging industries such as advanced manufacturing, IT, health care, mobility, and education.

The **Missouri** Department of Higher Education & Workforce Development’s MoExcels initiative **awarded** \$9.1 million in funding to boost the manufacturing sector by creating innovative programs that prepare students for advanced manufacturing careers and ensuring alignment between educational curricula and industry needs.

The **Nevada** System of Higher Education **secured** Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) funding to increase the state's water workforce pipeline through STEM education programs. This initiative aims to build a skilled workforce prepared for careers in the environmental sector while addressing water infrastructure challenges. Nevada's work in this area is also advanced through a \$5 million **multi-state environmental study** between Nevada, **Arizona**, and **Utah**.

In its third year of administering the Career Accelerator Internship Program, the **New Jersey** Office of the Secretary of Higher Education (OSHE) **awarded** \$2.4 million to 133 state employers. These funds will support paid internships for 574 students attending in-state postsecondary institutions. OSHE, in partnership with the state's Department of Labor, continues to grow the scholarship program, creating applied workforce learning experiences for students and economic opportunities for state businesses.

The **New Mexico** Higher Education Department is **launching** a series of new education and workforce training programs focused on adult education, further expanding the state's efforts to enhance workforce readiness in high-demand fields such as nursing and early childhood development. The programs will allow adult learners to earn industry-recognized workforce training while achieving their high school equivalency and/or improving their English language proficiency.

North Carolina Governor Roy Cooper **announced** a \$4 million grant to expand the state's apprenticeship programs, focusing on developing more career pathways in high-demand sectors like advanced manufacturing, health care, and information technology. This grant will help community colleges build capacity, recruit more apprentices, and provide critical support to employers seeking to fill workforce gaps. The expansion demonstrates the state's dedication to increasing access to workforce development opportunities and ensuring alignment with industry needs.

The **Ohio** Higher Education Commission **introduced** a new program to increase access to commercial driver's license (CDL) training, a critical component of the state's workforce development strategy. By expanding CDL programs, Ohio seeks to address shortages in the transportation sector and create new opportunities for residents.

The *Learn Here, Earn Here* initiative in **Oklahoma** **encourages** college graduates to stay and work in the state by offering incentives to those who secure local employment. These efforts aim to retain talent and align educational outcomes with workforce needs. A recent **report** from the Oklahoma State Regents for Higher Education highlights positive employment outcomes by showing that a significant number of graduates remain employed within the state and contribute to the local economy. These efforts reflect Oklahoma's commitment to strengthening its workforce and aligning higher education programs with workforce needs.

The **Oregon** Higher Education Coordinating Commission's Future Ready Oregon package is **addressing** workforce challenges through a series of grants and initiatives that support rural and underserved communities, including incarcerated and formerly incarcerated populations. HECC will award approximately \$40 million to workforce service providers and community-based organizations to recruit and retain a diverse workforce in key sectors of Oregon's economy – health care, manufacturing, and technology.

The **Tennessee** Higher Education Commission has **awarded** several rural workforce development grants to support local initiatives that boost employment and educational opportunities in under-resourced regions. These grants will fund programs that help individuals develop skills in high-demand fields and align education with workforce needs. Tennessee is also expanding the **Governor's Investment in Vocational Education** (GIVE) program, which aims to support technical education and workforce readiness in rural communities. Through these initiatives, Tennessee is taking proactive steps to ensure that its higher education institutions are at the forefront of addressing rural workforce challenges by equipping residents with skills in high-demand industries.

The **Talent Ready Utah** initiative **expands** work-based learning opportunities through a partnership between the **Utah** Board of Higher Education and local employers. The work-based apprenticeships and internships offer Utah students hands-on experience that aligns with high-demand industry needs and employers' access to top talent produced by Utah's higher education system. High school students can also participate in pathways across aerospace, life sciences, engineering, architecture, and construction to earn industry-recognized credentials.

The **Utah** System of Higher Education, as a part of the **Talent Ready Utah** initiative, recently **awarded** \$47,871 to Utah-based Rasa Legal to help individuals clear their criminal records quickly and affordably. This funding, provided through the Return-to-Work program, will further Rasa Legal's mission to support justice-impacted Utah residents interested in re-entering the workforce. Rasa will hire two new justice-impacted individuals who will receive specialized legal and case management training, mentorship, opportunities to participate in professional development opportunities, and a stipend.

