



SHEEO

State Higher Education
Executive Officers Association

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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 Summer 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.

ECONOMIC & WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT

ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE

The **California** State University (CSU) has **created** a systemwide strategy to promote innovative, ethical, and equitable adoption of artificial intelligence (AI). Among the projects supporting these efforts is the **Artificial Intelligence (AI) Educational Innovations Challenge**. CSU recently selected 63 faculty-led projects as part of the challenge with the goals of creating conditions to transform teaching and research while addressing AI application concerns in higher education learning. The awarded projects are multidisciplinary and cross-disciplinary in nature and focus on improving AI literacy and competencies, promoting effective and appropriate use strategies, and examining the ethical use of AI. CSU students are also engaging with AI through the **AI for Social Good** initiative. Funded in part by the National Science Foundation and led by CSU faculty, the AI for Social Good project creates opportunities for undergraduate students to engage with AI across disciplines to develop solutions to real-world problems such as wildfire detection, biodiversity protection, and robotic assistance technologies..

The University of **Hawai'i** System, recognizing the need to establish foundations for responsible adoption and use of AI on its campuses, has **created** an AI planning group. Over the next six to nine months, the planning group, composed of cross-functional stakeholders, will work to ensure that the UH system is prepared to engage appropriately and ethically integrate AI literacy and application into the curriculum and operations.

Mississippi has engaged in two AI-oriented partnerships. Partnering with Nvidia to expand AI training and research in its educational institutions, Mississippi is **focused** on preparing students for an AI-driven economy. The partnership is focused on incorporating AI skills, machine learning, and data science into the curriculum. In an Amazon partnership, Mississippi has **launched** the Mississippi AI Talent Accelerator Program to provide \$9.1 million in grants to develop AI and machine learning skills to support the expansion of Amazon Web Services.

Oregon is also **partnering** with Nvidia to include AI literacy and use lessons in K-12 and postsecondary curriculum. \$10 million of state money will be spent as part of the initiative to expand AI education access and associated career opportunities.

ENTREPRENEURSHIP

The State University of **New York** **celebrated** the success of the SUNY Startup Summer School Demo Day (S4), a competitive program designed to showcase the most promising technologies and startups. This year's participants included 222 SUNY students, faculty, and staff from 30 different SUNY campuses, with 15 teams selected for Demo Day. The SUNY Startup Summer School offers entrepreneurial education and training to help students and faculty secure the initial funding needed to get their technology to market. All S4 participating teams will continue to receive coaching and mentoring from successful entrepreneurs and seasoned executives serving on the SUNY Venture Advisors to support business development and commercialization.

HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES WORKFORCE

Connecticut State Colleges and Universities (CSCU) **awarded** more than \$2.1 million in scholarship funding to nursing and social work students in year two of the CT Health Horizons Initiative. The initiative, funded by the American Rescue Plan Act, seeks to address the critical statewide workforce shortage in nursing and social work. It allocates \$30.5 million to partner colleges and universities to expand faculty, provide tuition support for students, and create strategic workforce partnerships. Over the program's first two years, CT Health Horizons has awarded \$3.2 million in scholarship funding.

The University of **Hawai'i** System **received** two privately funded grants totaling more than \$1.5 million from The Leona M. and Harry B. Helmsley Charitable Trust to tackle pressing health disparities across rural Hawai'i and the U.S.-Affiliated Pacific Islands. Through community-centered health care and policy research, the projects aim to improve access, quality, and coordination of care in medically underserved areas. The first grant of \$1.15 million will support a two-year, in-depth assessment of health policy and health care delivery system in American Samoa and the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands. The second grant—\$383,844 over two years—focuses on opportunities to improve health in Hawai'i through policy changes.

The **Kentucky** Council on Postsecondary Education (CPE) has **awarded** \$4.3 million to 28 postsecondary health care programs across Kentucky. The awards provide training scholarships to over 200 Kentucky resident students studying fields with workforce shortages. The funds were made possible through the Kentucky Healthcare Workforce Investment Fund (HWIF), a public-private partnership enacted during the 2023 legislative session. The HWIF aims to cultivate a robust health care workforce in Kentucky, targeting critical needs among Kentucky's health care professional education and training programs.

