



# SHEEO

State Higher Education  
Executive Officers Association

## Quarterly Policy Review Spring 2025

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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 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 Spring 2025. 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](mailto:tharnisch@sheeo.org).

## ECONOMIC & WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT

### ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE

The **California** State University's **Artificial Intelligence Educational Innovations Challenge**, a new program that has called on faculty across the system's 23 universities to develop creative ways to integrate AI in teaching, has **received** more than 400 proposals. The program will provide grants of \$30,000 for selected courses, and \$60,000 for multi-course or interdisciplinary projects. The selected courses will run from June 2025 to June 2026. The project is part of the broader CSU AI Initiative, which also includes workforce training and the CSI AI Commons, a systemwide clearinghouse for tools, resources, and best practices.

The University of **Hawai'i** has **partnered** with Google to provide free AI training to its students and employees across its 10-campus system. Google's AI course is designed to provide students with practical, hands-on experience using AI to help with work tasks that can be applied to a variety of roles across industries. The initiative also offers access to the Google Career Certificates program, which equips people with skills for in-demand fields including cybersecurity, data analytics, and IT support.

**New York** announced an **expansion** of the state's Empire AI Consortium, including \$90 million in capital funding to increase the computing power of Empire AI, expand access for SUNY researchers, and support the addition of three new member institutions. The proposal will be matched by \$50 million in private funding from new members and \$25 million in SUNY operating funding over 10 years.

**New York** also **announced** \$5 million in funding to establish AI and Society departments, centers, and institutes at eight SUNY campuses. This initiative aims to foster interdisciplinary collaboration in AI research for the public good, address ethical concerns, and promote responsible data use, preparing students for the future.

**Utah** has formed a **public-private partnership** with NVIDIA, formalized through a memorandum of understanding, to strengthen the state's workforce training and research in AI and advanced technology. This collaboration aims to equip Utah universities, community colleges, and adult education programs with resources, including teaching kits and certifications for educators, to cultivate skills in generative AI for students and workers.

### ENTREPRENEURSHIP

The **North Carolina** Community College System has **announced** a partnership with Goldman Sachs to launch 10,000 Small Businesses as part of Goldman Sachs's **Investment in Rural Communities** initiative. The free, three-month program teaches practical skills to entrepreneurs in marketing, negotiation, and employee management, and invites graduates to join a national peer and alumni network.

The University of **Vermont** named Matthew McPherson the winner of the 2025 **Vermont Pitch Challenge**, a Shark Tank-like competition for teens. McPherson developed Boxer Breeze, an eco-friendly underwear brand that combats textile waste by using sustainable materials like bamboo fiber and organic cotton. The business plan also implements a closed-loop recycling system, where customers can return used pairs for discounts on future purchases, promoting sustainability in the fashion industry.

## HEALTH CARE PROFESSIONAL WORKFORCE

**Connecticut** State Community College (CT State) has **trained** more than 2,600 students for high-demand health care positions as part of the CT State Healthcare Industry Pathways Project (CT SHIP) grant. This four-year initiative, funded by a U.S. Department of Labor grant and state/local resources, involved multiple CT State campuses and established regional health care sector partnerships to align training with industry needs. As part of this effort, the program developed micro credentials tailored to industry demand, which will continue to be available to students.

The **Kansas** Board of Regents **awarded** the Kansas Nursing Workforce Center a \$1 million grant to engage in several projects designed to increase interest in nursing and drive applications to nursing schools throughout the state. The grant will support a comprehensive report analyzing the connection between the shortage and education programs, aiming to identify best practices and barriers to increasing applications, enrollment, and licensing pass rates. The project will also establish a foundation for a future unified application system for all Kansas nursing education institutions and create a web-based tool to guide prospective students.

**Massachusetts** **announced** the creation of a two-year, \$25 million scholarship program for graduate students completing degrees or certificates in behavioral health fields. Eligible areas of study include graduate degrees and certificates in social work, mental health counseling, substance use counseling, and mental health nursing programs. Under this scholarship program, students may be awarded up to \$12,500 for tuition, fees, and stipends for each academic year in which they are enrolled, with a maximum of \$25,000 per student across two academic years.

The **Michigan** Department of Lifelong Education, Advancement, and Potential **awarded** 27 Michigan community colleges \$56 million in grants to help more students complete a Bachelor of Science in Nursing after receiving their associate degree in nursing. Grant funds will help develop strategic partnerships with Michigan four-year colleges and universities so that students can earn a bachelor's in nursing from the four-year institution while attending classes on campus at a community college.

**New York** **announced** a \$62 million investment to develop nursing simulation centers on three SUNY campuses. This funding includes \$35 million in direct SUNY capital awards, with the remaining funds contributed by campus matches. The three nursing simulation centers will be located at the University at Buffalo, SUNY Canton and Stony Brook University campuses.

