



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 Winter 2025-26. 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 **Idaho** State Board of Education **announced** a \$4M federal grant aimed at elevating AI literacy. Idaho was one of two state recipients to be granted funding from the U.S. Department of Education's Funding for the Improvement of Postsecondary Education (FIPSE), Priority One: AI and Higher Education category. The funds will be used by Idaho to integrate AI into teaching and learning at Idaho public colleges and universities and prioritize the development of students' technical skills and critical thinking across the state. The fund is **expected** to help 90,000 students over the four-year grant period.

The State University of **New York** system will **leverage** its Buffalo campus' Empire AI supercomputer and campus partnerships between state universities, technical schools, and community colleges to increase access to AI research. Empire AI is funded by more than \$500 million in public and private funds and is composed of 10 campuses and research institutions.

The **Oklahoma** State Regents of Higher Education **awarded** \$150,000 in project funding to support state colleges and universities. Funded via the UpskillOK grant program, the state's microcredential program, the funding is focused on integrating AI into educational pathways. Funding supports scholarships and employer connections for students, faculty training, and program development.

Three campuses of the Universities of **Wisconsin** have **partnered** with Royal Credit Union to integrate AI into their internship program. Internships are granted to computer science students, who work with faculty and Royal Credit to test AI models that could help Royal Credit to better understand its consumer market. The program gives students opportunities to work with and apply AI in business settings to solve problems.

ENTREPRENEURSHIP

The University of **Maine** System (UMS) **announced** it is broadening a free entrepreneurship education initiative for Maine middle and high school students through its Maine Center in partnership with Everfi and the Maine Venture Fund. In the 2024–25 pilot, 348 students across 16 schools received business and budgeting training, with 71% reporting increased interest in starting a business. The expansion includes a statewide business plan competition culminating in a showcase next May, reinforcing UMS's role in workforce and economic development. The program's growth reflects the system's emphasis on preparing students with practical entrepreneurial skills linked to the state's predominantly small-business economy.

HEALTH CARE AND HUMAN SERVICES WORKFORCE

The **Kentucky** Council on Postsecondary Education **announced** the recipients of the fourth and final round of grants from the Healthcare Workforce Investment Fund, recognizing postsecondary-health care programs and employer partnerships that will deliver scholarship support to students in high-demand health care fields. Since the fund's creation by the General Assembly in 2023, about \$10 million in state funding has been matched with private contributions to generate roughly \$18.9 million in scholarships for 1,113 Kentucky students. Final awards included significant grants to partnerships such as Asbury University for nursing and the University of Kentucky for physical therapy and dental assistant training.

The State University of **New York** (SUNY) announced multiple initiatives to strengthen New York State's workforce and student support systems. In December 2025, SUNY **received** nearly \$1 million from the High Needs Nursing Fund to expand academic pathways into nursing careers, strengthen campus and Educational Opportunity Center partnerships, and add an estimated 230 additional nursing seats systemwide. SUNY continued these efforts in February 2026 by **awarding** High Needs Nursing Fund grants to multiple campuses to invest in simulation-based nursing education, including high-fidelity simulators and faculty training, to better prepare nursing students and support statewide health care workforce growth. SUNY also **expanded** its Mental Health Internship Program from a three-college pilot to five community colleges, providing paid internships for roughly 100–150 students to help build New York's behavioral health workforce.

RESEARCH AND DEVELOPMENT

The **Arizona** Board of Regents **awarded** \$3 million in grants to create the Arizona Hub for Agriculture Innovation Research. The hub is a partnership between the state's three research institutions and will focus on precision agriculture, soil health, and crop innovation research to make the agriculture industry more sustainable and efficient.

The State University of **New York** (SUNY) system **announced** \$550,000 in seed funding and a \$100,000 investment from the Griffiss Institute for its Technology Accelerator Fund (TAF). The TAF awarded eight SUNY campuses with awards for research and technology development to address "disease treatment, advance medical diagnostics, revolutionize communications and computing, enhance defense against digital misinformation, and strengthen national security."