The **Washington** Student Achievement Council (WSAC) has **launched** the Native American Apprenticeship Assistance Program (NAAAP) to support registered apprentices who are members of federally recognized tribes, with a focus on Washington State tribes. Applications opened on November 1, 2024, and funds must be allocated by June 2025. This program offers financial support for essential expenses, including tuition, supplies, and tools, to help Native American apprentices succeed in their pathways.

West Virginia **introduced** Credential WV, a new statewide program, aimed at preparing students for workforce readiness through credentialing programs. The initiative is designed to streamline pathways for students to obtain industry-recognized credentials by enhancing their employability in key sectors.

Wyoming Governor Mark Gordon **awarded** \$9.6 million in grants through the third wave of funding of the **Wyoming Innovation Partnership** to ensure programs' long-term resiliency and sustainability. The Partnership is a collaboration to support workforce development programs focused on strengthening the state's economy and increasing job opportunities in high-demand sectors.

ACCESS, PREPARATION, & ENROLLMENT

APPLICATIONS AND ADMISSIONS

The **Arkansas** Higher Education Coordinating Board **revised** its concurrent enrollment policy to allow a more holistic admissions approach for high schoolers seeking college access in the state. The new policy **allows** colleges to use indicators like GPA and prior course success, rather than a single standardized test score (e.g., ACT), to determine eligibility for college coursework.

The **California** State University (CSU) **hosted** five free "College Nights" across the state in September to provide prospective students and their families the opportunity to engage with representatives from all 23 CSU campuses and learn about admissions, financial aid, and student support services. CSU also **partnered** with the Riverside County Office of Education to launch a direct admission pilot program, offering approximately 12,000 eligible high school seniors in Riverside County conditional admission to 10 CSU campuses for the fall 2025 term before they even apply.

The **Connecticut** State Colleges and Universities (CSCU) are **promoting** the Connecticut Automatic Admission Program, which offers automatic admission to participating institutions for high school seniors meeting a certain GPA (3.0 weighted or 2.75 unweighted) and simplifies the process by waiving application fees and other requirements.

For the 2024-25 academic year, the **Idaho** State Board of Education's Campus Choice program will **include** 11th grade Idaho Standards Achievement Test (ISAT) scores as a criterion for guaranteed admission to Idaho's public higher education institutions, providing an additional pathway for students to qualify based on either proficiency in English Language Arts and Math ISATs or a GPA of 3.0 or higher.

The **Indiana** Commission for Higher Education **expanded** its Pre-Admissions: Your Path to College initiative — an effort that aims to boost college-going rates by informing students of their postsecondary options before they apply — and notified more than 67,000 high school seniors of their eligibility for pre-admission to 39 participating colleges.

In **New York**, Governor Kathy Hochul **launched** the SUNY Top 10% Promise Program, granting automatic admission to select State University of New York (SUNY) campuses for high school seniors graduating in the top 10% of their class.

The University of **North Carolina** (UNC) System has **launched** NC College Connect, a pilot program that offers high school seniors with a weighted GPA of 2.8 or higher a simplified application process to select UNC System universities and all 58 colleges in the North Carolina Community College System. The program allows qualifying seniors to **bypass** the traditional application process to improve college access, attracting students who may not have previously considered attending college, and meet workforce needs.

The **South Dakota** Board of Regents and the South Dakota Board of Technical Education are **offering** a Free College Application Period in October and November to increase higher education awareness and accessibility for high school seniors at the state's public universities and technical colleges.

Governor Abbott and the **Texas** Higher Education Coordinating Board (THECB) **introduced** the Direct Admissions initiative to simplify the college application process by providing Texas students with a list indicating which of the 31 participating institutions they qualify for acceptance before applying.

The **Utah** System of Higher Education **launched** "Admit Utah," a guaranteed admissions program **ensuring** every high school student in the state receives admission to at least one of Utah's 16 public colleges and universities, regardless of GPA. This initiative aims to **simplify** the college application process, provide guidance for undecided students, and integrate college preparation with the K-12 education system.