State University of **New York** **launched** a pilot program designed to expand the system's capacity to educate future nurses. The SUNY Healthcare Educator Scholarship will cover tuition and fees and provide a stipend to baccalaureate-prepared nurses pursuing a master's degree in nursing. In return, recipients will commit to a three-year faculty position at a SUNY associate-level nursing program.

## MICRO CREDENTIALS

The **West Virginia** Higher Education Policy Commission is **advancing** the **Credential WV initiative** that aims to equip students with workforce-relevant skills through targeted, stackable credentials, designed to address the evolving demands of West Virginia's labor market. Higher education leaders are developing strategies for embedding micro-credential programs into existing academic courses and creating opportunities for students to build industry-recognized skills that will make them more competitive in the job market.

## RESEARCH AND INNOVATION

**Utah** leaders and Idaho National Laboratory entered an agreement to **establish** a long-term collaboration on advanced energy research, workforce development and technology deployment—particularly on nuclear innovation. This partnership will focus on key priority areas, including advanced nuclear, infrastructure resilience, engineering and materials science and data science applications for energy development.

The University of **Vermont** is **partnering** with Casella Waste Systems, Inc. to launch the Casella Center for Circular Economy and Sustainability. With \$1.5 million in support, the center will serve as an industry-first interdisciplinary hub for research, workshops, and lectures on sustainable waste and materials management, resource solutions, climate leadership, and community engagement.

The Universities of **Wisconsin** **hosted** the 21st annual Research in the Rotunda event. This occasion provides an opportunity for more than 100 undergraduate researchers to present research findings to state legislators, business leaders, alumni, and the public.

## TEACHER PREPARATION AND WORKFORCE

The **Kansas** State Board of Education approved a new **literacy course**, Foundations of the Science of Reading, that will provide in-service educators with a pathway to meet new licensure renewal requirements. This no-cost course, developed collaboratively by literacy experts, introduces structured literacy principle, enabling teachers who complete six credit hours to receive the Seal of Literacy designation on their license, signifying commitment to evidence-aligned reading instruction.

The **Maryland** Higher Education Commission and other state agencies have **created** a new partnership to recruit displaced federal workers into teaching positions in the state. The initiative also focuses on enhancing higher education partnerships, with community colleges and four-year universities developing methods to license teachers more quickly for those who already have prior knowledge. Maryland state agencies will support institutions as they design and promote alternative pathways.

The **Pennsylvania** Department of Education **announced** a second round of awards totaling more than \$1 million for the Accelerated Special Educator Certification Program. Under the program, grants are made available to colleges and universities with approved PK-12 special education certification programs to partner with at least one school district or other educational entity to provide individuals who hold bachelor's degrees with summer field experiences, mentoring and coaching by experienced special educators during the school year, and deliver a post-baccalaureate program for PK-12 special education teacher certification within 18 months.

The University of **Wyoming** has **selected** the fourth cohort of the Wyoming Teacher-Mentor Corps. The program supports teacher retention and effectiveness across Wyoming by fostering mentoring relationships between experienced educators and early-career teachers. This year's cohort includes 18 educators from districts throughout the state.

## WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT

The **Arkansas** Department of Higher Education **awarded** \$750,000 to the University of Arkansas as part of an initiative to help increase the number of data science certificates and degrees throughout the state. The two-year grant aims to expand the Arkansas Data Science Ecosystem by adding more two-year colleges to the program and to create stackable certificates that allow students and current workers to upskill without requiring a college degree.

The **Arkansas** Department of Higher Education has **awarded** \$1 million to the University of Arkansas to expand electronics education by developing credit and non-credit courses related to workforce needs in the semiconductor industry. The award is expected to help establish a statewide program that connects area industry, K-12 education and higher education institutions to collaborate in improving the knowledge and skills needed to meet employment needs in the semiconductor industry.

The **California** State University has **launched** a new effort to infuse alumni engagement into all stages of the student life cycle, from recruitment to career, with the goals of helping universities enroll more students and encouraging students to achieve their academic and career goals. Through a \$500,000 initiative, 26 projects across CSU campuses are fostering connections between over 4.3 million alumni and current students via mentorships, career events, and outreach.

The University of **Hawai'i** System **launched** a Workforce Learning Community that is designed to strengthen career readiness statewide. The community will focus on greater alignment between programs and industry needs, particularly in high-demand sectors such as health care, technology and cybersecurity, and sustainable agriculture. The learning community is also designed to foster collaboration between faculty and staff engaged in both credit and non-credit workforce programs.

The **Indiana** Commission for Higher Education has **awarded** \$1.1 million in Education Readiness Grants to 11 CTE districts or high schools in the state to build programs in high-demand fields like advanced manufacturing and digital technology. The investment will help schools expand or launch programs connected to local employers, providing students with work-based learning opportunities and strengthening school-industry partnerships.

