



ESG

Education
Strategy
Group

SHEEO Higher Education Policy Conference
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The Great **ADMISSIONS REDESIGN**

Lessons in Automation, Simplification, and Proactivity



Colleen Sexton

Illinois Board of Higher
Education



Stephanie Cheung

Kentucky Council on
Postsecondary Education



Rathi Sudhakara

Washington Student
Achievement Council



Melanie Heath

Lumina Foundation



Lauren Norton

Education Strategy Group



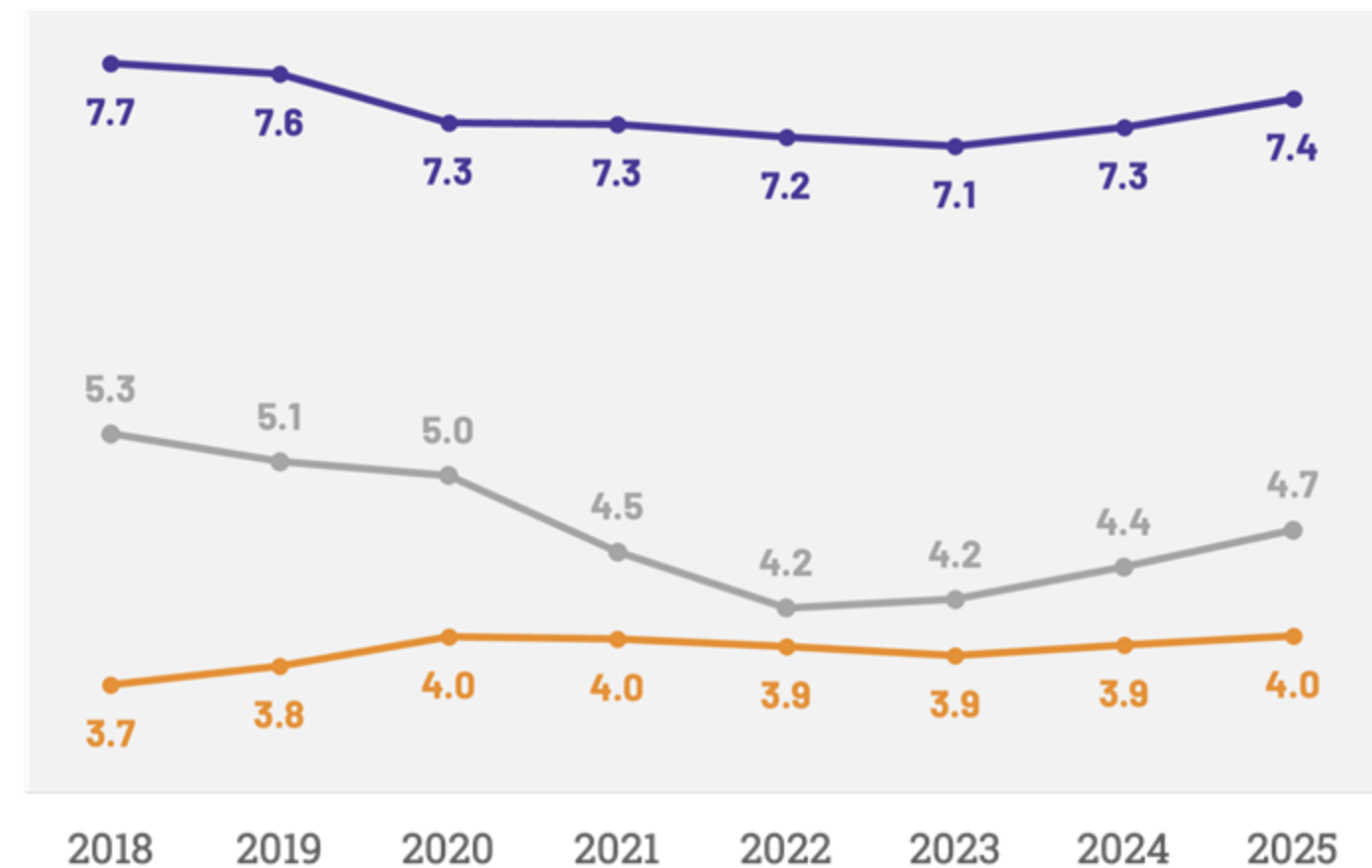
When it comes to enrollment, higher education is at a crossroads.