The **West Virginia** Higher Education Policy Commission and Community and Technical College System have **awarded** First-Generation Student Success Grants of up to \$5,000 to public colleges and universities statewide. These grants support initiatives that recruit, retain, and foster the success of first-generation college students, who often face unique challenges in completing their degrees.

COLLEGE PREPARATION

The **Indiana** Commission for Higher Education **announced** that the Indiana College Core, a program allowing high school students to earn 30 college-level general education credits, has expanded to 270 high schools for the 2024-25 school year — a 20% increase from 2023.

The **Kentucky** Council on Postsecondary Education, the Kentucky Department of Education, and the Kentucky Center for Statistics are **developing** an online resource to help high school students navigate postsecondary education opportunities and provide guidance on college options and financial aid.

The **Minnesota** Office of Higher Education's Get Ready program has been **awarded** a \$31 million grant from the U.S. Department of Education to continue supporting middle school students from low-income backgrounds and at-risk communities in pursuing higher education.

Several SHEEO member agencies — including those in **Minnesota, Rhode Island, Tennessee, Washington,** and **Wyoming** — **received** part of the Biden-Harris Administration's \$80 million GEAR UP funding to enhance college readiness and success for low-income students. For example, the Tennessee Higher Education Commission was **awarded** \$35 million to support about 9,000 students from underserved communities over the next seven years. Additionally, through its existing GEAR UP grant, the State Council of Higher Education for Virginia (SCHEV) is **distributing** up to \$200,000 in scholarships to about 80 college freshmen from high-poverty areas, building on SCHEV's commitment to provide college preparatory services and financial support to first-generation and low-income students.

ENROLLMENT

Several SHEEO member agencies have reported enrollment increases across their campuses this fall. The **South Dakota** Board of Regents **announced** a six-year high in student headcount, attributed to an increase in first-year students and strong retention. Similarly, the University of **North Carolina** System **reported** a 2.2% enrollment increase compared to the previous year, with every public university in the state making gains. The University of **Maine** System **began** the new academic year with its highest enrollment since 2021, up over 5% to nearly 24,400 students, driven by affordability, new access initiatives, and a 39% increase in transfer students, including many from the Maine Community College System via the new Transfer ME initiative.

FAFSA COMPLETION

The **Kentucky** Higher Education Assistance Authority **hosted** a 12-hour, first-ever “FAFSAthon,” featuring live music, games, and skits, to assist students and families in completing the FAFSA.

Maryland Governor Wes Moore and the Maryland Higher Education Commission **released** a promotional video encouraging students to apply for FAFSA.

The **Michigan** Department of Lifelong Education, Advancement, and Potential (MiLEAP) has launched several initiatives to improve college access and financial aid awareness, including **awarding** 100 students free pizza for a year in the inaugural “Reach for the Pie” contest to encourage FAFSA completion, and announcing a \$10 million Universal FAFSA Challenge Grant to expand financial aid opportunities for high school seniors in local schools and communities.

Joining about 10 other states, the **Nebraska** legislature **adopted** a universal FAFSA requirement that requires all high school seniors, starting with the graduating class of 2025, to complete the FAFSA as a requirement to graduate.

State University of **New York** (SUNY) Chancellor John B. King Jr. **announced** that more than 122,000 students have been contacted through an expanded FAFSA Completion Campaign — supported by the U.S. Department of Education and partnerships with Trellis and community organizations — to boost financial aid access amid an 11.6% drop in submissions due to federal delays and technical issues.

The **Tennessee** Higher Education Commission **recognized** 117 high schools as 2024 FAFSA Champions for achieving over 90% completion rates or increasing their FAFSA completion by at least 5% from the previous year.

COLLEGE AFFORDABILITY & STUDENT BASIC NEEDS

FINANCIAL AID

The State University of **New York** (SUNY) **announced** an expansion to help mental health and engineering pre-professional students move forward on a path toward graduate programs through its Educational Opportunity Program (EOP). EOP provides academic support, guidance, supplemental financial aid, professional mentoring, assistance with graduate or professional school preparation, and access to a SUNY network of professionals who will assist them in navigation preparation for careers. Students pursuing programs for careers in medicine were already included.