The **Maryland** Transportation Authority (MDTA), in partnership with the Maryland Higher Education Commission, has **created** the Key Bridge Rebuild Internship Program, where students from four Baltimore-area universities will be able to get hands-on project management experience in engineering, infrastructure development, environmental science, and public-sector communications. Ten students from more than 80 applicants have been selected to participate in the inaugural summer session.

The **Michigan** Department of Lifelong Education, Advancement, and Potential **awarded** an \$800,000 grant to the Urban Alliance Foundation to launch an innovative internship program designed to support Michigan Reconnect students ages 21-24. This initiative aims to empower young adults pursuing an associate degree or industry-recognized skill certificate by providing paid internships, job training and mentorship opportunities.

**Michigan** Governor Gretchen Whitmer **signed** an executive directive to increase access to skills training and higher education for young men. The directive empowers the Michigan Department of Lifelong Education, Advancement, and Potential and the Department of Labor and Economic Opportunity to conduct targeted outreach to men across the state and inform them about programs and resources that can support them as they pursue skills training and higher education.

The **Missouri** Department of Higher Education & Workforce Development has **partnered** with Coursera to offer three free online courses aimed at enhancing Missourians' job search, job readiness, and personal finance skills. The courses focus on foundational skills important to success in the workplace, financial literacy, and job search skills such as networking and resume building.

The **New Hampshire** Department of Education has **launched** a statewide work-based learning network, in conjunction with Granite Edvance, and Xello, to connect high school students with internships, apprenticeships, and job shadowing opportunities at local companies. This initiative aims to further advance career readiness and workforce development by directly linking students with employers and real-world experiences.

**Ohio** **awarded** \$8.3 million in Super RAPIDS Grants to 39 universities, community colleges, and career technical centers. These grants are used to purchase equipment for use in classrooms specific to regional workforce needs and were awarded through a competitive process that prioritized employer input. Equipment purchased by grantees is often shared among multiple campuses, expanding the reach of the equipment.

The **Oklahoma** State Regents for Higher Education **announced** that 27 businesses and higher education partnerships in the state have been awarded Business Partnership Excellence Awards. Institutions participating in these partnerships provide a \$500 tuition waiver, which is matched by the State Regents, for employees, internships for current students, faculty externships with partnering businesses, and other investments.

The Appalachian Regional Commission **awarded** the **Pennsylvania** State System of Higher Education Foundation a \$350,000 grant for a three-year investment in work-based learning. The grant will provide financial support for three universities to provide work-based learning earlier in students' education through strategic faculty-employer collaborations. Participating faculty will partner with an employer to co-create workplace-connected learning opportunities through classroom instruction, projects or other coursework.

The **Virginia** Talent+ Opportunity Partnership has **granted** \$1.15 million to 12 public universities to improve and better coordinate methods for collecting and reporting student internship data. These grants will help

institutions collect and analyze data, which will allow them to identify work-based learning trends. V-TOP also **distributed** \$1.2 million in grants to 12 Virginia universities to help remove barriers to internships and work-based learning opportunities. These funds can be used for expenses like stipends, transportation, professional attire, and housing, ultimately aiming to advance students' career paths and Virginia's economy.

Piedmont Virginia Community College and the University of Virginia will **receive** \$250,000 in grants from the State Council of Higher Education for **Virginia** to transform on-campus federal work-study jobs to function like internships. The grants were awarded in the fourth round of the Transforming Federal Work-Study grant awards through the Virginia Talent+ Opportunity Partnership. The funding is intended to expand paid and credit-bearing internships and other work-based learning opportunities.

## ACCESS, PREPARATION, & ENROLLMENT

### APPLICATIONS AND ADMISSIONS

The **Kentucky** Council on Postsecondary Education (CPE) has **developed** the Kentucky Postsecondary Advising Framework and a complementary Advising Toolkit to assist guidance counselors and advisors helping students explore college and career options. The framework identifies college and career milestones and activities for students in grades 6-12, while the toolkit serves as a resource hub with information about college and career planning and readiness.

The **Kentucky** CPE has also **named** six Kentucky public high schools as recipients of grants to support postsecondary advising. The grants, which were reimbursable up to \$10,000, were awarded by the Kentucky Advising Academy, an initiative within the Kentucky CPE. The schools included a range of collaborative partners and focused on college and career exploration, postsecondary opportunities, essential skills, and financial aid and literacy.

More than 150 high schools in **Missouri** **celebrated** Decision Day on May 1 to recognize high school seniors' postsecondary and career plans. Decision Day—modeled after the NCAA's National Signing Day—began in 2016 to recognize high school seniors and support students who are undecided on their future. It is one of three programs DHEWD sponsors to help students in Missouri on their postsecondary and career pathways.