TEACHER PREPARATION AND WORKFORCE

The **California** State University (CSU) and the California Community Colleges are **strengthening** their strategic partnership by unveiling a jointly developed toolkit tailored to address the state's teacher shortage. The PAVE Toolkit—*Pathways for Advancing Visionary Educators*—is a purposeful, action-oriented guide designed to ensure students experience a clear, high-quality, and well-supported journey through both the CSU and the community colleges. The PAVE Toolkit includes high-impact actions and promising practices organized by essential focus areas/themes, real-world stories, and partnership examples, along with key reports and resources to guide local strategy and implementation.

The **Connecticut** State Colleges and Universities (CSCU) are **embarking** on the Excellence in Teacher Residency project that will address the challenges of teacher shortages and retention, as well as support instructional quality. Central, Eastern, Southern, and Western Connecticut State Universities are partnering with the National Association of Higher Education Systems, the Association of College and University Educators, and Connecticut partner school districts to focus on excellence in teacher residency programs. The project will utilize an integrated approach to design thinking, improvement science, and excellence in teaching practice. This will allow CSCU campuses to leverage existing strengths in teacher preparation, develop new, research-aligned practices, and scale successes across CSCU.

The State University of **New York** (SUNY) is **updating** expectations for all educator preparation programs to align with the "Science of Reading," a set of evidence-based principles for literacy instruction. As part of Governor Hochul's Back to Basics reading plan, SUNY's policy update will help ensure that instructional best practices grounded in the Science of Reading are implemented statewide, so future educators are better equipped to teach students the foundational skills they need to become proficient readers. SUNY will also provide a range of resources, including a Community of Practice, to support campuses in implementing the new framework, thanks to funding from Google, the Robin Hood Foundation, and the Heckscher Foundation for Children.

The University of **North Carolina** System **announced** in January that it will begin accepting applications for the North Carolina Teaching Fellows program. The Teaching Fellows Program offers up to \$10,000 in forgivable yearly loans to cover tuition, books, and fees while fellows complete approved teacher preparation programs at participating universities. Those loans are fully forgiven once recipients meet

service requirements in North Carolina public schools—one year of teaching for each year the award was received. Once approved and admitted to the program, students also become part of a statewide network offering mentorship and professional development, a support system that remains once they graduate and move into a teaching career. Program leaders aim to reach 1,000 applicants annually, expanding geographic and demographic reach among students interested in teaching in eligible fields.

The **Ohio** Department of Higher Education recently **audited** all 48 educator preparation programs (EPPs) at colleges and universities across the state. The audit was conducted to ensure all Ohio EPPs are aligned with state laws requiring the Science of Reading and found that all institutions were in compliance or working towards compliance with state law.

WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT

The **California** State University **received** a \$100,000 grant from the Boeing Company. The funds were distributed to veterans resource centers at four CSU campuses—Fullerton, Long Beach, San Diego and San Marcos. The grant enables CSU to build structured pathways that support veterans in pursuing and excelling in high-demand STEM careers. The grant funding can be used to enhance outreach to prospective students and to support mentorship, workshops, and academic resources for those pursuing STEM majors.

Minnesota State has **completed** its first year in partnership with Google and the National Association of Higher Education Systems (NASH) to provide Google Career Certificates to students as co-curricular offerings or embedded into academic programs. In this first-in-the-nation partnership, Minnesota State is one of 11 higher education systems participating in the Microcredentials Community of Practice, an initiative of the Google AI for Education Accelerator. More than 350 students have already completed one or more Google Certificates at no cost through one of the nine participating Minnesota State colleges or universities in the first year of the partnership.

The State University of **New York** (SUNY) **announced** a partnership between SUNY and the New York State Insurance Fund (NYSIF) to provide SUNY students with paid internships. Through the partnership, NYSIF will provide 100 SUNY students with paid internships at its offices throughout New York State beginning in 2026. The partnership between SUNY and NYSIF will double the number of students hosted at the company and provide students with opportunities to learn in a unique business setting.

SUNY will **invest** \$14.5 million annually to fund paid internships, which will support 3,500 students each year at SUNY institutions. The budget request allows SUNY to make progress toward its goal of providing every undergraduate student with an internship or experiential learning opportunity, giving SUNY students access to paid, career-relevant work experiences that improve their chances of employment upon graduation.