New York Governor Kathy Hochul **announced** that the decision to increase income limit thresholds in the FY 2025 budget (\$55.7 million increase) has led to 40,000 new applicants to New York's Tuition Assistance Program (TAP). The expanded eligibility and minimum award increases are estimated to affect 93,000 students, including 48,000 newly eligible students.

FREE TUITION

The Universities of **Wisconsin** re-launched the **Wisconsin Tuition Promise** starting in fall 2025 for four years of free tuition coverage to in-state students whose families earn \$55,000 or less. Lawmakers had declined for funding to continue the program in 2024, asking campuses to fundraise for the program. UW-Madison and UW-Milwaukee fund their own tuition promise programs, and the statewide program will cover the other 11 universities within the system through Ascendium Education Group, UW System administration, and participating universities' budgets. Approximately 1,300 students are expected to qualify for the program.

STUDENT SAFETY AND BASIC NEEDS

The **Arizona** Board of Regents (ABOR) **broadened** the scope of the Student Food and Housing Workgroup to address mental health and well-being. The action comes after Arizona's inclusion in SHEEO's **Student Mental Health and Wellness Learning Community**. Student regents will lead on-campus support efforts through in-person listening sessions with students and report results to the board to inform policy and guide university resources.

The **California** State University (CSU) has **expanded** its efforts to support students in need of secure housing. All 23 campuses offer some form of emergency housing assistance, have an array of programs to help students secure temporary or long-term housing, and have made progress in providing affordable housing options. CSU has convened an Affordable Housing Work Group to look into additional policy recommendations to further increase the availability of affordable housing for students. Read more about CSU's Basic Need Initiative [here](#).

The Commonwealth of the **Northern Mariana Islands** (CNMI) **launched** a major initiative to expand broadband infrastructure, a critical step in enhancing workforce development and educational access. By improving internet connectivity, CNMI aims to bridge the digital divide, providing residents with better access to online education, job training programs, and remote work opportunities.

The University System of **Georgia** is **partnering** with the state Department of Behavioral Health and Developmental Disabilities to launch a 988 suicide prevention campaign. The state agencies will place 988 suicide and crisis hotline number decals in the dorm rooms of all public colleges and universities. The 988 decals are one part of the System's broader Mental Health Initiative, launched in 2020 to significantly expand services to students.

Maryland Governor Wes Moore has **announced** that 36 colleges and universities will share nearly \$19 million in grants for campus safety projects. The Maryland Higher Education Commission's Campus Safety Grant program will administer the funding that will include security assessments, emergency management planning, and implementation of enhanced security operations and mechanisms.

The **Minnesota** Office of Higher Education (OHE) **awarded** over \$400,000 to 24 campuses with **Hunger Free Campus** grants. Campuses applied to the latest round of funding through up to three different grants: sustaining their existing Hunger Free Campus designation, pathways to designation, and for purchasing equipment necessary to operate an on-campus food pantry. OHE also **released** the Student Basic Needs Annual Report, which identified recommendations across eight basic student need areas and identified opportunities for future research and discussion. The report found that nearly 40% of undergraduate students experience basic needs insecurity.

The **New Mexico** Higher Education Department **released** its first **Basic Needs Report** that surveyed basic needs insecurities among the state's students enrolled in public higher education. Overall, the report found that 58% of students were food insecure, 39% had very low food security, 62% were housing insecure, and 14% were homeless in the past 12 months. A second report summarizing faculty and staff survey responses is expected in fall 2024.

The Student Lifeline Act in **New York** was **recently** signed into law, creating a statewide multimedia campaign to promote mental health awareness and suicide prevention among students. The \$5 million campaign will promote awareness of the state's 988 Suicide and Crisis Lifeline. The legislation requires institutions in New York to print the 988 Lifeline on student identification cards and distribute resources to students explaining when to use the 988 number.

The **Oregon** Higher Education Coordinating Commission **reported** that its **Benefit Navigators** program made over 21,000 referrals to resources to more than 15,000 students. Benefit Navigators are employees at Oregon colleges and universities who help students apply for federal, state, and local benefits programs that can support their progress in college. In the 2023-24 academic year, food insecurity was the highest need, followed by housing and transportation.

The **Pennsylvania** Department of Education **announced** a new grant opportunity for \$1 million as part of the **Hunger-Free Campus Initiative** to help institutions better serve their communities and ensure their students have access to healthy, nutritious food. This is a second year of funding following a previous \$1 million from the governor to combat student hunger on campus. Funding levels are determined based on how many learners an institution has.