### COLLEGE PREPARATION AND GEAR UP GRANTS

The **Indiana** State Board of Education **approved** a diploma rule that sets new requirements for a high school diploma and develops readiness seals that provide a blueprint for achieving a student's goals and aspirations. The readiness seals include three pathways: Enrollment Honors developed with the Indiana Commission for Higher Education, Employment Honors developed with the Indiana Chamber of Commerce, and Enlistment Honors developed with the Indiana National Guard. Purdue University **announced** that it will automatically grant undergraduate admission to high school students in Indiana who have earned the new Honors Enrollment Plus seal diploma.

The **Minnesota** Office of Higher Education **announced** the Intervention for College Attendance Program, which aims to promote postsecondary attendance and retention through outreach services for historically underserved students in grade six through 12 and first-year undergraduates. Grantees—which can include public and private postsecondary institutions, school districts, professional associations, and community-based organizations—will receive up to \$120,000 over two years to provide counseling, mentoring, tutoring, career awareness, and other precollege services.



GEAR UP **New Mexico** and STEM Sante Fe **hosted** the fourth annual Girls STEM Pathways Conference to introduce middle-school girls to STEM college and career options. More than 100 students participated in an interactive college and career fair and STEM workshops on topics such as computer science, coding, and robotics.

Middle and high school students in **Oklahoma** can **experience** campus life while learning STEM at the free 2025 STEM Summer Academies, hosted by the Oklahoma State Regents for Higher Education. The academies are open to eighth through twelfth graders at the state's 14 colleges and universities and offer hands-on activities and experimentation in the classroom and outdoors. The academies are intended to provide all students with an opportunity to expand their career and educational aspirations, as well as increase their interest in STEM.

The State Council of Higher Education for **Virginia**'s GEAR UP Virginia and Level Up programs have allowed more than 5,700 Virginia students to **visit** a college campus as early as seventh grade. College visits are an effective strategy to offset anticipated declines in enrollment. Graduates from the Virginia GEAR UP program reported that college visits were the most influential activity in their decision to pursue education after high school. Beginning college outreach in seventh grade provides students with ample time to align their academic and personal goals with a postsecondary pathway.

The **West Virginia** GEAR UP Academy **hosted** over 1,300 ninth and tenth grade students from 11 counties across the state to explore career opportunities in West Virginia. Industry professionals from more than 55 organizations were in attendance to provide students with a vision of their future career.

## DUAL ENROLLMENT

Seven states were **selected** by the College in High School Alliance to become national leaders in dual enrollment policy. A two-year project supported by the ECMC Foundation, Joyce Foundation, and Strada Education Foundation will provide **Minnesota, New Mexico, Ohio, Oregon, Tennessee, Virginia, and Washington** the opportunity to work with national experts to develop and implement dual enrollment policies. The project supports states in eliminating participation and success gaps in dual enrollment for underrepresented students and developing systems to support students through their high school and postsecondary pathways.

**Oregon** has **developed** an innovative approach to dual enrollment that provides college credit to high school students and qualifications to high school teachers. Rather than requiring dual credit teachers to have equivalent qualifications as college faculty, the sponsored dual credit program provides teachers with discipline-specific professional learning communities with university and college faculty. The shared curriculum and assessments ensure that high school courses are equivalent to those offered at the college or university. The sponsored dual credit program has expanded to 17 institutions in Oregon and accounts for more than one quarter of all dual enrollment credits.

## ENROLLMENT

Between 2023 and 2024, all sectors of postsecondary education in **Kentucky** **experienced** increases in undergraduate enrollment, rising above pre-pandemic levels. The Kentucky Community & Technical College System saw the largest increase at 6.8%, followed by 3.9% at public universities and 3.7% at private institutions in Association of Independent Kentucky Colleges and Universities. Enrollment among underrepresented minority, Pell-eligible, dually enrolled, and non-traditional (age 25-64) students also increased dramatically since 2023.

## FAFSA COMPLETION

The **Arizona** Board of Regents (ABOR) **announced** the winners of the state's 2024-25 AZ FAFSA Challenge, which awarded 63 students iPads to use as they enter postsecondary education. High schools that improved



their FAFSA completion rates or that had the highest completion rates were also recognized by ABOR and Governor Katie Hobbs.

The **Indiana** Commission on Higher Education **announced** that 241 K-12 schools in the state have exceeded the state's goal of 60% of their senior class completing the FAFSA. Indiana has greatly improved its FAFSA completion rate since implementing a FAFSA completion requirement in 2023.

The **Michigan** College Access Network **announced** the Ticket to Tuition sweepstakes, a statewide initiative to encourage Michigan students enrolling in college for the first time to complete the FAFSA. Ten students will receive \$50,000 and forty students will receive \$10,000 in their Michigan Education Savings Program accounts. Funds can be used for tuition and fees, living expenses, or computers and textbooks.

March 31 through April 4 was "Finish the FAFSA Week" in **Tennessee**. The Tennessee Higher Education Commission (THEC), which ranks third in the country for FAFSA completion, **encouraged** all high school seniors to complete the FAFSA prior to April 15 to be eligible for up to two years of tuition-free college through Tennessee Promise.