The **New Mexico** Higher Education Department **announced** the success of a new state workforce training initiative that allowed 6,200 New Mexicans to complete career-focused programs in health care, transportation, construction, and other high-demand fields. The Government Results and Opportunity Trust (GRO) program achieved a 94 percent completion rate across 224 distinct workforce training programs at 19 higher education institutions statewide, backed by a \$20 million investment in Fiscal Year 2025. The GRO program was established in 2023 by Governor Michelle Lujan Grisham and the New Mexico Legislature to support workforce training throughout the state. The three-year, \$60 million initiative supports training and apprenticeship programs at universities, branch community colleges, and independent community colleges throughout New Mexico.

According to data from the Adult Education Division, New Mexico **reported** substantial growth in the state's adult workforce development programs, with enrollment in the Integrated Education and Training system increasing nearly 50 percent to 787 participants and students earning 487 industry-recognized certificates in high-demand fields. The expansion reflects priorities set by the Governor, supported by a recurring legislative appropriation to fund new workforce training programs primarily at community colleges.

The **North Dakota** University System (NDUS) institutions **received** a \$250,000 strategic impact and innovation grant from the Midwestern Higher Education Compact to provide all system institutions with access to the career readiness and workforce alignment platform, Compass by Golden Path Solutions, to connect NDUS to the state's four-year Rolling Plan designed to connect every learner with a clear and supported path from education to career. All 11 institutions, serving more than 47,000 students, will be able to highlight their programs and employer partnerships to high school students. This transparency will help students make more informed decisions about their post-graduation plans while also supporting colleges' enrollment and recruitment efforts.

Pennsylvania's State System of Higher Education (PASSHE) **announced** the expansion of its work-based learning partnerships with employers to better prepare students for in-demand careers, supported by new grants awarded through the PASSHE Foundation. The funding enables faculty to integrate real-world projects and assignments into coursework in collaboration with local employers across multiple campuses, giving students practical experience and strengthening the classroom-to-career pipeline. Participating collaborations include projects with the Pennsylvania Department of Environmental Protection, Blue Mountain Resort, Hershey Entertainment and Resorts, and others, spanning fields like data analytics, environmental science, sports marketing, tourism, small business, and AI consulting.

The **Texas** Higher Education Coordinating Board **awarded** \$9.9 million in grants through the Texas Reskilling and Upskilling through Education (TRUE) Grant Program to public higher education institutions to create, redesign, and expand short-term workforce education and training programs aligned with high-demand occupations. The competitive grants support industry-aligned programs of less than six months' duration and require collaboration with employers, workforce boards, and economic development partners. Recipients include community and junior colleges across Texas with programs in areas such as data science/AI, advanced manufacturing, healthcare, shipbuilding, logistics, cybersecurity, construction, and business services.

The State Council of Higher Education for **Virginia** **launched** a comprehensive statewide strategy to position Virginia as the nation's leader in talent development. The plan, effective January 1, 2026, sets measurable targets to increase college participation and retention, reduce time to degree, expand pathways into high-growth industries, and boost graduate employment. Meanwhile, the state also **announced** the launch of InternshipsVA, a new statewide initiative backed by about \$14.5 million annually to help Virginia employers create high-quality paid internships for higher education students, strengthening the education-to-career pipeline and connecting classroom learning to real-world experience.

The **West Virginia** Higher Education Policy Commission **announced** that West Virginia is joining the Learning Mobility Collaborative to build on its Credential WV initiative, a statewide effort to make credentials more portable, skills more visible, and transitions between education and employment more seamless for learners. This national collaboration aims to align education and workforce systems so students can better document and transfer the skills and credentials they earn. The move reinforces West Virginia's ongoing work to expand microcredentials and skills-based pathways that address workforce needs and improve learner flexibility across education and employment sectors.

ACCESS, PREPARATION, & ENROLLMENT

ACCESS

The **California** State University (CSU) **hosted** a symposium to highlight the role of public universities in promoting social mobility. The CSU has long been regarded as a national leader in promoting social mobility and delivering tangible returns for graduates. This year marked the launch of a national center for social mobility, which aligns with the system's strategic plan to expand access to postsecondary education that advances opportunity and promotes economic mobility for students.