The State Council of Higher Education for **Virginia** **awarded** \$1 million to five universities to increase the number of mental health providers and improve mental health access on campus. This is the second round of funding in the **Higher Education Mental Health Workforce Pilot**, which aims to expand mental health services to students on campus while increasing the mental health workforce pipeline overall by offering supervised clinical hours for candidates who seek to become licensed mental health professionals. The Virginia General Assembly allocated continued funding in the 2024-26 budget.

The **West Virginia** Higher Education Policy Commission **awarded** its latest Campus Mental Health Grants to nine projects aimed at addressing the mental health needs of students at West Virginia's public colleges and universities. This year's funded projects focus on creating supportive environments, providing early interventions, and enhancing mental health services across campuses.

VALUE, ROI, & TRANSPARENCY

COST CONTAINMENT

The **California** State University (CSU) **launched** the **Multi-University Collaboration Initiative** to improve efficiency and reduce costs while enhancing service to students. The initiative focuses on shared services in benefits administration, information security, procurement, and leveraging systemwide collaboration to streamline processes and achieve economies of scale. This effort aims to support academic excellence and student success by strategically managing limited resources.

The **West Virginia** Higher Education Policy Commission **reported** that its Open Educational Resources (OER) initiative, **Open Learning WV**, saved students \$7.75 million on course materials. Launched in 2021, the program funds faculty to develop low- or no-cost course materials, improving affordability and access. With a return of \$17 in student savings for every \$1 in grant funding, the initiative supports student success and retention by reducing financial barriers. The commission aims to expand this effort statewide.

VALUE OF POSTSECONDARY DEGREES

The University System of **Georgia** (USG) **contributed** \$21.9 billion to the state's economy in fiscal year 2023, a 9% increase from the previous year. Additionally, USG Class of 2023 graduates are projected to earn \$1.4 million more over their lifetimes compared to those without a degree, highlighting the significant economic and personal financial benefits of higher education. The system also supports over 163,000 jobs statewide.

A University of **Hawai'i** Economic Research Organization **analysis** explores the financial returns of college majors in Hawai'i compared to the U.S. Medical and health sciences majors have the highest mid-career earnings in Hawai'i, followed by engineering and physical sciences, although STEM fields yield lower financial returns in Hawai'i than nationally. The report emphasizes that the state's narrower income range reflects its reliance on tourism and lower economic diversity.

New Jersey has **launched** a statewide campaign, led by the Office of the Secretary of Higher Education and the Higher Education Student Assistance Authority, to promote affordable and accessible higher education, highlighting the benefits of earning a degree in-state. The campaign emphasizes expanded financial aid, including tuition-free options, and uses digital outreach to encourage residents to explore educational opportunities via a new central hub, CollegeForYou.NJ.gov. It aims to support diverse learners, including adults returning to education.

A recent **analysis** by the **Utah** System of Higher Education (USHE) reveals that USHE graduates experience significant wage increases, earning 79% to 167% more one year post-graduation compared to pre-graduation income. Over five years, graduates collectively contributed nearly \$100 million in additional state tax revenue. This report highlights the economic value of higher education in Utah.

The **Washington** Student Achievement Council (WSAC), Central Washington University (CWU), and Sandbox Inc. **launched** the "Changing the Narrative" pilot project to promote college enrollment, particularly among underrepresented groups. Supported by a \$250,000 Lumina Foundation grant, the project uses digital media tools to reframe the benefits of higher education. It combines user research, storytelling, and behavioral science to create engaging content aimed at fostering a college-going culture in Washington.

STRATEGIC PLANNING TO IMPROVE ROI

The **Utah** Board of Higher Education has **approved** its 2024-27 strategic plan, focusing on increasing college access, improving degree completion, enhancing financial value, and driving economic development. Key initiatives include raising the college-going rate and completion rates by 3%, promoting high-demand programs, and fostering collaboration with industry and state partners. The plan aims to align higher education outcomes with workforce needs and support economic growth in Utah.