The **Kentucky** Council on Postsecondary Education, in partnership with the Department for Community-Based Services (DCBS) and a consortium of postsecondary institutions, **kicked off** the Community Learning Network in July. The program provides a more responsive, modern, and regionally inclusive workforce training system for Kentucky's human services professionals, including over 5,000 DCBS employees and thousands of foster parents, kinship caregivers, and community partners across 120 counties.

The **Maryland** Higher Education Commission has **awarded** \$17.2 million to 24 projects at 13 Maryland public universities, community colleges, and independent colleges to strengthen the nursing workforce. The Fiscal Year 26 Competitive Institutional Grant funding awards include one-year resource grants, multi-year implementation grants, and planning grants. The Nurse Support Program II focuses on nursing faculty and increased educational efforts to prepare highly skilled and highly trained professionals to address the challenges and demands of the field.

The State University of **New York** (SUNY) **announced** that 12 students have been selected to receive the inaugural SUNY Healthcare Educator Scholarship, an innovative pilot program designed to expand SUNY's capacity to educate future nurses as part of Governor Kathy Hochul's health care workforce agenda. The program supports baccalaureate-prepared nurses pursuing a master's degree in nursing, and in return, recipients will commit to a three-year faculty position at a SUNY associate-level nursing program. The SUNY Healthcare Educator Scholarship will cover up to \$25,000 per academic year, including up to \$20,000 for tuition and fees toward a qualifying master's in nursing degree program at SUNY, plus a \$5,000 annual stipend for each year of eligible enrollment.

The **Ohio** Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services and the Ohio Department of Higher Education **announced** the launch of a new recruitment campaign to grow and strengthen the field, referred to in the campaign as Ohio's Wellness Workforce. The campaign features real Ohio professionals and students who share why they were drawn to the field and encourage others to pursue a career helping those in need.

The **Tennessee** Higher Education Commission **announced** the recipients of the Rural Health Care Pathways Expansion Grant, a key initiative designed to strengthen Tennessee's rural health care workforce by expanding access to education and career pathways in high-demand health care fields. Grants of up to \$2 million have been awarded to 20 higher education institutions across the state. These awardees will develop or expand health care career pathway programs that connect rural students with in-demand opportunities in health care, behavioral health, and dental health professions.

RESEARCH AND INNOVATION

The **Arizona** Board of Regents (ABOR) is engaged in several initiatives aimed at leveraging the state's postsecondary research and innovation to address key issues in the state. In a partnership with the Arizona Department of Water Resources, the Regents are **facilitating** the Tri-University Recharge and Water Reliability Project (ATUR). This initiative is a grant-funded project geared towards recapturing runoff and precipitation to replenish aquifers before evaporation, bringing together researchers and professionals to create innovative solutions that will boost water conservation in the state. ABOR has also **established** partnerships with its public universities and the Arizona Department of Transportation to address new driver skills and safety. The \$280,000 grant aims to use engineering, technology, and psychology to "understand and mitigate driving risks."

The **California** State University (CSU) system has **created** the CSU Climate Adaptation Consortium. To address increasing climate impacts, the consortium will connect faculty, staff, students and external partners through research, curriculum, workforce development, and community engagement. The goals of the consortium are to grow partnerships, secure funding, share knowledge, and engage students in creating climate resilient and sustainable solutions. Students at CSU also **showcased** their academic work through the system's research competitions and challenges. These annual occurrences allow students to share their research, academic work, and creative pursuits with the broader CSU and California communities.

The **Minnesota** Office of Higher Education has **awarded** \$2.9 million to 15 Spinal Cord Injury and Traumatic Brain Injury (SCI-TBI) research projects. The Minnesota Legislature established the SCI-TBI grant program in 2015 and awards funds to projects that are piloting, advancing, and translating spine and brain injury insights.