- **Demographic cliff**
- Year-over-year **declines in freshman enrollment** following the COVID-19 pandemic
- Waning public trust around the **value** of higher education and concerns around affordability
- Shifting **test policies** for admissions
- **Supreme Court ruling** on affirmative action
- Volatility in **federal funding**

How can the college admissions process evolve from *gatekeeper* to *gateway*?

Total Spring Enrollment by Sector
(Millions)

Public 4-year Private, Nonprofit 4-year Public 2-year



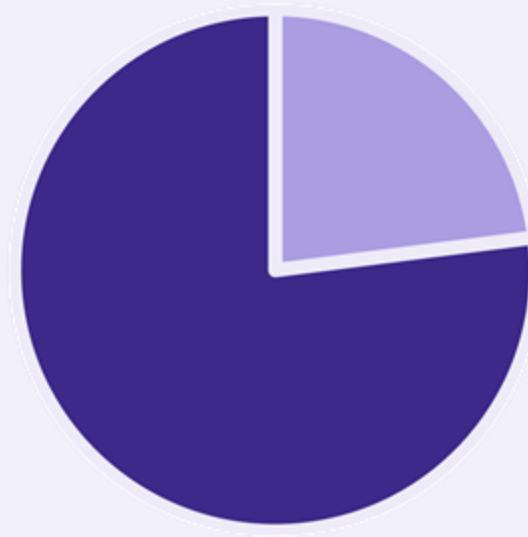
Source: [National Student Clearinghouse](#)

➤ Students face steep barriers to navigate the enrollment process because of unnecessary bureaucracy and misaligned systems.

A recent survey of students aged 16-22 found that:



52% of students say that applying to college has been more stressful than anything else they have done academically.



More than **three-quarters** of students feel the college admission process is complex.

Source: [National Association for College Admission Counseling](#)

To **disentangle the “gauntlet”** that college applicants currently square up against, scholars have been increasingly advocating for admissions innovations that prioritize:



Proactivity

Informs students of their options before they apply and communicates quickly and efficiently



Automation

Leverages data and technology to reduce the burden on both students and practitioners



Transparency

Ensures information, including eligibility, total cost, and financial aid, is clearly conveyed

Source: [Annenberg Institute](#)

➤ Admissions redesign is emerging as a promising solution, quickly gaining momentum across the country.





Lumina's Great Admissions Redesign is igniting a national movement.

In 2023, Lumina Foundation launched [The Great Admissions Redesign](#) (GAR), challenging states, systems, and institutions to propose bold approaches to simplifying and automating admissions. More than **70 applicants across 32 states** and U.S. territories responded to Lumina's challenge.

Implementation grants sought to propel the progress of mature redesign projects.

Northern Arizona University

California State University

Illinois Board of Higher Education

Planning grants sought to support discovery and vision-setting within nascent redesign projects.

Kentucky Council on Postsecondary Education

Louisiana Board of Regents*

Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board

Washington Student Achievement Council

*Note that the Louisiana Board of Regents received funding for two separate projects.



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Kentucky's Framework for Collaborative Action



“We can achieve more together than anyone can do alone”

“Progress moves at the speed of trust. Relationships are the infrastructure for change”



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Four-week digital diary study