STUDENT SUCCESS & COLLEGE COMPLETION

ADULT LEARNERS

The **Kansas** Board of Regents **opened** a competitive five-year grant opportunity to eligible providers focused on adult education. The Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA)-funded awards support providers offering adult education and family literacy, education for institutionalized individuals and Integrated English Literacy and Civics Education.

The **North Carolina** Community College System is implementing two initiatives geared toward adult learners: **NC Reconnect** and the **REACH Collaborative**. In response to shifting enrollment patterns and evolving workforce demands, NC Reconnect will help colleges re-engage with students with some college credits but no degree. The REACH Collaborative supports Black, Hispanic, and Native American adult learners by enrolling them in high-value credential programs.

The University of **North Carolina** System is **partnering** with Project Kitty Hawk (PKH), to enroll and support more than 550 adult learners in 11 degree programs at three system institutions: North Carolina Central, East Carolina, and Appalachian State universities. The first PKH-powered program, a bachelor of science in nursing, launched at NC Central in 2023. Project Kitty Hawk was funded in 2021 by the North Carolina General Assembly.

COLLEGE COMPLETION AND STUDENT SUCCESS

The University of **California**-California State University partnership – UC|CSU Collaborative for Neuroscience, Diversity, and Learning – **convened** at UCLA to review current research and strategies to support students. The collaborative's 24 fellows include legislators and UC-CSU educators working to address the needs of neurodiverse learners by equipping educators with the tools needed to effectively support all students.

Michigan Governor Gretchen Whitmer and the Michigan Department of Lifelong Education, Advancement, and Potential have **announced** the first round of the new College Success Grant awards. Nearly \$3 million has been awarded to Michigan State University, the Diploma Equity Project, and to Schoolcraft College to implement innovative student success practices that support Michigan's Sixty by 30 attainment goal.

The **New Jersey** Office of the Secretary of Higher Education has **announced** the second cycle of FY25 Some College No Degree (SCND) grants totaling over \$1.6 million to support institutions that are building capacity, addressing institutional barriers to re-enrollment and completion, and developing innovations to serve SCND students.

CURRICULUM, TRANSFER, AND ACADEMIC PROGRAMS

The **California** State University (CSU) and California Community Colleges are **collaborating** to improve access to bachelor's degree enrollment and completion for community college students. CSU-CCS agreements are streamlining the transfer process through guaranteed admissions, concurrent enrollment, and clearer degree pathways. Partnerships include Sacramento State's new Placer Center and new Black Honors College, Sonoma State's guaranteed admissions program, and San Diego State's partnership with Kumeyaay Community College to provide guaranteed admissions to remove barriers for Native and Indigenous student populations.

The University of **Maine** System will **guarantee admission** to Maine Community College System graduates through an unprecedented agreement, Transfer ME. Qualifying students will have earned at least 30 community college credits and enrollment in eligible degree programs, including behavioral health, education, and pre-engineering.

More than 1,000 learners have **earned** the University of **Maine** System Dawnland credential about the history of Wabanaki Nations in the state within the first two years of its launch. Created in November 2022 by John Bear Mitchell, a citizen of the Penobscot nation, the Dawnland credential enables learners to demonstrate their own knowledge about the Indigenous movement and way of life. All educator preparation students at UMaine and the University of Maine at Augusta now earn the credential before they begin student teaching.

The **Mississippi** Institutions of Higher Learning **approved** six new degree programs, with five the first of their kind designed to streamline paths to careers and address shortages statewide. Mississippi State University will offer the Bachelor of Arts in Integrated Design and the Built Environment, Bachelor of Science in Applied Behavior Analysis, Master of Science in PK-12 Student Support, and Educational Specialist in Professional School Counseling. Delta State University will add a Bachelor of Science in Secondary Education. The University of Mississippi Medical Center will add a Master of Science in Health Professions Education. The Master of Science in PK-12 Student Support will help meet the demand for licensed counselors when a shortage of counselors and demand due to student mental health needs are highest.

North Carolina has made a **new online data tool** available, a collection of nearly 1,400 Transfer Guides, to provide students and advisors key information about admissions, academic programs, and course equivalencies. The Guides, published on university websites and at the College Foundation of North Carolina **website**, will help students match their earned community college credits to specific four-year degree requirements at individual UNC System institutions.