The **Nevada** System of Higher Education (NSHE), through funding from the National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA), has **created** the Nevada Space Grant Program to advance workforce development and create connections to NASA's mission. The program will provide support for "internships, fellowships and scholarships for NSHE students; curriculum development and faculty training; research and workforce development projects; and pre-college STEM education initiatives, including teacher training and classroom projects."

The State University of **New York** (SUNY) **announced** the expansion of its Upstate Biotech Ventures fund by \$4 million. The fund, which now has a \$10 million investment, is a regional venture capital fund established "to support and accelerate the growth of early-stage biotech, life sciences, and health tech companies in Upstate New York." SUNY also **announced** the creation of the SUNY Research Leadership Academy to promote inclusion in science, technology, engineering, mathematics, and medicine (STEMM) fields. Funded in part by a \$100,000 grant from the Henry Luce Foundation, the initiative aims to build the next generation of research leadership, with a focus on building skills to help researchers translate research findings and communicate with the public.

TEACHER PREPARATION AND WORKFORCE

The **District of Columbia** Office of the State Superintendent of Education (OSSE) **hosted** its second annual OSSE Apprenticeship in Teaching "Signing Day" to formally welcome 28 apprentices into the 2025 cohort of the program. The **OSSE Apprenticeship in Teaching program** is the District of Columbia's first citywide registered apprenticeship for aspiring K-12 teachers and a strategy to build an educator pipeline in high-demand subject areas. The District of Columbia developed the DC Apprenticeship in Teaching program in 2024—in partnership with the Department of Employment Services and the University of the District of Columbia—to remove barriers to entering the teaching profession by providing cost-free pathways for District paraprofessionals and high-impact tutors to become certified teachers in three citywide high-demand subject areas: early childhood education, elementary education, and special education.

The University of **Hawai'i** System STEM Pre-Academy is **expanding** its Toolkits for Teachers Lending Library for the 2025–2026 academic year. The program provides K-12 educators with a broad range of free hands-on STEM resources, including nearly 100 toolkits and equipment, for their classroom use.

ACCESS, PREPARATION, & ENROLLMENT

APPLICATIONS AND ADMISSIONS

The **Alabama** Commission on Higher Education, Alabama Possible, the Alabama Department of Education, and Alabama Community College System have **launched** the Alabama Direct Admission Initiative. The new initiative will offer high school students direct admission offers to 16 of Alabama's four-year institutions and 23 of its community colleges based on students' transcripts.

The **Illinois** Board of Higher Education, Illinois Community College Board, and the Illinois Student Assistance Commission have **launched** the One Click College Admit direct admission program. The program will allow high school seniors and community college students to receive automatic admission offers from participating colleges by submitting their GPA online.

The University of **North Carolina** System, the NC Community College System, and other state partners are **continuing** the NC College Connect, a direct admissions program. NC College Connect started as a pilot one year ago and will continue this year, now offering more than 62,000 North Carolina high school seniors direct admissions to an expanding list of institutions in the state.

The **Tennessee** Higher Education Commission **announced** the launch of TN Direct Admissions and is the first in the nation to pair automatic college admissions with state-supported and merit-based financial aid. The TN Direct Admissions pilot will offer direct admissions to 53 colleges in the state and will include about 41,000 students from more than 230 randomly selected high schools in Tennessee.

The Universities of **Wisconsin** **announced** in August that nearly 34,000 high school seniors from 467 schools across Wisconsin received admissions offers from the Direct Admit Wisconsin program during its second year. The program saw an increase of 155 schools and at least 9,000 students compared to 2024. The program automatically admits qualified high school students to up to 10 universities in the system without requiring a separate application.

COLLEGE PREPARATION AND GEAR UP GRANTS

The Get Ready GEAR UP **Minnesota** program has **awarded** scholarships to 237 students, totaling \$450,000 funded through no-cost extension funds. Scholarship recipients receive a one-time award of \$1,500 for students attending a Minnesota 2-year college or certification program, and \$2,500 for students attending a 4-year institution.

More than 25 students from seven high schools were able to **explore** college campuses throughout **New Mexico** and **Colorado** through the support of the GEAR UP New Mexico Summer Tribal College Bus Tour. Through the program, students spent three days exploring postsecondary major paths, college offerings and workshops that included scholarship opportunities and student organizations for indigenous students.

