



SHEEO

State Higher Education
Executive Officers Association



Shared Visions, Shared Outcomes: Transforming Student Success Through Partnership

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The State Higher Education Executive Officers Association (SHEEO) and Sova are grateful to state and institutional teams in Kentucky, Louisiana, North Carolina, and Wyoming for participating in the Pursuing Alignment for Student Success Across Higher Education Institutions & State Agencies (PASS) project.

The PASS project fosters collaboration between state agencies and higher education institutions to better align student success policies and practices. By formalizing state networks across state higher education agencies and institutions, PASS promotes strategies across leadership teams and aims to scale equitable student success efforts statewide.

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The State Higher Education Executive Officers Association (SHEEO) serves the chief 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.

Together, we build the capacity for large-scale change. Our focus is not just on the systems and institutions themselves but on the incredible people behind them. By joining the Sova community, you become part of a collective force dedicated to achieving impactful results. We offer personalized support, tailored strategies, and hands-on guidance to help you navigate the path toward transformation. Our approach is grounded in collaboration, empathy, and a genuine understanding of your challenges. We provide the tools and resources needed to turn your vision into reality, ensuring that every step you take is purposeful and clear. For more information, visit sova.org.

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INTRODUCTION

True to its dynamic nature, the higher education landscape in the United States is constantly shifting, driven by changes in market and workforce demands, curricula, pedagogy, costs, value proposition, technological advancements, evolving student needs, and much more. In this environment, state higher education agencies and systems (SHEEOs) play a crucial role in shaping policies that support student success across diverse institutional settings. The responsibility for implementing these policies varies across agencies, systems, and individual institutions. Within each organization, due to capacity restraints or other challenges, responsibility often falls to individual units and the leaders within them. This reality can lead to isolation in development and implementation, “silos,” and divisions higher education policymakers and practitioners strive to avoid.

Policies aimed at improving student success—whether defined by persistence, completion, or other metrics—are typically framed and executed by institutional chief academic officers. Consequently, effective coordination at scale requires robust partnerships between state chief academic officers (SAOs) and institutional chief academic officers (CAOs) to ensure statewide goals are translated into practical, measurable, and replicable student outcomes.

These partnerships are not just about aligning administrative procedures but are also about the deeper work of fostering a shared vision for student achievement that leverages the benefits of state and institutional coordination. The importance of these collaborations lies in their potential to create streamlined pathways for students, from enrollment to graduation and beyond. CAOs, who operate within individual colleges and universities, hold the knowledge of their unique campus environments and have the power to lead campus teams through implementation, while SAOs bring a broader perspective on statewide educational goals and resources, and experience (if not expertise) navigating and oftentimes framing the policy mandate and accountability process to scale student success systemwide and statewide. Together, they can effectively collaborate in the development, implementation, assessment, and refinement of policy and practice with key stakeholders from institutional academic units, student bodies, and boards, to state agencies and legislatures, resulting in a coordinated approach to improving student outcomes.

The need for partnerships has grown more urgent. Increasingly, states are adopting performance-based and outcomes-based funding models, where a portion of institutional funding is tied directly to student success metrics such as graduation rates, retention, and workforce placement. This shift underscores the importance of ensuring that institutions are not working in isolation but are instead collaborating with state agencies to meet shared objectives. It is in this context that the role of state and institutional leaders becomes critical. Their ability to collaborate effectively can mean the difference between fragmented efforts and a cohesive, statewide strategy for student success.

Four states—Louisiana, Kentucky, North Carolina, and Wyoming—have capitalized on these intrastate partnerships between SAOs and CAOs to advance student success initiatives. The chief academic officers at the four state agencies and the institutions participating in the PASS project are centering equitable student success as a priority. The intentional collaboration between state and campus academic officers as well as institutional academic officers offers the promise of scaling evidence-based best practices. Drawing on insights from each state’s

experiences, this deliverable highlights the successes and challenges of these collaborations. By examining the role of SAOs and CAOs in aligning student access and success policies, we can better understand the vital role these partnerships play in the higher education ecosystem.