The **Pennsylvania** State System of Higher Education was **awarded** \$10,000 by the National Association of Higher Education Systems to promote a new, unified student information system to support course-sharing across the 10 system universities. Participating students will never need to leave their home institutions, but will have increased flexibility and access to courses and programs.

FACULTY DEVELOPMENT

The **North Carolina** Teaching and Learning Hubs, approaching their third anniversary, are **boosting** student and faculty success across the North Carolina Community College System institutions, benefiting nearly 75,000 students. Established in 2021, the Hubs are designed so that community college faculty statewide share readily adoptable, evidence-based classroom management and teaching practices and techniques.

RE-ENROLLMENT

The **California** State University System is **piloting** the Second Start program at 14 system colleges, a GPA reset intervention aiming to re-enroll students among the state's six million stop-outs who did not earn their degree due to unsatisfactory academic progress. Second Start will include grade forgiveness, and rely on data and insights to prompt possible changes to policy.

The **Michigan** Department of Lifelong Education, Advancement, and Potential (MiLEAP) and Michigan College Access Network (MCAN) have **awarded** \$10,000 Reconnect Expansion Outreach Campaign grants to 14 organizations to provide outreach to 5,000 adult learners to earn a tuition-free skill certificate or degree.

REMEDIAL EDUCATION

The **Louisiana** Board of Regents **reports** 52% of students completing corequisite math in 2023-24 passed a credit-bearing math class during their first year, a nearly five-fold **increase** in success from an 11% freshman pass rate in remedial math in 2020-21.

STUDENT PARENTS

The **California** State University System has **launched** the Pregnant and Parenting Student Initiative, a system-wide effort across its 23 campuses to mitigate the stop-out rate of students due to the demands of school and parenting. The initiative, prompted by legislation signed in 2022, helps students beyond food and housing basic needs, and includes additional supports—class scheduling flexibility, childcare resources, child-friendly spaces across campus, and reducing stigma for students seeking services.

Policy Spotlight: Rhode Island Reconnect



Rhode Island Reconnect, a program of the Rhode Island Office of the Postsecondary Commissioner, helps adult learners achieve their postsecondary goals by addressing barriers preventing them from earning a college degree or a credential required for a higher-paying job. Getting these learners back into school is a key component to Rhode Island's goal of increasing the overall postsecondary achievement rate to 70% and increasing the per-family income across the state by \$20,000.

Rhode Island Reconnect (RIR) works with adult learners who have some college credit and those who never started down a postsecondary path. The program provides support in three important ways:

1. Help with the non-tuition costs associated with learning a new skill or earning a degree. RIR provides up to \$1,500 per semester in ways that can provide the most impact for the learner:

- Provision of a laptop computer with wifi access
- Addressing food insecurity through gift cards to local grocery stores
- Help paying for car repairs to aid in transportation to classes
- Assistance with childcare costs
- In certain circumstances, help with housing costs
- Transportation costs
- Costs of exams or certification
- Book costs

2. RIR has partnered with colleges and universities across the state to address past-due balances that might keep a student from returning to school. RIR pays up to \$2,500 per student to pay such balances when the school agrees to match the RIR contribution.

3. The key to RIR's success rests with the team of Navigators who work with the adult learners. Each learner is assigned a Navigator, most of whom are or have been adult learners themselves. Navigators coach, advise, and help students determine which barriers RIR can best address. Among the ways that Navigators help students:

- Conversations about finding the right program
- Assistance in finding the right points of contact at their institution to help them with their progress
- Routine check-ins. Navigators call each student at least once every two weeks to talk about their progress, assess barriers, and provide assistance. These calls also serve to keep students motivated and on track. Just getting a call from somebody who cares about one's education and is ready to hear and help with challenges goes a long way in keeping students in programs.
- Help in completing the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA).

RIR started in 2020 with help from a grant from the Lumina Foundation. Since its inception, RIR has assisted 5,576 adult learners, addressing over 24,000 barriers outside of the classroom.

In the earliest stages of the RIR, Office of the Postsecondary Commissioner worked closely with teammates in the Department of Labor and Training (DLT), focusing on workforce development and attainment of work credentials. During this phase, the program drove an 87% completion rate among participants. Since that time, the program has expanded to include all postsecondary education and training opportunities.