The **Tennessee** Higher Education Commission is **launching** a comprehensive effort to expand and align college access resources and initiatives that have a focus on supporting communities that are historically under-resourced. The effort is supported by the seven-year GEAR UP TN grant from the U.S. Department of Education, and it aims to strengthen Tennessee's college-going culture. Some of the components of the initiative include hiring regional College Access Outreach Coordinators across the state, enhancing statewide college communication, identifying and addressing service and resource gaps in college access, and establishing a Tennessee College Access Advisory Committee.

FAFSA COMPLETION

Alabama Gov. Kay Ivey **declared** August to be FAFSA Completion Month, and emphasized the work of Alabama Possible, the Alabama Department of Education, and the Alabama Commission of Higher Education in providing the training, data, and resources to help students complete the form. The FAFSA month will include local FAFSA events and share resources to help Alabama students complete the form.

The **Arizona** Board of Regents (ABOR) **partnered** with the U.S. Department of Education on a beta testing initiative of the updated Free Application For Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) again this year. In addition, the state's Major League Baseball team, the Arizona Diamondbacks, donated 1,600 game tickets to be given away to families participating in the testing. Public institutions of higher education throughout the state also donated prizes. This builds on **an effort** from earlier in the year, in which the Diamondbacks gave away tickets to the first 1,000 Class of 2025 Arizona high school students completing the FAFSA. ABOR also **partnered** with College Ready AZ to provide information and guidance on financial aid, college planning, and FAFSA assistance at a booth during a Diamondbacks game in June.

Arizona's FAFSA Peer Coach program **continues** to produce strong results for FAFSA completion. The program trains high school seniors and empowers them to help their classmates complete the form through one-on-one support, classroom presentations, events or workshops. Currently, 40 schools are served by the program, with 169 peer coaches and over 18,000 high school seniors. Schools with peer coaches have a nearly 33% higher completion rate than the state average.

The **District of Columbia's** Office of the State Superintendent of Education (OSSE) and **Nevada** Board of Regents (NSHE) **announced** winners of FAFSA completion competitions this summer. OSSE announced winners in three categories for both large and small schools: MVP for highest FAFSA completion rate, Most Improved award for improving FAFSA completion rates, and Biggest Boost for schools with the largest week-to-week improvement in FAFSA completion. Similarly, the NSHE **unveiled** the winner of the inaugural Nevada FAFSA Challenge, a statewide challenge to boost FAFSA completion rates among the state's high school seniors.

Massachusetts **continued** its efforts to promote FAFSA completion this summer. The state has partnered with several organizations to increase FAFSA completion, including a financial aid road show and the "College is Possible" ad campaign from late February to mid-May.

STUDENT ACCESS

In May, SHEEO **kicked off** a learning community to expand postsecondary education for justice-impacted individuals in partnership with the Vera Institute for Justice. The states participating in the learning community include **Arizona, Kentucky, Louisiana, Minnesota, and Virginia**. Through this initiative, states will work to evaluate relevant policies, remove barriers to access, and promote high-quality, workforce-aligned educational experiences for justice-impacted students. The effort will also work to strengthen collaboration among higher education agencies, corrections departments, and other key partners to build equitable pathways for incarcerated learners.

Massachusetts **opened** up \$180,000 in grant funding for public colleges and universities in the state to support the Massachusetts Inclusive Postsecondary Education (MAIPSE) programs. MAIPSE provides opportunities for certain students with severe disabilities to participate in academic courses, extracurricular activities, internships, work experiences, and campus life activities.

The **Minnesota** Office of Higher Education has **announced** awards to three campuses for Inclusive Higher Education grants. This program, established in 2023, increases inclusive postsecondary pathways for people with intellectual and developmental disabilities in Minnesota.

In July, the **Minnesota** Office of Higher Education **publicized** the recipients of the Intervention for College Attendance Program (ICAP) grants. ICAP grants are available to school districts, public and private postsecondary institutions, professional organizations, and community-based organizations to provide a range of pre-college services, including academic counseling, mentoring, tutoring, career awareness and exploration, and financial aid.