As part of this effort, each participating state used a policy scan tool (included in the appendix) to reflect on their statewide student success policies. This exercise enabled state higher education agencies to evaluate current initiatives, identify gaps in implementation or otherwise, and examine how state-level policies influence institutional practices. The policy scan served as a foundation for deeper discussions between SAOs and CAOs, fostering a shared understanding of opportunities and challenges in scaling student success. By pausing to assess existing policies, state teams gained critical insights into aligning their work to advance equitable student outcomes statewide.

LOUISIANA: EMPLOYING EVIDENCE TO INFORM POLICY DESIGN

The Louisiana Board of Regents' (BoR) **Meauxmentum Framework** demonstrates the state's commitment to using evidence-based strategies to advance student success. Grounded in extensive research and data, the framework aims to support Louisiana's ambitious goal of 60% degree or high-value credential attainment among working-age adults by 2030. Drawing on national best practices and proven methodologies from states like Tennessee and Georgia, it reflects a broader trend toward research-driven decision-making in higher education.

A key component of the Meauxmentum Framework is its focus on using research to inform policy. For example, evidence shows that students who complete a math or English course in their first year are five to 10 times more likely to graduate. In response, Louisiana transitioned from traditional remedial courses to a corequisite mathematics model, where students receive additional support while taking credit-bearing courses. This shift has led to significantly higher first-year course completion rates.

Furthermore, Louisiana has centered rigorous analysis to shape its policies on dual enrollment and AP credit transfer. The framework's emphasis on pathways has led to policy changes that formally recognize high school coursework as part of college admissions criteria, making it easier for students to start earning credits early. This evidence-based approach is invaluable in increasing college-going rates among high school students.

In addition to improving academic outcomes, the **Louisiana Transfer Associate Degree Program** and related initiatives have been designed using insights from research on student transitions between institutions. While the program has made significant strides in ensuring seamless transfer pathways, ongoing analysis and feedback from students and institutions continue to guide efforts to improve and refine the system.

The Meauxmentum Framework's success is about individual policies and its holistic, evidence-informed strategy. By incorporating evidence at every stage—from identifying challenges to evaluating the effectiveness of solutions—Louisiana is ensuring that its higher education system is responsive to the needs of students and aligned with workforce demands. Greater collaboration between the Board of Regents and institutions, through the PASS project, can accelerate the implementation of such evidence-based policies. Institutional leaders, with their on-the-ground perspectives, can provide critical feedback on challenges faced during implementation, enabling the state to refine these initiatives for even greater impact. By fostering a shared approach, Louisiana can ensure that dual enrollment pathways and corequisite models are scaled consistently across institutions, meeting both student needs and state attainment goals.

KENTUCKY: USING DATA-DRIVEN APPROACHES TO BUILD A RESILIENT WORKFORCE

Kentucky's approach to student success is deeply rooted in data-driven strategies that guide policy development and resource allocation. The Council on Postsecondary Education (CPE) has focused on integrating educational attainment goals with workforce needs, using data to inform decisions and ensure that initiatives are aligned with the demands of the state's economy.

CPE's statewide program approval process is one such example that integrates data on student demand and market demand to help institutions make evaluation decisions regarding what academic programs to launch. The state's numerous [interactive data dashboards](#) also inform policy development and initiative implementation. Collaboration between CPE and institutional leaders is key to translating Kentucky's data-driven strategies into measurable outcomes. For example, while CPE sets the goals and priorities for workforce alignment, institutional leaders play a critical role in embedding initiatives like the 10 Essential Skills Graduate Profile into campus programs. By working together, the state and institutions can ensure that curricula and co-curricular experiences are aligned with employer expectations, creating a seamless pipeline between education and the workforce.

Kentucky's performance-based funding model also highlights the state's reliance on data to shape educational outcomes. This model ties institutional funding to key student success metrics such as graduation rates, retention, and degree completion, incentivizing colleges and universities to focus on measurable outcomes. Regular evaluations and performance reviews help to refine this model, ensuring that it adapts to changing student needs and workforce demands.