In 2023, recognizing the success of the program, the Rhode Island legislature provided financial support to the RIR, budgeting \$8M over three years to help Rhode Islanders earn postsecondary credentials.

RIR is student-focused and agnostic with regard to where the student studies. The program helps students at both public and private institutions across the state.

RIR is designed to promote economic advancement for Rhode Islanders. Applicants must be Pell-eligible, ensuring that funding is directed at those who most need it and helping to raise the economic status of individuals and families in communities throughout the state.

STATE BUDGETS & PUBLIC POLICY

COLLEGE AFFORDABILITY

New York Governor Kathy Hochul **signed** legislation expanding the uses of 529 college savings accounts to allowable uses beyond college expenses. Payments on the interest of education loans and deposits to Roth IRA accounts are now considered qualified withdrawals of the New York state tuition savings program. This change aligns the New York law with federal tax laws.

Students in **South Carolina** pursuing degrees in education **are eligible** to receive additional scholarship funds to the tune of up to nearly \$10,000 total on top of their existing state grants. South Carolina students receiving the LIFE or Palmetto Fellows Scholarship who meet certain academic requirements and attend eligible in-state public or private colleges can receive the scholarship enhancement. In return, students must agree to teach at a South Carolina public school for one year for every year they receive the enhancement or pay the money back.

STUDENT SERVICES

New York Governor Kathy Hochul **signed** legislation on Women's Equality Day to require menstrual products be offered for free in public college and university restrooms. This legislation expands the availability of free menstrual products that were already offered in elementary and secondary public schools in the state.

CIVIC ENGAGEMENT, FREE SPEECH, & PUBLIC PURPOSES

CIVIC ENGAGEMENT

In **California**, more than 3,000 students were **selected** to participate in College Corps for the 2024-2025 academic year, which provides students the opportunity to earn up to \$10,000 while completing up to 450 hours serving their communities. This program, launched in 2022, gives students the opportunity to apply their knowledge from the classroom in the community, strengthen their leadership skills, and gain career development and training.

The University System of **Georgia** Foundation **partnered** with Fostering Success Act, Inc. to create a new scholarship for foster youth. This scholarship is funded using the foundation's largest single gift (\$10 million) in its history.

The **Iowa** Board of Regents **approved** the University of Northern Iowa (UNI) to establish the Center for Civic Education. This center was developed in response to the 2023 Board of Regents' directive to institutions to establish initiatives that provide opportunities for research and education on civic education and free speech. To launch the center, UNI **requested** \$1 million from the legislature for fiscal year 2026.

After a natural disaster in western **North Carolina**, the John M. Belk Endowment **pledged** \$2 million to the North Carolina Community College System to aid institutions in providing additional wrap-around student services and support rebuilding efforts as the region recovers from Hurricane Helene. The NC Community College System also **launched** a drive to collect relief supplies and a donation fund to support recovery efforts and resources for students, faculty, and staff.

ENVIRONMENTAL SUSTAINABILITY

The University of **Hawai'i** **signed** a memorandum of understanding (MOU) to partner with the National Caucus of Environmental Legislators (NCEL) and serve as environmental research expertise providers. NCEL aims to connect research and expertise from the University of Hawai'i with policymakers to develop innovative preservation and environmental policy solutions.

FREE SPEECH AND EXPRESSION

The **Arizona** Board of Regents **released** its Fiscal Year 2024 Free Expression Annual Report. This report was written by the board's Committee on Free Expression, as required by A.R.S. §15-1867.

The State University of **New York** (SUNY) has **allocated** \$125,000 in grants, spread across the 22 SUNY campuses to furnish or enhance space for interfaith reflection and prayer to promote a welcoming and inclusive campus environment.

The **Wisconsin** Institute for Citizenship and Civil Dialogue (WICCD) has **provided** the opportunity for students, faculty, and staff at the Universities of Wisconsin (UWs) to apply for civil dialogue grants that can support research, assessments, events, and professional and curriculum development. The UW System also implemented a **new interim administrative policy** – Commitment to Academic Freedom and Freedom of Expression – aiming to affirm the Board of Regents' commitment to academic freedom, freedom of expression, and an environment that allows for civil discourse and debate. This **policy** requires administrators to maintain viewpoint neutrality and limit statements on public and social issues.