The State Council of Higher Education for **Virginia** **launched** a financial aid help desk for Virginia students and families completing the FAFSA. Students can send a text message to receive answers to their financial aid questions from an expert within 24 hours. The help desk is funded by SCHEV's GEAR UP initiative, which aims to increase the number of low-income students entering and succeeding in higher education.

## P-20 ALIGNMENT

The **Minnesota** P-20 Education Partnership (MNP20) was **awarded** \$437,000 in grants over two years from the Joyce Foundation and the ECMC Foundation to advance its work to align state services and support across sectors. The Joyce Foundation funding will support the creation of a strategic plan, including how to improve statewide educational data use and educational access and affordability. The ECMC Foundation funding will support staffing to realize the strategic plan. MNP20 is a multi-sector coalition of K-12, higher education, nonprofit, workforce development, and government leaders collaborating to advocate for policies to improve learner success and outcomes from birth through the workforce.

## STUDENT ACCESS

**Colorado** Governor Jared Polis **announced** the creation of The Colorado Partnership for Proven Initiatives, a new multi-year effort to improve economic opportunities for Coloradans that aims to expand students' access to the support needed to thrive in the classroom and workforce. Over the next four years, Arnold Ventures will match the state's investments up to \$10 million, focusing initially on replicating the successful ASAP program at Lamar Community College and Colorado Mountain College to boost graduation rates and economic mobility for low-income students. This collaboration aims to utilize evidence-based strategies and create sustainable pathways to improve outcomes for Colorado residents.

The **Massachusetts** Board of Higher Education **approved** new state regulations to improve inclusive access to postsecondary education for students with intellectual disabilities, severe autism spectrum disorder, and developmental disabilities. Opportunities will be available at public institutions of higher education to individuals with disabilities ages 18 and older. The regulations strengthen partnerships with state health and human services agencies that support individuals with disabilities, define collaborative student-centered participation plans, and lay out campus reporting requirements.

The **Ohio** Department of Higher Education has **announced** a third cohort of colleges and technical centers that have achieved Ohio Reach Postsecondary Designation. This designation demonstrates that these campuses have met criteria for supporting students with experience in foster care. Since its launch in August 2023, 57 campuses in Ohio have earned this designation.

The **Tennessee** Department of Disability and Aging will **award** \$509,105 in grant funding through Tennessee Believes to five colleges and universities to develop or expand higher education programs

that serve students with intellectual and developmental disabilities. Another \$490,850 will be awarded to existing multi-year contracts with an additional four colleges and universities.

The **Tennessee** Higher Education Commission **announced** a new cohort of high schools as recipients of the Advise TN program, which provides dedicated college and career advisors to high schools. These advisors have helped over 62,000 students apply for college, secure financial aid, and explore career pathways, and are particularly effective in assisting first-generation and low-income students. The new cohort of schools has college enrollment rates below the state average and is an important population in the state's efforts to improve college enrollment and degree attainment.

## STUDENT SUCCESS & COLLEGE COMPLETION

### ACADEMIC PROGRAMS, CURRICULUM, AND TRANSFER

The **Connecticut** State Colleges and Universities (CSCU) system has **launched** a systemwide initiative to strengthen the student transfer experience by simplifying pathways between its 12 community colleges and four state universities. This effort is part of CSCU's participation in the Transfer Reset Design Accelerator, a **national initiative** led by the University Design Institute at Arizona State University, aimed at improving credit mobility and increasing bachelor's degree attainment. CSCU's initiative focuses on removing barriers to transfer through clearer articulation agreements, improved advising practices, and streamlined credit evaluation processes.

The **Maryland** Higher Education Commission has **introduced** the Maryland Community College Baccalaureate (MCCB) Degree Pathways initiative to enhance transfer pathways from community colleges to four-year institutions. Funded by a federal grant, this program aims to increase bachelor's degree completion by expanding dual admissions partnerships, clarifying degree maps, and improving advising across institutions. The initiative prioritizes equity in access and outcomes for Maryland students, particularly those from underrepresented backgrounds.

The **Louisiana** Board of Regents, **Minnesota** State Colleges and Universities, **Missouri** Department of Higher Education & Workforce Development, **Nevada** System of Higher Education, **Ohio** Department of Higher Education, **Pennsylvania** State System of Higher Education, and **South Carolina** Commission on Higher Education have **joined** the Holistic Credit Mobility (HCM) Acceleration Cohort, a national initiative led by Ithaka S+R in collaboration with Complete College America and funded by Ascendium Education Group. This 12-month effort aims to streamline credit transfers and enhance the recognition of prior learning, including work and military experience, to facilitate timely degree completion.