Public colleges and universities in **Massachusetts received** \$3.6 million from the state to support students with disabilities participating in the Massachusetts Inclusive Postsecondary Education (MAIPSE) programs. These programs provide students with disabilities the opportunity to participate in undergraduate courses, extracurricular and student life activities, and internships and work experiences. The grant funding supports the operations of MAIPSE programs at 16 public colleges and universities.

The State University of **New York** (SUNY) and the City University of New York (CUNY) are **collaborating** with the New York State Workers' Compensation Board to provide free community college to adult learners who have been injured while working. Through the SUNY and CUNY Reconnect Initiative, adults without a prior college degree can pursue an associate degree in a high-demand field and receive free tuition, fees, books, and supplies.

The State Council of Higher Education for **Virginia released** two new reports on students with disabilities. The reports highlight the need for improved data collection and better transitions between high school and postsecondary education. Recommendations for institutions, agencies, and policy leaders include strengthening student preparation, expanding postsecondary opportunities, improving collaboration among state agencies, linking K-12 and higher education data, publishing retention and graduation data for students with disabilities, training faculty on inclusivity, and requiring institution-level self-assessment and improvement of disability services.

APPLICATIONS AND ADMISSIONS

Colorado hosted its eighth annual Colorado Free Application Days in October, which led to over 71,000 college and university applications and saved students more than \$2.4 million in waived application fees. This year's participation was a 9% increase over the prior year and prioritized accessibility and affordability for first-generation students and students of color, who have historically lower college enrollment rates in the state. As a result of the campaign, several institutions are eliminating their application fees year-round.

The **Tennessee** Higher Education Commission **sent** more than 45,000 college admission letters to eligible high school seniors graduating in 2026 as a part of the state's TN Direct Admission pilot. The pilot program is partnering with randomly selected high schools to connect students with participating in-state colleges and universities. The letters inform students of institutions where they have been automatically admitted without a traditional college application. Students can select their preferred institutions and immediately claim admission. Colleges will then follow up with official admission information and guidance on FAFSA completion, orientation, and enrollment.

Ten colleges and universities in **Virginia received** more than \$126,000 from the State Council of Higher Education for Virginia and the Virginia Department of Education and Commonwealth Savers to support the Middle School Campus Visit Project. Each grant dollar is matched by institutions. The Middle School Campus Visit Project invites middle school students to campuses for hands-on activities, scavenger hunts, student-athlete panels, and dining hall meals. The program is in its third year of operation.

DUAL ENROLLMENT/EARLY COLLEGE

Massachusetts announced a new goal of enrolling 100,000 students in Early College programs in the next ten years, up from the 10,000 currently enrolled, along with a proposed \$15 million investment in Early College in the governor's FY27 budget plan. The Early College programs in Massachusetts are complemented by the expansion of career technical education programs, Innovation Career Pathways, and subsidized Advanced Placement tests. Collectively, these programs allow Massachusetts students to make progress on postsecondary education while still enrolled in high school.

The **North Carolina** Community College System (NCCCS) will **participate** in a national community of practice to advance policies related to credit for prior learning (CPL). CPL allows colleges to award academic credit to students for learning acquired outside of the classroom, such as military service, industry credentials,

apprenticeships, and on-the-job training. NCCCS will work with the Council for Adult and Experiential Learning and RAND for two years to modernize its statewide CPL infrastructure and tie CPL to workforce needs in the state.

FAFSA COMPLETION

The **Arizona** Board of Regents (ABOR) **announced** that 73 high schools reached the 50% completion goal for the 2026-27 FAFSA, or a 10% increase over the prior year as part of the state's 50 by Fall campaign to promote FAFSA completion among Arizona high school seniors. Schools that met 50% completion or saw a 10% increase in completions received a total of \$161,000 in funding for FAFSA completion activities.