STUDENT SUCCESS & COLLEGE COMPLETION

ACADEMIC PROGRAMS, CURRICULUM, AND TRANSFER

The **California** State University's Expository Reading and Writing Curriculum (ERWC) **connected** 150 high school students with Congressman Derek Tran (D-CA) to meet and ask questions after writing open letters to him. ERWC is used in about 1,000 high schools across the state and prepares students in grades 9-12 for college-level writing through critical thinking and real-world issues. The experience reinforced students' literacy and civic skills and highlighted the importance of representation in influential roles among the large Vietnamese American student body.

A consortium of six public university systems in **Florida, Georgia, North Carolina, South Carolina, Tennessee,** and **Texas** **launched** the Commission for Public Higher Education (CPHE), which aims to offer a new accreditation model tailored to public institutions. The commission aims to streamline accreditation by emphasizing academic excellence, student outcomes and achievement, process efficiency, and the pursuit of quality assurance for public postsecondary education, providing an alternative to traditional national or regional accreditors.

The **Indiana** Commission for Higher Education **announced** that six public institutions preemptively submitted more than 400 degree programs for elimination, suspension, or merger/consolidation in lieu of House Enrolled Act 1001-2025, which set statutory average graduate thresholds for all degree programs. Starting after July 1, 2025, institutions must seek approval from the Commission to continue under-threshold degree programs. Students currently enrolled in any eliminated or suspended degree program will have the opportunity to complete their study through an orderly teach-out.

The University of **Maine** System (UMS) Board of Trustees **approved** piloting five 90-credit applied bachelor's degree programs, targeting adult learners who have prior college credit and have been out of higher education for at least two years. These fully online programs—in areas like public administration, business management, psychology, liberal studies, and college studies—are designed to help working adults re-enter education efficiently, improving economic mobility and addressing state workforce shortages. UMS plans to seek accreditation this fall, with the goal of enrolling students as early as next summer.

The **North Carolina** Community College System **reported** that 37 educators graduated from the second year of the intensive North Carolina Community College Master Instructor (NC3MI) Program. These graduates represented 21 different community colleges and came from diverse academic and technical fields, spanning fields from the arts to the skilled trades. The NC3MI initiative continues to elevate instructional quality statewide by strengthening faculty expertise through targeted professional development.

The **Oklahoma** State Regents for Higher Education's Course Equivalency Project (CEP) **released** its 2025-26 course equivalencies for over 8,000 courses across 48 disciplines that transfer seamlessly among all public and several private institutions in the state. Since its inception in 1995, CEP has relied on an annual, collaborative effort involving up to 500 faculty members each year to update common course descriptions, share course syllabi, evaluate learning materials, and discuss emerging trends.

The **Utah** Board of Higher Education **approved** five institutions' and conditionally approved three institutions' strategic reinvestment plans, meeting a milestone in implementing HB 265 *Higher Education Strategic Reinvestment*. These plans represent a systemwide collaborative effort to shift resources from administrative inefficiencies, underutilized courses, and lower-priority areas. Institutions will instead invest those funds into critical research, high-impact instruction, and workforce-aligned programs such as nursing, engineering, and artificial intelligence.

The **Utah** System of Higher Education **endorsed** the state's first accelerated bachelor's degree programs from two public universities under a policy that permits public institutions in Utah to offer bachelor's degrees with

fewer than the traditional 120 credit hours. These programs, designed to be completed in approximately 90 credits, aim to improve affordability and flexibility for students while aligning with workforce needs. Final approval from the regional accreditor is still required before the programs can launch. The accreditor has already released a statement expressing general support for accelerated bachelor's degrees.

ADULT LEARNERS

The **Michigan** Department of Lifelong Education, Advancement, and Potential (MiLEAP) **celebrated** over 5,000 adult learners who earned degrees or credentials through the tuition-free Michigan Reconnect program during a virtual graduation ceremony. Michigan Reconnect provides Michiganders aged 25 and older with tuition coverage for associate degrees or credentials and has supported over 200,000 participants with more than 10,000 completions since its launch in 2021. The program is a key strategy in advancing Michigan's "Sixty by 30" goal, raising the proportion of working-age adults with a postsecondary credential to 60% by 2030.

