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Governors' Top Education Priorities: 2017 State of the State addresses

ALYSSA RAFA AND DAVE ROGOWSKI

Amid recent changes in national and state leadership and following the reauthorization of federal education law, governors took the stage in early 2017 to articulate their policy priorities. For all governors—including eight newly elected to their positions—increased flexibilities under the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) provide the opportunity to help create a vision for education in their state. Education stakeholders, including governors and their staff, are coming together to help guide their state education policy priorities toward that vision. This year, governors' addresses provide a glimpse of these state priorities as transitions to ESSA take shape.

Each year, Education Commission of the States **tracks** and analyzes governors' addresses, identifying emerging trends and priority issue areas. To date, 42 governors have delivered their 2017 State of the State addresses.

This Education Trends report highlights the top seven education priorities identified by governors in 2017:

■ **School Finance:** At least 32 governors focused on improving K-12 education by

increasing funding or changing funding strategies.

■ **Workforce Development and Career and Technical Education:** Fostering state economic growth by providing adequate training and education for the workforce was a priority of at least 24 governors.

■ **Teacher Issues:** Recruiting, retaining and better compensating teachers was a focus area for at least 17 governors.

■ **Early Learning (pre-kindergarten - third grade):** Governors in at least 16 states focused on enhancing early learning opportunities from preschool through-third grade.

■ **Postsecondary Affordability:** Ensuring that students are able to afford to pursue a postsecondary education was a top priority for at least 15 governors.

■ **Technology:** At least 11 governors highlighted the need to expand access to high-speed internet, especially in rural areas, and invest in classroom technology.

■ **School Choice:** Governors in at least 10 states prioritized policies designed to provide parents and students with increased education options.

"We have adapted to meet a **changing world** many times before and we can do it again—beginning with the **most important** part of this transformation: our public schools ... we need a **school system** that truly prepares students to **think creatively** and to be **problem solvers** and **innovators**."

– Hawaii Gov. David Ige

For a complete list of summaries of each governor's education policy priorities to date, please visit Education Commission of the States' **website**.



School Finance

Funding for K-12 education is one of the top expenditures in most states. As such, governors often prioritize school finance issues in their annual State of the State addresses. This year, at least 32 governors discussed strategies to improve K-12 education through funding. Priorities included increasing overall funding, updating funding formulas and improving infrastructure. Some governors focused on equity by proposing changes to the dispersal and utilization of state education dollars to improve opportunities for at-risk populations.

“...there are certain **priorities** we must continue to fund. That is why we propose an **increase in funding for K-12 education**. I know education is an investment in our children and **our future**.”
- Nebraska Gov. Pete Ricketts

School Finance Highlights

Arizona Gov. Doug Ducey	Requested a per-pupil funding boost for high-performing schools and additional funding for high-quality schools serving low-income students. Proposed investing more money in school construction and capital.
Connecticut Gov. Dannel Malloy	Proposed developing a funding formula based on local property tax burden, student need and current enrollment. Requested the new formula guarantee equal access to a quality education regardless of zip code.
Hawaii Gov. David Ige	Requested an investment of \$61.7 million to improve cooling systems in schools.
Illinois Gov. Bruce Rauner	Increased funding for K-12 education by \$700 million over the last two years and requested implementation of the 2016 bipartisan task force’s recommendations to reduce the funding gap between low- and high-income schools.
Massachusetts Gov. Charlie Baker	Increased local school funding by \$227 million over the last two years and proposed an additional increase of \$90 million.
Nebraska Gov. Pete Ricketts	Requested an increase in K-12 funding by an average annual percentage of 2.7 percent, resulting in a 5.4 percent increase for the biennium. Recommended an additional 3 percent increase in special education funding.
Nevada Gov. Brian Sandoval	Proposed investing an additional \$30 million, for a total of \$80 million, in victory schools – historically low-performing schools that receive intensive wraparound and family engagement services.