Eligible **Arizona** high school seniors can also **receive** free tickets to a Cactus League spring training baseball game by completing the 2026-27 FAFSA. The incentive program, run by the ABOR, is in its fourth year of operation after distributing more than 4,500 tickets during the 2025-26 FAFSA cycle. The incentive has contributed to Arizona reaching its 40% FAFSA completion goals among 2025 graduating seniors, and placed Arizona sixth in the nation for year-over-year improvement. ABOR also **launched** the College Ready AZ FAFSA Scholarship to encourage high school seniors to complete the FAFSA. The scholarship will provide one-time awards of \$2,000 to 25 Arizona high school seniors planning to attend one of the state's public institutions. Students must complete the 2026-27 FAFSA, complete an application, and respond to an essay to be eligible for the award.

Massachusetts **published** a FAFSA data dashboard to encourage students to complete the FAFSA. The dashboard is just one piece of the state's FAFSA completion initiative, which includes a financial aid roadshow, grants to high schools to adopt career planning tools for students, subsidized AP exams, new early college programs, and the Go Higher initiative to raise awareness of postsecondary financial support options.

The State University of **New York** **launched** a virtual "Fill Out Your FAFSA" event to encourage high school seniors to complete the form. The forum was focused on the greater Rochester community, which has lagged behind the rest of the state in FAFSA completion. Students participated in the virtual forum to share their stories about filling out the FAFSA and the importance of financial aid in their higher education pathways.

The **South Carolina** Commission on Higher Education **announced** winners of the Early Bird Award as part of its FAFSA First Challenge. The initiative encourages friendly competition among schools to promote college and career readiness through FAFSA completion. Early Bird Awards are given to institutions with the highest levels of FAFSA completion by February 1.

The **Washington** Student Achievement Council (WSAC) **named** 14 leaders from around the state to form a new Washington Completes FAFSA advisory board. The board will work with WSAC to increase the number of high school seniors in Washington who complete the FAFSA. WSAC and the board will set a statewide financial aid goal and provide training and resources to schools and school districts that support students in completing the FAFSA. Despite the state's generous financial aid programs, it has one of the lowest rates of FAFSA completion in the country. The advisory board aims to increase that number through outreach strategies and financial aid completion efforts within communities.

STUDENT SUCCESS & COLLEGE COMPLETION

ACADEMIC PROGRAMS, CURRICULUM, AND TRANSFER

The University of **Hawai'i** System is **implementing** a multiyear plan to expand fully online degree options and integrate artificial intelligence into its curriculum. As part of the initial phase of the plan, expected to conclude by spring 2027, the system is identifying existing academic programs with only a few in-person

course requirements and offering those courses online so students can complete degrees fully online. The plan also introduces an online AI literacy course and incentivizes AI integration in instruction. System leaders cite a desire to better accommodate student needs and to prepare graduates for the workforce.

The **Massachusetts** Board of Higher Education **approved** new regulations that create a pathway for public and private colleges to pilot three-year bachelor's degrees and other non-traditional or sub-120-credit academic programs to reduce costs and accelerate student progress toward the workforce. Institutions must apply through a formal review process, demonstrating innovation, responsiveness to student or labor market needs, and consumer protections before pilots are approved and evaluated. This regulatory change aims to encourage innovative educational models that reflect evolving student demographics, technology, and workforce expectations while maintaining quality oversight.

The **Minnesota** Office of Higher Education **updated** its academic standards to allow bachelor's degrees with fewer required credits. The new standards provide guidance for the state's postsecondary institutions to offer reduced-credit programs with a minimum of 90 credits, consistent with 2024 guidelines from the Higher Learning Commission. The change is intended to reduce barriers to student completion and close state achievement gaps.

The **Missouri** Department of Higher Education & Workforce Development **announced** the graduation of the third cohort of students from the Missouri Security Operations Center (MOSOC). The eight-week program, open to high school seniors and young adults, provides training in physical security and the chance to earn a professional certificate. Graduates then complete a paid work experience with a partnering employer, with the goal of securing full-time employment upon completion.

The State University of **New York** (SUNY) and New York University (NYU) **launched** the Higher Education Design Lab, a research partnership aimed at evaluating and accelerating innovations that better prepare college graduates for success in a rapidly changing social and economic landscape, including the impacts of AI on work and civic life. The Lab will rigorously study programs and policies, such as dialogue initiatives, career readiness practices, orientation experiences, and experiential learning, to develop evidence-based frameworks that can be adopted across higher education institutions nationwide. This collaboration leverages the scale and diversity of SUNY's 64-campus system alongside NYU's extensive research capacity to inform future higher education improvements.