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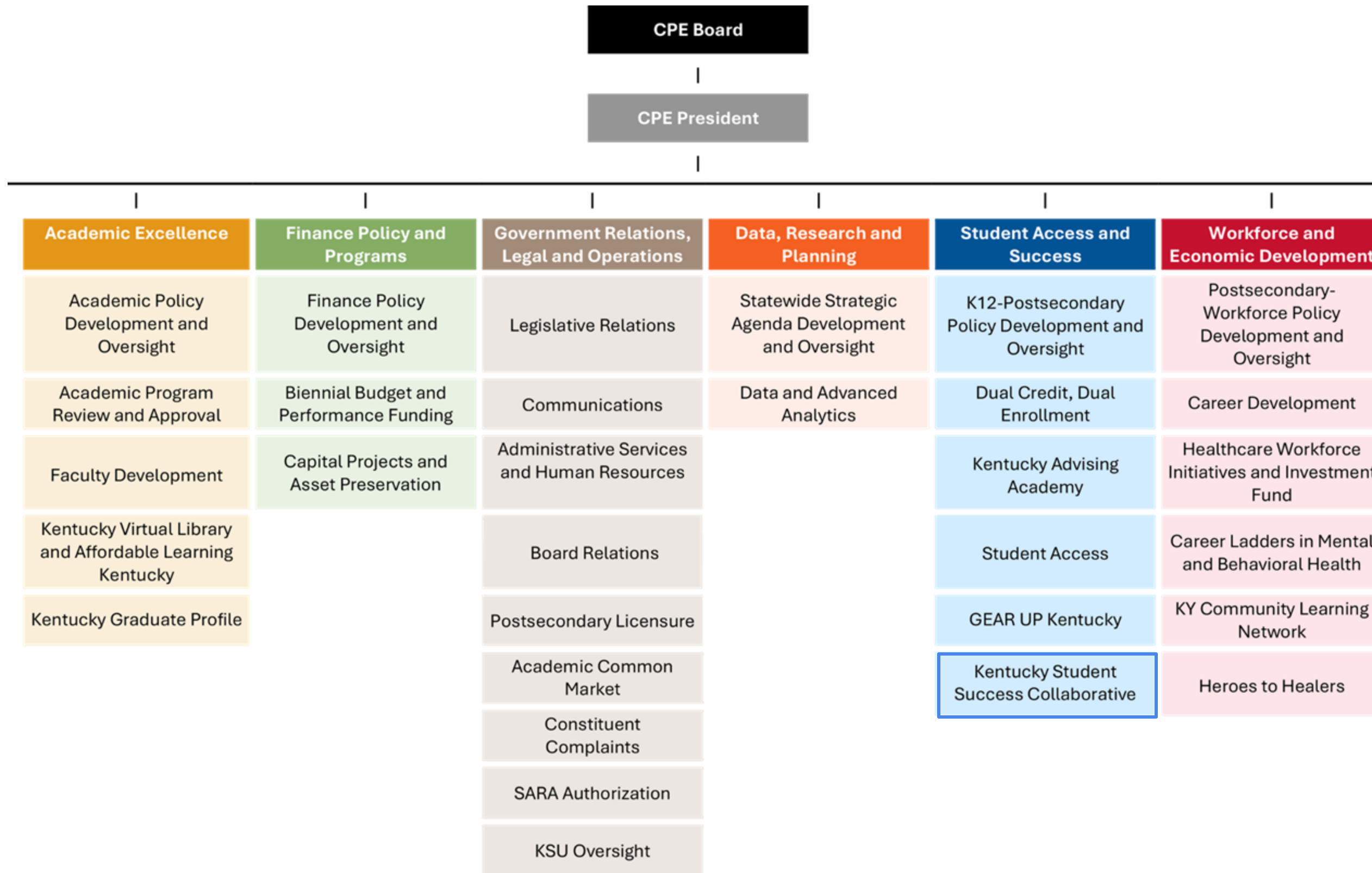


Lauren Norton

Education Strategy Group



Kentucky Council on Postsecondary Education



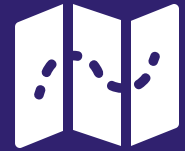
CPE is a coordinating board overseeing Kentucky's state universities and the Kentucky Community and Technical College System.

The Council facilitates a positive return on investment of public funds supporting higher education by monitoring academic quality, affordability and student success through policy and accountability measures.





Six key lessons emerged from the grantees' inspiring redesign efforts.



The field is moving beyond traditional “direct admissions” efforts to consider simplification and automation **throughout the student journey**, including financial aid, transfer, and/or dual enrollment.



Policy, while not required, can create the enabling conditions to catalyze action.



It's essential to articulate a clear, compelling **vision** for simplification to all stakeholders.



A robust cross-sector **data ecosystem** is necessary for enabling automation.



Technology plays a crucial role in advancing the efficiency and transparency of admissions innovations, offering powerful tools to both students and practitioners.



To break through to students and families, admissions innovations must be supported by a “**ground game**” of champions in the field.