The University of **North Carolina** System has **implemented** a more efficient process for evaluating transfer credits, enabling quicker transitions for students to move between institutions. This streamlined approach is designed to facilitate timely degree completion and reduce redundant coursework.

**Oregon's** Higher Education Coordinating Commission (HECC) has **highlighted** efforts to improve transfer pathways through enhanced articulation agreements and common course numbering. These measures aim to simplify the transfer process and ensure that students receive appropriate credit for prior coursework.

### ADULT LEARNERS

The **Arizona** Board of Regents (ABOR) has been **awarded** a \$1.1 million grant from the Helios Education Foundation to launch the AZ Comeback Initiative, a statewide effort aimed at helping Arizonans with some college credit but no degree return to higher education and complete their credentials. This initiative, supported by Arizona State University, Northern Arizona University, and the University of

Arizona, seeks to identify and implement evidence-based strategies to reduce barriers to re-enrollment and degree completion. Each university will tailor its approach to assist as many as possible of the nearly 770,000 Arizona residents who have left college without finishing their degrees. The program also includes partnerships with organizations like WestEd to evaluate outcomes and develop a comprehensive playbook for statewide adoption of successful strategies.

The **Michigan** Department of Lifelong Education, Advancement, and Potential (MiLEAP) has **expanded** its “Michigan Reconnect” initiative, a tuition-free program aimed at adults over 21 who do not yet have a college degree. The initiative now includes a \$10 million investment to support wraparound services, such as academic advising, childcare, and transportation assistance, to help returning adult learners enroll and persist in community college programs. This expansion is part of a broader state effort to increase educational attainment and workforce readiness among Michigan residents.

**New York** will **launch** its SUNY Reconnect program in Fall 2025. The **program**, which recently was passed by the state legislature and signed by Gov. Kathy Hochul, provides free tuition, fees, and books for adult learners in high-demand fields in community colleges across the state.

**New York** **announced** \$1.1 million in grants awarded to 22 community colleges in the State University of New York (SUNY) System to support adult learners through the Adult Learner Leadership Initiative. The initiative aims to enhance access and completion rates for students aged 25 and older by implementing strategies such as expanded credit for prior learning, flexible scheduling, and comprehensive support services.

## PRIOR LEARNING CREDIT

The University System of **Georgia** and the **Indiana** Commission for Higher Education have **partnered** with the American Council on Education to enhance postsecondary education opportunities for military learners. This collaboration focuses on establishing comprehensive Credit for Prior Learning policies and practices that acknowledge military training and experience, thereby facilitating smoother transitions for service members into higher education and accelerating their path to degree completion.

The **Kentucky** Council on Postsecondary Education, through its Kentucky Student Success Collaborative, has **launched** a year-long initiative to expand Credit for Prior Learning opportunities across the state's public institutions. This effort aims to make higher education more accessible and affordable by recognizing students' prior learning experiences, such as military service, work experience, and professional certifications. The initiative is part of Kentucky's broader strategy to increase the percentage of working-age adults with a postsecondary credential from 56% to 60% by 2030.

## STUDENT PARENTS

The **Minnesota** Office of Higher Education (OHE), in partnership with the Minnesota Department of Health, has **awarded** \$5.3 million in Student Parent Support Initiative (SPSI) grants to 13 organizations. These grants aim to support the academic goals, health, and well-being of student parents by providing services such as on-campus childcare, mental health support, and financial assistance. The SPSI is part of Minnesota's broader effort to increase postsecondary attainment among parenting students.

**Pennsylvania** has **announced** over \$1.5 million in Parent Pathways grants to 12 institutions across Pennsylvania. These grants are designed to support parenting students through tuition assistance, emergency funding, and wraparound services. The initiative is part of Governor Shapiro's plan to make higher education more accessible and affordable, particularly for students balancing academic responsibilities with parenthood.

## STUDENT SUPPORT SERVICES

The **Colorado** Department of Higher Education has **launched** the COSI Achieve initiative, allocating up to \$6.1

million to public institutions and \$2 million to nonprofit organizations. This program combines scholarships with essential student support services, such as academic advising and mental health resources, to enhance student retention and success. A one-to-one funding match is required to encourage community investment. The initiative builds upon the Colorado Opportunity Scholarship Initiative's decade-long efforts to reduce barriers to postsecondary education.

The **Michigan** Community College Association has been **awarded** a \$650,000 grant from the Kresge Foundation to advance a range of student success efforts across the state's 31 community and tribal colleges. This investment will support evidence-based policy reforms, new partnerships with national student success organizations, and a greater focus on guided pathways.

## VETERANS

The **Tennessee** Higher Education Commission **announced** that Austin Peay State University has been designated as Tennessee's first VETS Bravo Campus, recognizing its exceptional support for military-connected students. The designation requires institutions to meet elevated criteria, including peer mentoring programs, tailored career services, and dedicated campus liaisons. APSU's Newton Military Family Resource Center serves as a hub for these services, reflecting the university's commitment to veteran success.