The University of **North Carolina** System **established** its first systemwide law enforcement training academy to centralize training for campus police recruits. The Basic Law Enforcement Training (BLET) academy brings cadets together from across the state in a program aligned with state certification standards. Instruction is largely delivered by UNC System law enforcement officers, supporting a shared understanding of postsecondary campuses and the communities they serve.

The **North Dakota** State Board of Higher Education **approved** new policies authorizing pilot reduced-credit bachelor's degree programs at North Dakota University System (NDUS) institutions, allowing colleges to offer Bachelor of Applied Science degrees with as few as 90 credits instead of the traditional 120-credit requirement. These pilots, limited to up to two per institution and focused on career-aligned, high-demand fields, are designed to create faster, lower-cost pathways into the workforce while maintaining core academic standards, enhanced advising, and tracking of retention, completion, and job placement. The pilots are slated to begin in fall 2026 and underscore NDUS's efforts to innovate educational pathways that better align with student and employer needs in the state.

The **Oklahoma** State Regents for Higher Education **completed** a statewide review of academic offerings across the 25 public colleges and universities it oversees and announced the termination or suspension of degree programs to better align higher education with workforce needs. As a result of the review, the Regents approved the elimination of 41 academic programs and the suspension of 21 others that failed to meet productivity thresholds, while most of the remaining programs were retained with action plans to boost enrollment and productivity. Several programs at the University of Oklahoma and other institutions, including language, arts, and specialized degrees, were among those affected as part of the effort to focus resources on high-demand fields and relevant credentials.

The **Utah** Board of Higher Education **endorsed** a plan to redesign the Utah System of Higher Education to strengthen collaboration and coordination among the state's public colleges and universities. The redesign framework would emphasize region-based integration, shared programs and services, clearer institutional roles, and better alignment with student needs and regional workforce demands. The proposal aims to expand access to high-value programs, improve student academic and career pathways, and make more effective use of public resources statewide.

ADULT LEARNERS

The **Michigan** Department of Lifelong Education, Advancement, and Potential **launched** a new Reconnect Enroll with Momentum Grant opportunity to help community and tribal colleges work with county governments to increase adult learner enrollment and credential completion, especially for current and potential Michigan Reconnect students. Grants of up to \$300,000 over two years will support strategies that remove enrollment barriers and help adult learners progress more quickly toward certificates or degrees, advancing Michigan's goal to have 60% of working-age adults hold a postsecondary credential by 2030.

The State University of **New York** (SUNY) **outlined** expanded support for SUNY Reconnect, New York State's free community college program for adult learners ages 25–55 without a prior college degree. SUNY Chancellor King announced that \$4 million in Reconnect funding is being allocated to community colleges to bolster advising, enrollment, outreach, credit-for-prior-learning processes, and student support services expansion to help enrolled and prospective adult learners succeed and persist into Spring 2026. Since its launch in Fall 2025, the initiative has been strengthening pathways into high-demand fields such as advanced manufacturing, technology, nursing, cybersecurity, and engineering.

CAMPUS INFRASTRUCTURE

The **New Jersey** Office of the Secretary of Higher Education **awarded** \$244.4 million in state capital facilities grants to support infrastructure upgrades at 92 projects across 23 colleges and universities, targeting deferred maintenance, campus safety enhancements, ADA compliance, and class and laboratory modernization. State leaders emphasized that these investments strengthen campus facilities, support institutional missions, and position New Jersey's higher education system to continue delivering quality education and workforce preparedness.

DEGREE COMPLETION

Massachusetts **awarded** \$13 million to nine state universities to strengthen supports that help students complete their degrees, including supplemental tutoring, case managers, and assistance with non-tuition costs like transportation, child care, and food. Funding is part of the FY 2026 budget and aims to increase degree completion by targeting students at risk of dropping out, using predictive analytics and evidence-based advising practices. The initiative builds on the state's larger investment in financial aid and student success programs to boost persistence, graduation rates, and future workforce participation.