Kentucky's commitment to using evidence extends to its [10 Essential Skills Graduate Profile](#), which was developed in collaboration with the state's higher education institutions and industry leaders. Aimed at bridging the gap between education and workforce readiness, this initiative ensures that students are equipped with critical skills and competencies necessary to thrive in the modern workplace.

The 10 Essential Skills focus on areas such as effective communication, critical thinking, civic engagement, quantitative reasoning, and teamwork, among others. These skills are embedded in both academic curricula and co-curricular activities, ensuring students have multiple opportunities to develop and apply these skills throughout their college experience. For example, students practice communication through presentations and collaborative projects, while problem-solving and critical thinking are emphasized through real-world case studies and data analysis exercises.

The Kentucky Graduate Profile Academy, which oversees the implementation of the 10 Essential Skills across the state's public institutions, uses tools such as the [Employability Scan \(EScan\)](#) to assess how well academic programs prepare students for the workforce. This continuous feedback loop ensures that educational offerings remain aligned with employer expectations and evolving workforce demands. These initiatives are a crucial part of Kentucky's broader strategy to enhance the employability of its graduates and serve as a direct pipeline to career readiness.

NORTH CAROLINA: RESEARCH-BACKED EXPANSION OF COLLEGE ACCESS AND PATHWAYS

North Carolina's **Career & College Promise Program**, a flagship initiative of the North Carolina Community College System (NCCCS), embodies the state's data-informed approach to expanding access to higher education. The program provides structured pathways for high school students to earn transferable college credits, a strategy that is backed by research showing the benefits of early exposure to college-level coursework. Studies have consistently demonstrated that dual enrollment programs, like those offered in North Carolina, lead to higher rates of college enrollment and success, particularly for underrepresented student populations.

Collaboration between NCCCS, the University of North Carolina (UNC) system, and institutional leaders is essential to ensuring the success of programs like the Career & College Promise Program. Institutional feedback can help refine advising systems, identify barriers to transfer and ensure that pathways like the Comprehensive Articulation Agreement remain responsive to student and workforce needs. By working together, state agencies and institutions can streamline transfer processes and expand dual enrollment opportunities to benefit more students.

North Carolina has further strengthened its commitment to student success through the development of guided pathways and a focus on transferability between its community colleges and the University of North Carolina (UNC) system. The Comprehensive Articulation Agreement (CAA), a nationally recognized model, ensures that students who complete associate degrees at North Carolina community colleges can transfer credits meaningfully into UNC institutions. This agreement, continually refined based on data analysis and student feedback, helps to minimize excess credits and reduce time to graduation. By streamlining these pathways and enhancing advising services, North Carolina ensures that students, particularly those from community colleges, have a clear and structured route to achieving their academic goals.

In addition to expanding academic access, North Carolina has embraced workforce alignment through initiatives like **ApprenticeshipNC**. This program connects academic learning with real-world, hands-on experience in fields such as manufacturing, health care, and information technology. The state's focus on integrating classroom education with apprenticeship opportunities addresses regional labor market needs, supported by data showing that students who engage in work-based learning programs are more likely to secure employment after graduation. North Carolina's efforts in this area demonstrate a forward-thinking approach to higher education, where student success is closely tied to economic growth and workforce readiness.

WYOMING: ALIGNING FINANCIAL INCENTIVES TO WORKFORCE NEEDS

Student success initiatives guided by the Wyoming Community College Commission (WCCC) play a central role in ensuring that community colleges align their priorities with the state's strategic goals. A key component of this alignment is performance-based funding, where financial resources are directly tied to specific outcomes, such as graduation rates, student retention, and workforce development. This funding model incentivizes institutions to prioritize student success in their strategic planning, ensuring that both short-term and long-term goals reflect the state's broader educational and economic objectives.