# COLLEGE AFFORDABILITY, COST CONTAINMENT & BASIC NEEDS

## AFFORDABILITY

The **Kentucky** Council on Postsecondary Education (CPE) **released** a report in March showing the average student loan debt levels for students at public two- and four-year colleges decreased by nearly 33% over the past five years. According to the report, nearly 60% of undergraduates who completed a certificate or degree in the state of Kentucky in 2023-24 did so with student debt.

The University of **North Carolina** System **froze** tuition rates for its 16 public universities this spring for the 9th year in a row. The average in-state tuition at 12 of the 16 universities in the UNC System is \$4,553 per year.

The **South Dakota** Board of Regents **approved** a 2.9% tuition increase for the upcoming academic year in April after having nearly flat tuition over the past five years. The cost of attendance at South Dakota public institutions of higher education remains among the lowest in the region.

The **Utah** System of Higher Education **kept** tuition and fee rates flat at its eight technical colleges, with sub-inflationary tuition increases averaging 2.23% among degree-granting institutions in the state, which is below last year's increase.

## COST CONTAINMENT

The **California** State University (CSU) is **advancing** its **Multi-University Collaboration Initiative**, a system-wide effort to contain costs, simplify processes, improve efficiency, and achieve economies of scale. CSU is advancing work on CSUBUY, a statewide procurement platform, and plans to have the procurement program in place at all campuses by the end of 2025. The CSU is also launching a Benefits Administration Collaboration Team to provide benefits administration to the 23 CSU campuses, which aims to provide a more consistent experience and reduce administrative burdens, as well as the Cyber Fusion Center, which will provide centralized cybersecurity.

## OPEN EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES

The **West Virginia** Higher Education Policy Commission **announced** in April that Open Learning WV, the state's open educational resources program, has saved students an estimated \$9.6 million in textbook costs since its launch in 2021. The program has generated a return of \$18 for every \$1 in grant funding. All the state's public colleges and universities are using the program, with 527 classes and 307 faculty members redesigning their curriculum using these resources.

## STUDENT BASIC NEEDS AND SAFETY

The **California** State University is **improving** housing capacity across its system. To support the increasing number of students enrolling in CSU institutions, the system is building innovative mixed-use buildings that prioritize improving access to campus offices and resources and affordable housing options.

The **Kentucky** Council on Postsecondary Education (CPE) is working to improve student mental health and addiction and recovery support in their state. Building off of insights from the Healthy Minds survey of 3,621 students at 21 Kentucky postsecondary institutions, the CPE, in partnership with the JED Foundation, has **created** a new strategy to address mental health concerns and improve student support.

**Kentucky** CPE is also focused on providing support to students in recovery from substance abuse. Through a \$488,676 grant from Kentucky's Opioid Abatement Advisory Commission, KCPE will **create** Collegiate Recovery Resource Centers on five campuses that will provide addiction, recovery, and associated mental health support for degree and certificate seeking students.

The **Minnesota** Office of Higher Education is **accepting** proposals for its Emergency Assistance for Postsecondary Students grant. The goal of the grant program is to provide Minnesota postsecondary institutions with funding and resources to address postsecondary student basic needs insecurities, including housing, food, or transportation barriers.

The **New Jersey** Office of the Secretary of Higher Education recently **established** the New Jersey Higher Education Mental Health Ambassadors Program. The program is student centered and led by peer mental health ambassadors, with a goal of improving mental health awareness, supporting student leadership and advocacy efforts, and creating a statewide peer network to improve student mental health.

# VALUE, ROI, & TRANSPARENCY

## DATA RESOURCES

The **New Jersey** Statewide Data System (NJSDS) **launched** the External Access program, granting approved researchers access to longitudinal, de-identified administrative data from four key state agencies, including education and labor departments. Eligible applicants must meet research qualifications and obtain IRB approval. The initiative supports requests that align with the NJSDS research areas, such as exploring pathways through services and systems to understand outcomes and patterns.

The **South Carolina** Commission on Higher Education recently added several data resources to its website, including dashboards and reports that enhance transparency and inform policy decisions. Key resources include a **Distance Education Dashboard** using NC-SARA data to analyze trends across South Carolina and the Southern Regional Educational Board area, and a **Merit and Non-Merit Aid Factbook** covering financial aid data from 2008 to 2023. Additionally, the **Academic Programs and Career Clusters Dashboard** offers insights from 1992 to 2024, and the **2024 Institutional Factsheet** provides current institutional performance metrics.

## RETURN ON INVESTMENT

The **Indiana** Commission for Higher Education **released** key findings from a nine-month study conducted by Heart+Mind Strategies and funded by a grant from Lilly Endowment Inc. The study reveals that approximately 80% of Hoosier high school students and parents believe college is worth the investment. However, Indiana's college-going rate remains around 53%, highlighting a 30-point gap between perceived value and actual enrollment. The Commission aims to raise Indiana's national college-going rank from 33rd to the top 10 by 2030 through its **HOPE Agenda**.