COLLEGE COMPLETION

New York Governor Kathy Hochul **announced** the expansion of the State University of New York's Advancing Success in Associate Pathways (ASAP) and Advancing Completion Through Engagement (ACE) programs from 25 campuses to 34 campuses to serve 7,050 students starting in fall 2025. The state seeks to reach 10,000 students by fall 2026 due to a \$12 million state budget investment. Both the associate-focused ASAP and bachelor's-focused ACE programs have demonstrated substantial improvements in credit completion and persistence. ASAP students show a 20% higher credit completion rate and higher fall-to-spring persistence than non-participants, while ACE students outperform their counterparts by 9%.

PRIOR LEARNING

The **Utah** System of Higher Education's Credit for Prior Learning (CPL) **released** its annual report, which noted serving 34,490 students to earn college credits for knowledge and skills acquired outside traditional classrooms, resulting in approximately \$60.2 million in tuition and fee savings. Students obtained credits through national standardized exams such as AP, CLEP, and IB, as well as through military training, employer-sponsored training, third-party certifications, foreign language proficiency exams, and challenge exams. This approach accelerates time to graduation, enhances affordability, and aligns education with real-world experiences—empowering learners to progress more efficiently toward their degrees.

STUDENT PARENTS

The **California** State University system **launched** a systemwide Pregnant and Parenting Students Initiative (PPSI) to enhance support for students with dependents, aiming to share best practices and tailor solutions across campuses. The initiative builds upon the CSU Student Parent Network and aligns with California Assembly Bill No. 2881, which mandates improved access to classes and basic needs resources for student parents. With additional funding from the foundation, CSU is establishing a systemwide taskforce to connect stakeholders and develop a unified approach to support pregnant and parenting students.

STUDENT SUCCESS AND SUPPORT SERVICES

The University of **Hawai'i** **approved** a five-year subscription to EAB Navigation360 and EAB Edify, two integrated technology platforms designed to improve graduation and retention rates using predictive data technology. The new systems will use administrative data to proactively alert faculty, advisors, and support staff at the earliest signs of risk to support proactive interventions consistently across the 10 campuses. System leadership was influenced by the technology's impact at Georgia State University, which saw double-digit increases in retention and graduation rates after adoption.

Pennsylvania's State System of Higher Education (PASSHE) **awarded** free tuition to 29 exceptional community college students who were named to the 2025 All-Pennsylvania Academic Team, recognizing their academic excellence and leadership. These students will pursue bachelor's degrees at various PASSHE universities with majors ranging from early childhood education to environmental science. This initiative highlights PASSHE's commitment to supporting transfer students and strengthening partnerships with community colleges to enhance educational opportunities and workforce readiness across Pennsylvania.

VETERAN STUDENTS

The **Indiana** Commission for Higher Education and the Indiana Department of Veterans Affairs **recognized** 28 postsecondary institutions for demonstrating a supportive environment for U.S. military-affiliated students from application to graduation by awarding the Collegiate Purple Star of Indiana. Recipients met up to 37 standards across eight categories: core requirements, marketing and communication strategies, admissions and enrollment, financial support, institutional support systems, student support services, student engagement, and career and community engagement opportunities.

New York State **announced** the expansion of the Veterans Tuition Awards Program to veterans who served at least four years on active-duty. Previously, only veterans who served in combat or a specific combat theater were eligible. Administered by the New York State Higher Education Services Corporation, the program provides eligible veterans with up to the full cost of SUNY undergraduate tuition at approved colleges and vocational training programs across the state. This opportunity is one of many resources highlighted on a new one-stop-shop web page for active-duty servicemembers, veterans, and family members interested in attending any SUNY college or university.

The **Ohio** Department of Higher Education (ODHE) **renewed** 30 colleges' and universities' Collegiate Purple Star designations for continuing their efforts to support students with military backgrounds. Started in 2022 by Gov. Mike DeWine, criteria for being chosen as a Purple Star college or university include having a dedicated military/veteran point of contact, establishing priority registration for veterans and servicemembers, conducting surveys about needs and challenges, and allowing for the establishment of student-led groups and organizations for veterans and servicemembers.