Collaboration between WCCC and institutions is vital to ensuring that performance-based funding translates into effective student success strategies. Institutional leaders can identify where targeted investments—such as enhanced advising, student support, or program development—are needed most. By working together, the state and institutions can better allocate resources to close skills gaps and expand high-demand workforce programs, particularly in Wyoming's rural and underserved communities.

Wyoming has also invested heavily in aligning its postsecondary education system with regional workforce demands. Programs such as [Wyoming Works](#) exemplify this approach by providing financial aid and support to students pursuing credentials in career and technical fields that are critical to the state's economy, such as energy, manufacturing, and health care. This initiative, developed in response to detailed labor market data, ensures that students are not only gaining access to education but are prepared for high-demand careers. By tailoring educational offerings to match labor market needs, Wyoming is addressing both the skills gap and the long-term sustainability of its workforce.

In addition to aligning financial incentives and workforce development, Wyoming demonstrates a strong commitment to stakeholder engagement. The WCCC works closely with various community stakeholders, including students, faculty, local businesses, and tribal nations, to ensure that policy development is informed by a wide range of perspectives. This collaborative approach fosters a deeper understanding of local educational challenges and opportunities, ensuring that the state's higher education system remains responsive to the needs of its diverse communities. Partnerships with tribal nations and community organizations have been instrumental in expanding access to educational opportunities, particularly in underserved and rural areas.

CONCLUSION: THE CASE FOR STRONG SAO-CAO PARTNERSHIPS

The work in Louisiana, Kentucky, North Carolina, and Wyoming highlights the pivotal role SAOs play in advancing equitable student success by partnering with institutional CAOs. These partnerships foster alignment between state attainment goals and institutional practices, ensuring the development of workforce-aligned curricula and continuous improvement through data-driven approaches. Together, these efforts create a responsive higher education system that meets the needs of students and society.

This collaborative work emphasizes the value of intentional spaces for dialogue where state-level goals and institutional realities intersect. Such spaces enable continuous reflection, thoughtful policy development, and actionable progress. Tools like the policy scan have provided state teams with insights into how state policies shape institutional practices, laying a strong foundation for alignment and future innovation. Other states may benefit from adopting this approach, as described in the appendix, to regularly assess policies and gather feedback, ensuring responsiveness to student and workforce needs.

Statewide collaborations between academic officers at institutions, systems, and agencies offer a powerful opportunity to scale innovations, integrate data platforms, and improve funding models, such as performance- or outcomes-based approaches. To maximize their impact, states must invest in the infrastructure that supports these partnerships while actively engaging a diverse array of stakeholders—students, employers, and community members—in policy development. As educational trends and workforce demands evolve, the leadership of SAOs and CAOs in advancing statewide student success will remain critical, underscoring the importance of sustained collaboration and innovation.

APPENDIX: STATEWIDE STUDENT SUCCESS SCAN

INTRODUCTION TO THE TOOL:

States participating in the Pursuing Alignment for Student Success Across Higher Education Institutions & State Agencies (PASS) completed the below scan to help state higher education agencies evaluate their student success policies, practices, and strategies. The exercise of pausing to reflect and understand ongoing initiatives served to be valuable in enabling state agencies to identify new ways to partner with their institutional chief academic officers.

DIAGNOSTIC RATING SCALE:

Please use the diagnostic rating scale below to assess your statewide student success policies. The comments column can be particularly valuable and should be used to offer additional insights into how current state policies and practices on specific criteria contribute to your scoring choice. Please feel free to include any information from current state statutes, regulations, and agency policies.