➤ Opportunities to Learn More

Review ESG's newly released *Lessons Learned* report, read our article in Forbes, read briefs from DQC and Research for Action, invite your colleagues to attend a webinar, listen in to Lumina's upcoming live podcast, check out Lumina's website, and more!





USING DATA TO STREAMLINE COLLEGE ADMISSIONS AND ACCESS

Many states and institutions are using data to simplify various aspects of the traditional college application process, such as eligibility, the cost and time required to apply, financial aid, and more. These state- and institution-level efforts to help people go to college (e.g., automatic admissions, guaranteed transfer, and admissions pathways) use data to reduce the administrative burden for postsecondary institutions while simultaneously helping students understand and pursue their postsecondary goals. These programs can also increase postsecondary attainment, serving state and community interests.

All efforts like these to streamline the admissions process will require strong, secure data connections between high schools and postsecondary institutions, ideally supported by a statewide longitudinal data system (SLDS) that includes data across early education, K-12, postsecondary education, and the workforce over time. Seamless transfer of verified high school data (e.g., transcripts and test scores) to postsecondary institutions or between postsecondary institutions relieves students of the burden of manual data entry and document submission. This process not only reduces application and enrollment barriers for students, especially for students with limited resources or support, but also reduces the burden for institutions, which can instead focus their resources on evaluating applicants rather than collecting redundant information. Comprehensive data sharing can also facilitate targeted outreach and support to students who may not otherwise apply, ultimately promoting greater equity in college access.

DIFFERENT PROGRAMS, ONE GOAL: EASING POSTSECONDARY TRANSITIONS

There are several different models for streamlining postsecondary admissions. Some programs guarantee admission to eligible students whose high school records indicate that they meet specific academic criteria, such as grade point average (GPA) or standardized test scores, often eliminating the need for extensive applications. In some cases, the institution proactively informs students of their acceptance based on the student's high school data, simplifying the process even further. Other universities are offering students a path to admission by directing them to local community colleges and guaranteeing admission to the university if criteria are met there. These initiatives seek to democratize access to higher education by simplifying and demystifying the path to college.

MAY 2025

Admissions Innovations at the State and System Levels		
In conducting a literature and landscape scan of postsecondary admissions innovations at the state and postsecondary system levels, we have identified seven types of policies as outlined in Figure 1.		
Figure 1. An Admissions Innovation Typology		
Innovation Type	Definition	Key Components
 Direct Admissions	High school students are proactively notified by a state postsecondary agency or system of their acceptance to at least one two- or four-year institution based on academic criteria (e.g., GPA) and can select the institution(s) of their choice by completing a simplified application process.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Admission assured early• Application process simplified• Proactive notification• Application fee waived
 Informed Admissions	High school students are proactively notified by a state postsecondary agency or system that they will be admitted to at least one two- or four-year institution based on academic criteria (e.g., GPA), but are required to complete a traditional application process.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Admission assured early• Proactive notification• Application fee waived (in some cases)
 Cascading Admissions	High school students applying to a four-year institution in a state postsecondary system who are not accepted are alternatively offered admission and encouraged to attend another institution(s) in the system based on academic criteria and areas of interest.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Admission assured early• Application fee waived
 Invitational Admissions	High school students are proactively notified by a state postsecondary agency or system of their eligibility for admission to a four-year institution based on academic criteria and encouraged to apply without a guarantee of admission.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Proactive notification
 Self-Reported Admissions	High school students enter limited academic information (e.g., GPA) into an online questionnaire/portal to determine acceptance, after which they complete an application to institutions where they are accepted.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Admission assured early
 Guaranteed Admissions	High school students are assured admission to one or more four-year institution(s) if they apply and meet established academic criteria.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Admission assured early
 System Admissions	High school students may apply to multiple institutions in the same postsecondary system with a single application.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Application simplified or eliminated

3 | Postsecondary Admissions Innovations at the State and System Level: A Landscape Typology Brief

RESEARCH FOR ACTION



The Great ADMISSIONS REDESIGN

ONE YEAR LATER: LESSONS LEARNED



SAVE THE DATE:

Aug 22 - Lessons Learned Webinar

Sept 4 - Lumina Live Podcast