The **Michigan** Department of Lifelong Education, Advancement, and Potential (MiLEAP) **awarded** nearly \$10 million in College Success Grants to 22 colleges and universities across the state to strengthen student support services, accelerate credential attainment, improve persistence, and boost degree completion. These grants are part of MiLEAP's broader \$45 million Student Success Grants initiative, which aims to help institutions implement evidence-based practices such as enhanced advising, accelerated course pathways, gateway course redesign, and career readiness programs to improve outcomes.

The State University of **New York** (SUNY) **announced** expanded resources for its Academic Momentum Campaign, an initiative launched in Fall 2025 to strengthen student retention and degree completion through evidence-based practices such as improved advising and gateway course redesign. SUNY named an inaugural cohort of 24 faculty and staff Academic Momentum Fellows who will support campuses in implementing these strategies, and 23 campuses have chosen to participate in a professional learning community focused on redesigning key gateway English and math courses.

INCARCERATED STUDENTS

The State University of **New York** (SUNY) **expanded** its Higher Education in Prison Program by launching the Teaching Forward Fellowship, an initiative providing paid professional and workforce development opportunities for formerly incarcerated individuals to support their transition into careers. SUNY, home to one of the largest higher education-in-prison networks in the state with degree programs offered in multiple correctional facilities, emphasized the fellowship's role in advancing educational equity and long-term career success for justice-impacted graduates. The initiative includes work placements, professional development, networking, and employer resources on fair-chance hiring.

The **Oregon** Higher Education Coordinating Commission (HECC) **announced** that Oregon has joined the national Jobs for the Future Fair Chance to Advance State Action Networks initiative to expand postsecondary education and workforce pathways for justice-impacted individuals. As one of four inaugural states selected, Oregon's HECC, Oregon Department of Corrections, and Oregon Employment Department will collaborate to increase access to education and training in correctional facilities, backed by up to \$2.1 million in funding and technical assistance. The effort aims to strengthen inter-agency coordination, unify data systems, and expand education-to-employment transitions for individuals with histories of incarceration.

COLLEGE AFFORDABILITY, COST CONTAINMENT & BASIC NEEDS

BASIC NEEDS

The **Minnesota** Office of Higher Education **awarded** nine private nonprofit and Tribal colleges 2026 Hunger Free Campus grants totaling \$360,000, with awards ranging up to \$50,000 and a required 50 percent match through in-kind or monetary contributions. Grant funds must support a defined set of campus hunger requirements, such as maintaining a food pantry or food bank partnership, providing SNAP and other benefit information, notifying work study students about potential SNAP eligibility, hosting an annual hunger awareness event, offering emergency assistance grants, and convening a student-inclusive hunger task force at least three times per year.

The State University of **New York** (SUNY) **announced** a Spring 2026 set of basic needs initiatives spanning 18 SUNY campuses, with planned evaluation for possible expansion. SUNY noted that every campus already offers a food pantry or stigma-free food access, that the system provides \$1 million in ongoing operating support annually for food insecurity initiatives, and that SUNY added \$550,000 in support for SUNY community college food pantries beginning this academic year. SUNY is also expanding refrigerated food lockers, building on last year's pilot at five campuses and adding new locker sites at SUNY Erie and Westchester Community College this year.

SUNY also **announced** housing insecurity supports, including campus homeless liaisons in place since 2023 and a partnership with SchoolHouse Connection for individualized technical assistance and intensive campus projects. Examples highlighted include SUNY Fredonia's work on gap housing, intake processes, and coordination with community agencies, SUNY Old Westbury's focus on gap housing during winter and summer sessions plus early identification and case management, and SUNY Oswego's housing policy update that allows year-round on campus housing applications without additional charges along with summer housing and dining scholarships for students experiencing housing insecurity. A local news report echoed SUNY's statewide framing, noting that the housing, food, and transportation initiatives will run across 18 campuses during Spring 2026 and sit alongside SUNY's recent efforts, such as required homeless liaisons and sustained investments in student supports.