- 0 = This statement does not describe statewide efforts. This means that your state does not have a consistent statewide approach and no ongoing initiatives to implement this practice.
- 1 = Your state is making progress on this criterion but has additional work to advance this policy or practice.
- 2 = This statement accurately describes the policies and practices in your state.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION:

State Name:

State Team (Names and Titles):

CRITERIA	DESCRIPTION	SCORE	COMMENTS
ALIGNMENT WITH STATE ATTAINMENT GOALS			
Coordination Between K-12 and Postsecondary Education	Use state postsecondary initiatives and data systems to identify practical policies to improve college access and success. Dual enrollment and direct admissions policies are examples.		
Coordinated Admissions Processes at Two- and Four-Year Institutions	Partnerships between two- and four-year institutions cultivate equitable transfer pathways with both transfer-receiving and transfer-sending institutions being equally responsible.		
Alignment in Coursework Offered at Two- and Four-Year Institutions	Curricular alignment through programs such as guided pathways that "guide" students currently in an associate degree program to seamlessly transition to a four-year institution.		
Student Success Policies Explicitly Defined Within the Higher Education System	Explicitly defines and measures student success to link it to higher education's state attainment goals.		
Stakeholders are Engaged in the Development and Implementation of Student Success Policy	Collaborate with stakeholders, including students, faculty, employers, and community members, in shaping and implementing state student success policy.		
FINANCIAL INVESTMENTS TOWARDS STUDENT SUCCESS			
State Funding to Support Financial Aid Programs	Invest in state financial aid programs that address college affordability in the state. Examples include tuition-free programs.		
State Operating Financial Support Towards Student Success Endeavors	Investments help make higher education more affordable and help institutions meet state attainment goals.		
State Role in Ensuring Academic Quality	Evaluate and strengthen their authorization processes to protect students better and improve the quality of higher education.		
Streamline Financial Aids Programs	Optimize financial aid programs and administration while expanding financial aid resources to meet unmet needs to cover the total cost of attendance (tuition, fees, books, supplies, room and board).		
State Resource Allocation Aligns with Student Success Priorities	Use a transparent budget or funding mechanism associated with the student success policy.		

CRITERIA	DESCRIPTION	SCORE	COMMENTS
STATE ATTEMPTS TO DEFINE STUDENT SUCCESS			
Unique Definitions of Student Success Based on the Type of Institution (Two-year, Four-year, Minority Serving Institution)	Conceptualize student success based on the unique needs of the type of institution and characteristics of its students.		
Role of Institutional Leaders in Creating a Climate for Success	Collaborate with higher education institution leaders to define a statewide vision for school success that includes policies and incentives that support institutions in establishing a healthy school climate.		
Faculty Hiring and Reward Systems	Recruitment, professional development, and rewards are aligned with state and institutional goals and priorities.		
Value of Student Success Theoretical Frameworks	Review relevant research, practice, and policy literature on student success in postsecondary education to create an inclusive and theory-informed perspective on student success.		
Policies and Practices Include Strategies to Address Disparities in Student Success Outcomes for Various Demographic Groups	Policies and practices understand the unique needs of underserved and underrepresented students and develop policies to support their advancement.		
Diverse Student Experiences are Integrated into Policy Development	Policies ensure inclusivity and representation of diverse student populations in decision-making processes.		
Prioritize Accessibility for Students with Disabilities:	State policies and practices recognize and support the accessibility needs of students with disabilities.		
STUDENT SUCCESS STRATEGY			
One-Stop Model of Student Support	One-stop models of shared services that improve access and efficiency of student support services across academic tutoring, library and writing support services, and career preparation.		
Integrate Faculty into Designing Student Support Services	Faculty are integrated into the student support services with early warning systems, shared data, case management meetings, and a holistic advising model.		
Eliminating the Algebra I Requirement	Consider alternatives to the one-size-fits-all college algebra requirement and consider alternatives that align with academic majors.		
Implementation of a Co-Requisite Developmental Education Model for English and Math	Replace traditional remedial education with co-requisite development courses where students receive extra support as they take college-level courses.		