South Carolina's National Guard College Assistance Program **doubled** its annual tuition assistance, increasing the cap from \$5,500 to \$12,000 per academic year, thanks to increased funding in the 2025-26 state budget. Additionally, the lifetime benefit ceiling rises from \$22,000 to \$25,000. These enhancements reflect the state's commitment to incentivize and reward South Carolina Army and Air National Guard service while supporting educational attainment for those who serve.

COLLEGE AFFORDABILITY, COST CONTAINMENT & BASIC NEEDS

COURSE SHARING

The **Pennsylvania** State System of Higher Education (PASSHE) is **developing** a course-sharing initiative to allow students to take advanced or specialized courses from other PASSHE universities without leaving their home campus. PASSHE received a \$536,000 grant to support the initiative, and this funding has allowed for an additional 165 faculty members to participate in training that provides research-based teaching strategies which benefit course sharing. More than 500 PASSHE university faculty members have completed training offered by the Association of College and University Educations to enhance in-person and online instruction.

MENTAL HEALTH AND WELLNESS

The **New Jersey** Office of the Secretary of Higher Education **released** new data identifying key mental health needs among New Jersey's college students, and insights that uplift the positive impact that the free services offered by the state-funded teletherapy program have had for New Jersey students. Based on the data, the statewide partnership with mental health provider Uwill has provided over 78,000 counseling sessions to 18,223 students at 45 institutions across New Jersey since 2023.

The **Pennsylvania** Department of Education **recognized** 15 postsecondary institutions across the Commonwealth as PA CARES campuses, for their commitment to preventing suicide and promoting mental health and wellness for their learners. PA CARES is a new recognition that stands for Connect, Assess, Respond, Encourage, Support; it recognizes postsecondary institutions that have implemented Act 110 mental health and suicide prevention plans.

OPEN EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES

The **Colorado** Department of Higher Education is **re-issuing** the Zero Textbook Cost (ZTC) Challenge for Colorado Institutions in 2025. The initiative challenges institutions in Colorado to find strategies to take classes and entire degrees to cost zero dollars in textbooks. Since the inception of the ZTC Challenge over 2,000 courses in Colorado have become zero cost textbooks.

Colorado Governor Jared Polis **announced** several Open Education Resource (OER) awards that increase access, equity, and affordability in higher education; and re-issued the Zero Textbook Challenge (ZTC) for Colorado institutions. At the 2025 Colorado OER Conference, five categories were recognized through the annual OER awards, two of which went to a group of Spanish faculty who created the first ZTC degree in Colorado and to the Mathematics and Statistical Sciences department for developing the ZTC degree in mathematics.

VALUE, ROI, & TRANSPARENCY

RETURN ON INVESTMENT

The **Colorado** Department of Higher Education **released** its seventh Return on Investment report in August, which provides postsecondary outcomes across credential types, programs, institutions, and student demographics from the 2022-23 academic year. It includes earnings after graduation, student debt levels and unemployment trends.

The University of **Hawai'i** System's Good Jobs Hawai'i program has **resulted** in improved average quarterly wage gain for participating students. Program completers earned on average more than \$1000 in real quarterly wages compared to non-participants. Clean energy and skilled trades gains were particularly significant, with completers earning 35% more than non-completers and many completers moving from low- to high-wage fields.

The **Oklahoma** State Regents of Higher Education **announced** that the state's 25 public colleges and universities contributed \$14.61B in FY24 to the state's economy. As part of its economic impact study, conducted by the University of Cincinnati Economics Center, the recent **report** also noted that postsecondary institutions also supported over 111,000 jobs, generated \$461.8M in tax revenue, and generated \$17.48 in economic output for every \$1 of state appropriations invested.