COST CONTAINMENT

The **Oregon** Higher Education Coordinating Commission (HECC) **adopted** and transmitted a Spending and Efficiency report for Oregon's seven public universities to inform the 2026 legislative session, analyzing trends in student costs, spending, staffing, and efficiency amid constrained state resources and limited enrollment growth. HECC highlighted a set of policy levers for legislative consideration, including deeper shared services and potential affiliations or mergers, periodic program review and renewal, a separate statewide salary pool, prioritized modernization of major IT infrastructure, and continued targeted sustainability and integration investments.

EMERGENCY AID

The **Minnesota** Office of Higher Education **awarded** \$1 million in Emergency Assistance for Postsecondary Students (EAPS) grants to 10 private nonprofit and Tribal institutions to provide emergency aid for students facing unexpected housing, food, and transportation expenses that can derail completion. Established by the Legislature in 2017, EAPS supports institutional emergency grant programs, with awards structured for the biennium and annual limits per grantee.

MENTAL HEALTH

The State University of **New York** **announced** Mental Health First Aid grants of up to \$8,000 to 27 campuses (including state-operated campuses and community colleges) to expand mental health literacy and early response capacity among non-clinical faculty and staff. SUNY estimates that, once fully implemented, the program will support training for nearly 3,000 personnel annually, strengthening campus capacity to recognize and respond to students in distress and connect them to appropriate supports.

OPEN EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES

The **Colorado** Commission on Higher Education **approved** \$1 million for 28 Open Educational Resources (OER) grant projects to expand no-cost learning materials and accelerate zero textbook cost (ZTC) degrees and certificates, with funding spread across multiple project types, including ZTC degree development and collaborative efforts. The state noted the grants are part of a multi-year statutory initiative and will increase the number of ZTC degrees or certificates in progress statewide.

VALUE, ROI, & TRANSPARENCY

DASHBOARDS

The **Wyoming** Community College Commission **launched** a dual and concurrent enrollment dashboard that will provide insight into enrollment trends and metrics for Wyoming high school graduates taking college-level courses. Dashboard metrics include enrollment data in dual and concurrent courses, average number of credits completed by high school graduates, a list of the top five dual enrollment courses, and the trajectory of high school graduates into Wyoming postsecondary institutions.

ECONOMIC IMPACT

The **Michigan** Association of State Universities **released** an economic impact report highlighting the value public universities add to the state's economy. Michigan's 15 public universities generate nearly \$45 billion in annual economic activity, supporting more than 129,000 jobs, and contributing over \$7 billion in state tax revenue.

STUDENT DEBT

The **Kentucky** Council on Postsecondary Education **released** a new report showing improvements in several measures of student borrowing. Sixty percent of graduates from Kentucky public institutions now graduate without borrowing—an improvement from 46.7% in 2019-20. Additionally, the average amount borrowed per student declined 10.7% over the past five years.

CIVIC ENGAGEMENT, FREE SPEECH, & PUBLIC PURPOSES

CIVICS ENGAGEMENT

The State University of **New York** System (SUNY) **announced** the inaugural recipients of the Building Bridges civic engagement student leadership awards. The five SUNY campus groups selected will each receive \$5,000 grants to enhance projects that strengthen their communities and build connections across lines of difference.

LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT

The State University of **New York** System **announced** the 2026 Fellowship Class for SUNY's Leadership Institutes. SUNY's Leadership Institutes aim to cultivate a diverse pipeline of inclusive and innovative leaders to enhance student success and institutional excellence across SUNY campuses. The program is designed for faculty and administrative professionals from all backgrounds on a leadership trajectory at their institutions.

PUBLIC PURPOSES

The **Nevada** System of Higher Education launched a **partnership** with the City of Reno to provide secure Wi-Fi access at nine public locations, including community centers, parks, and recreational centers across the city. Enhancing public Wi-Fi in Reno is part of the Nevada System's broader statewide initiative to bridge the digital divide and improve educational access through strategic partnerships and infrastructure investment.

The State University of **New York** System is now **accepting** applications for the Empire State Summer Service Corps Program. This is a paid civic and service internship program that will select 150 students, who will engage in 300 hours of service focused on critical areas such as K-12 tutoring, peer mental health, sustainability, and food insecurity.