CRITERIA	DESCRIPTION	SCORE	COMMENTS
Apprenticeship-Based Learning Models	Develop apprenticeship-based learning models that promote hands-on learning and help students apply their knowledge and skills outside the classroom.		
Align Workforce Development	Policies and practices invest in workforce development programs that equip students with the skills and knowledge to align with local and regional labor market needs and also build a resilient and competitive workforce.		
Integrate Career Development into Academic Policies	Embed career development and related services into the curriculum and early advising while enhancing experiential learning opportunities that align the career and academics.		
Examine Early College Programs to Build Higher Education Pipeline	Consider early college programming to help support more students entering higher education.		
Commitment to Community Engagement	State higher education policies encourage and facilitate student engagement with local communities and industries.		
MEASURING STUDENT SUCCESS			
Build Systems of Regular Assessment of Existing Initiatives	Conduct regular assessments or audits of existing student success programs and initiatives to assess their effectiveness.		
Conduct a Gap Assessment of Student Success Initiatives	Use learnings from assessments to identify gaps in student success initiatives and inform continuous improvement.		
Prioritize the Use of Data in Developing Student Success Initiatives	Develop a data-informed student success strategy that prioritizes both quantitative data and qualitative data.		
Policy Emphasizes Ongoing Commitment to Research and Evaluation	Ensure an ongoing commitment to research and evaluation to assess effectiveness by incorporating evidence-based practices into the policy.		
Integrate Student Perspectives in Designing Policies	Incorporate student voices through surveys and by including students in task forces or interviews to offer depth and validation to task force findings while identifying discrepancies between student and administrator perceptions.		

CRITERIA	DESCRIPTION	SCORE	COMMENTS
SUSTAINABILITY OF STUDENT SUCCESS MEASURES			
Continued Commitment with Stakeholders to Ensure Continued Work	Build collaborative partnerships with stakeholders across the educational ecosystem to ensure the sustainability of student success initiatives.		
Student Success Initiatives Recognize Changes in the Political Landscape	The policy recognizes changes in educational trends, technology, and workforce demands over time and therefore incorporates a process for regular reviewing and updating of the policy to ensure relevance.		
Student Success Policy Prioritizes Continuous Improvement	Policies and practices are in place to ensure continuous improvement of student success policies based on feedback, evaluation results, and changing circumstances. Feedback is collected from students, faculty, and other stakeholders.		
Continuous Professional Development for Educators	State higher education agencies offer ongoing professional development opportunities for faculty and staff to better support student success.		
Holistic Student Supports	State student success policies incorporate holistic student support measures beyond academic and workforce development.		
Mental Health and Wellness Supports	Policies and initiatives are in place to support the mental health and overall well being of students.		
Investments in Technological Advancements	Emerging technologies are being integrated to support student success, including online learning platforms and digital resources.		

REFLECTIONS:

CHALLENGES AND OBSTACLES

As you completed the student success scan above, what are the main challenges your state identified in implementing these student success policies? How can they be addressed?

RESOURCE ALLOCATION

Are resources being allocated effectively to support these policies, and where might adjustments be needed?

FUNDING LANDSCAPE

What is the funding landscape in your state, including appropriations, funds discussed, or budgeted for current or upcoming student success policies? Please reference any performance or outcomes-based funding that might be tied to equity audits in your state.

POLITICAL LANDSCAPE

Are there legislative or gubernatorial agendas that align with state SHEEO aspirations regarding student success? Are there others that do not align with state SHEEO aspirations regarding student success? Please offer insights on both questions.

ALIGNMENT WITH FEDERAL INITIATIVES

Given the growing federal focus on higher education success strategies, has your office participated in higher education success strategies such as the Postsecondary Student Success Grant Program (PSSG)? Are there plans to engage more actively in this work?

IMPACT ASSESSMENT

What tangible impacts have student success policies had on student success rates over time, particularly among historically underserved populations?

STAKEHOLDER FEEDBACK

How do stakeholders, including students, faculty, and employers, perceive the effectiveness of these policies?

DATA UTILIZATION

How effectively is data being used to inform and adjust policies for better outcomes?

INNOVATIVE PRACTICES

What innovative practices or policies have been particularly successful or promising in your state?

COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS

How do your state's student success policies compare to best practices observed in neighboring and peer states?

LESSONS LEARNED

What lessons have been learned from the current strategies, and how might they inform future policy decisions?

FUTURE PLANNING

What areas need more focus or development in future policy planning to enhance student success?