CIVIC ENGAGEMENT, FREE SPEECH, & PUBLIC PURPOSES

ENVIRONMENTAL INITIATIVES

The **Arizona** Board of Regents (ABOR) has used its convening capacity to address key state agricultural and environmental concerns. ABOR **convened** stakeholders in June to focus on solutions to meet state water management and crop production needs, with a focus on water-limited environments. In partnership with the Arizona Department of Agriculture, the convening included researchers, state officials and agriculture producers to “co-develop a strategic roadmap for sustainable agriculture in arid environments and to launch a statewide think tank focused on solving pressing agricultural challenges.” In addition, ABOR **convened** stakeholders in August to shape a wildfire resiliency strategy to address changing fire patterns and build stronger wildland fire response in the state. Stakeholders are hopeful that these critical partnerships between land management groups and ABOR institutions that conduct important environmental research will only make the state’s response to environmental challenges more informed and effective.

The **Missouri** Department of Higher Education & Workforce Development (MDHEWD) played a key role in the state’s ongoing recovery from devastating severe storms that caused significant destruction in the St. Louis- and southeast Missouri areas in May. Immediately following the storms, MDHEWD dedicated \$750,000 in federal workforce funds aimed to aid Missourians affected by the storm. These efforts included temporary wages for those willing to help with storm cleanup. In July, MDHEWD was **awarded** a \$1 million Disaster Recovery National Dislocated Worker Grant from the U.S. Department of Labor to continue and expand this work while the state awaits potential approval of the full requested amount of \$4 million. Together with local workforce development boards, the MDHEWD has **coordinated** cleanup efforts utilizing these funds in the St. Louis area and six southeastern counties in the state.

FREE SPEECH AND MEDIA

The **Arizona** Board of Regents (ABOR) is in the process of **reviewing** its annual 2025 Free Expression Annual Report, a document that reaffirms the Board’s commitment to protecting intellectual freedom and encouraging the lawful and respectful expression of diverse viewpoints. All of the state’s four-year universities hold the highest “green light” rating from the Foundation for Individual Rights and Expression (FIRE), which is a measure of student perceptions of free expression on their campus.

The State University of **New York** (SUNY) recently **launched** an internship program to address “news deserts” located in many rural parts of the state. Throughout the summer, 20 interns from SUNY institutions gained direct experience in local journalism at 15 news outlets. Stakeholders are hopeful the program will both serve communities in need of local news professionals and support the future of journalism in New York.

HEALTH CARE & INFRASTRUCTURE

Arizona Board of Regents (ABOR) Executive Director, Chad Sampson, **recently spoke** on Arizona’s proposal to expand the Stimulus Plan for Economic and Educational Development (SPEED) Bond Program, which provides infrastructure loans to public institutions of higher education in Arizona. Sampson believes the expansion of SPEED Bonds will allow Arizona universities to keep up with workforce demands in the state, highlighting that new nursing education facilities, medical schools, and even environmental science labs could be built if the program is expanded.

A **new report** from University of **Hawai’i** Rural Health Research and Policy Center (UH RHRPC) details how emergency response times, non-emergency transportation to medical appointments, and limited

insurance coverage for such costs are growing concerns in Hawai'i. The report says improving access to health care for the more than 30% of residents that live in rural areas across the state's six islands will require coordinated efforts across health care, transportation, and policy sectors. Policy solutions proposed by the UH RHRPC report include establishing a grant program for housing pregnant people relocating for prenatal and delivery care and enhancing ambulance fleets and mobile health hub development.

LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT

The University of **North Carolina** (UNC) System **announced** its next cohort of the Executive Leadership Institute participants this quarter. The program is designed to cultivate the next generation of UNC System leadership at institutions across the state. Over 10 months, the 36 participants will gather in-person and virtually to complete five immersion experiences that will equip them to succeed at the executive level. The program was established in 2019 to prepare future leaders to move into systemwide senior leadership positions.

PUBLIC PURPOSES

The University of **Hawai'i** System and the Defense POW/MIA Accounting Agency (DPAA) **signed** a five-year agreement in August to enhance science and technology education while collaborating with the DPAA on their critical mission of accounting for missing U.S. personnel from past conflicts. The agreement focuses on joint research, educational enrichment, and workforce development.