The **Utah** System of Higher Education **announced** a new policy brief that underscores the significant advantages of the state's investment in higher education, connecting it to a robust economy, civic participation, and overall well-being. With 240,000 students enrolled in 16 public institutions, Utah generates a \$3 return in tax revenue for every \$1 invested in higher education. The report also indicates strong links between higher educational attainment and better health outcomes—97% of college graduates possess health insurance, compared to fewer than two-thirds of individuals lacking a high school diploma. These results emphasize the essential role of higher education in fostering a prosperous and healthy society in Utah.

## TRANSPARENCY

The **Arkansas** Department of Higher Education has **launched** the **ACCESS website**, which focuses on the six aspects of the state's new ACCESS (Acceleration, Common Sense, Cost, Eligibility, Scholarships, and Standardization) law. It also will soon include a portal to the state's direct admissions program.

# PUBLIC POLICY

## ACCESS, AFFORDABILITY, AND BASIC NEEDS

Lawmakers in **Colorado** **passed** the Tuition Waivers & Colorado National Guard Members bill, which changed an existing tuition assistance program to a tuition waiver program. Members of the Colorado National Guard are now eligible to have tuition waived for up to 65 credit hours at designated two-year institutions, 130 credit hours at designated four-year institutions, or a total of 145 credit hours if a student attends both a two-year and four-year institution while enrolled.

**New Mexico** **became** just the fifth state in the nation to offer free high school equivalency exams. In accordance with the new law, the New Mexico Higher Education Department will now cover testing and test preparation fees.

**New Mexico** lawmakers also **created** the **Veterinary Medicine Loan Repayment Program**. The state will provide student debt relief for veterinarians focused on food animal veterinary care and commit to working designated underserved areas for a minimum of four years.

In **Virginia**, the legislature passed and Governor Glenn Youngkin **signed** into law the Hunger-Free Campus Food Pantry Grant Program. The program will distribute \$500,000 to state postsecondary institutions to support on-campus food pantries or nearby partner food pantries with a goal of improving support to postsecondary students facing food insecurity.

## ADMISSIONS

In **New Jersey**, Governor Phil Murphy signed a **bill** that requires all public colleges and universities to readmit students who withdrew for military service, free of any fees or change in academic status. Students may begin providing written requests to be readmitted under this law starting in the 2025-2026 academic year.



## ADVANCED DEGREES

In **Kentucky**, more public universities are now able to seek approval to offer professional and advanced degree programs, such as medical and veterinary schools and doctoral programs. In accordance with the **new law**, the Kentucky Council of Postsecondary Education will review proposals and make approval and funding recommendations to the legislature.

## INVESTMENT

The State University of **New York** will **receive** \$114 million in additional state investment in the upcoming state budget. The state has increased operating support by 30% over the past three years, allowing for additional investments in faculty and staff, student and faculty research, and internship opportunities.

# CIVIC ENGAGEMENT, FREE SPEECH, & PUBLIC PURPOSES

## FREE SPEECH

The **Arizona** Board of Regents **presented** the 2025 Regents' Cup, its annual speech and debate competition, on April 10 at Northern Arizona State University (NAU) in Flagstaff. Nearly 50 student contestants from Arizona State University, NAU, and the University of Arizona prepared several months to compete through persuasive storytelling and Oxford-style debate for scholarship prizes.

The University System of **Georgia** **hosted** its second annual Regents' Cup Debate Series, awarding scholarship prizes to students exemplifying communication from different perspectives in persuasive and respectful ways. Students from 13 campuses debated national and international topics from education to government.

## LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT

The **Connecticut** Office of Higher Education **announced** the award of five mini-grants (\$38,787) from The Allstate Foundation to support youth-led initiatives to serve communities, center youth voices and decision-making, and promote impact and action in their project design.

The **Kentucky** Council on Postsecondary Education (CPE) has **selected** 16 faculty and professional staff members from the state's public institutions for participation in the 2025 cohort of the Academic Leadership Development Institute (ALDI). The yearlong institute provides professional development opportunities for fellows on track for career advancement.

## PUBLIC PURPOSES

The second annual Empire State Service Corps Program is **inviting applications** from State University of **New York** (SUNY) students for one of 500 paid civic and service internships for Fall 2025. The program goal is to provide students hands-on community service experience through internships in civic engagement/ civic discourse, FAFSA, student success coaching, and veterans affairs outreach, among other focus areas.

The State University of **New York** and City Year are **expanding** their partnership to promote service and opportunities for students. Generous support from the Einhorn Collaborative will enable SUNY to expand the award of credit for prior learning and to create a Student Success Coach's role for students to serve as near-peer tutors and role models in their own communities.