Workforce Development and Career and Technical Education

Governors in at least 24 states emphasized the need for developing a well-trained, well-educated workforce to foster economic growth in their state. Plans for addressing the gap between available jobs and qualified workers included increasing funding for career and technical education programs, aligning training programs to the needs of specific industries, and creating workforce development initiatives focused on some level of postsecondary attainment and/or completion.

“In order to grow Iowa, **we must also look at policies and reforms** that will continue growing family incomes. One way to do this is to **close the skills gap** which in many ways is the biggest challenge our state faces over the next decade.”
- Iowa Gov. Terry Branstad



Workforce Development/CTE Highlights

Arkansas Gov. Asa Hutchinson	Proposed paying tuition and fees at a two-year college or technical school for students pursuing a high-need job skill or degree through the ArFuture Grants program. Asked that recipients of this grant are required to receive mentoring and work in Arkansas for three years after graduation.
Indiana Gov. Eric Holcomb	Requested a \$2 million investment to create regional Jobs Ready Grant programs that help current workers complete credentials or certificates in high-demand, high-wage fields.
Iowa Gov. Terry Branstad	Asked to create opportunities for Iowans to compete in an increasingly digital economy by prioritizing the Future Ready Iowa initiative goal that 70 percent of Iowans in the workforce have education or training beyond high school by 2025.
Michigan Gov. Rick Snyder	Created the Community College Skilled Trades Equipment Program to provide resources and equipment for community colleges to upgrade their career and technical education programs. Requested an increase in investments for K-12 career and technical education programs.
Rhode Island Gov. Gina Raimondo	Requested investments in manufacturing initiatives for high school students and set a goal to ensure that 70 percent of Rhode Island adults have some degree or credential beyond high school by 2025.
Utah Gov. Gary Herbert	Created the Aerospace Pathways program, providing high school students with early training in the aerospace industry. Proposed creating Talent Ready Utah to expand high-skill career opportunities by increasing business and education partnerships.

Teacher Issues: Compensation, recruitment and retention

Efforts to attract and retain quality teachers were on the top of many governors' priority lists. Because high-quality teachers play a key role in student success and states face perennial shortages of quality teachers, many policymakers focus on ensuring teachers are better compensated and given greater access to the opportunities they crave to grow and develop their professional expertise.

“Those who are on the **front lines** of this field, who **mold young minds** every day in the classroom and who answer such a **challenging calling** are the **‘everyday heroes’** that a successful society requires.”
– Georgia Gov. Nathan Deal

In their speeches, at least 17 governors focused on issues of teacher compensation, recruitment and retention. Some of the strategies highlighted for addressing these issues included salary increases, student loan forgiveness programs and leadership and mentoring programs.

Teacher Compensation, Recruitment and Retention Highlights

Georgia Gov. Nathan Deal	Requested a 2 percent increase in the teacher pay scale and a 3 percent increase in merit pay.
Idaho Gov. Butch Otter	Asked to maintain an ongoing \$6 million in the executive budget for teacher professional development. Requested an allocation of \$58 million, in addition to the \$75 million already invested, to continue implementing the career ladder pay model for public school teachers.
Kansas Gov. Sam Brownback	Launched TeachersKan, a new scholarship program for Kansas college students who commit to teaching in a hard to fill discipline or underserved community, and proposed allocating new funds for teacher merit pay.



Maine Gov. Paul LePage	Proposed an increase in base pay for teachers statewide and equal pay for teachers in rural areas, placing them on par with those in wealthier areas.
New York Gov. Andrew Cuomo	Proposed extending the Empire State Excellence in Teaching Awards program to award more top-performing teachers \$5,000 for professional development.
Oklahoma Gov. Mary Fallin	Called for a permanent, phased-in and targeted pay raise for public school teachers.
Washington Gov. Jay Inslee	Budgeted funds for the Beginning Educator Support Team to provide new teachers with mentoring and support.

Early Learning (Pre-Kindergarten-Third Grade)

Efforts to narrow the achievement gap frequently include investing in early learners. As such, governors often focus on the significant return on these investments in their annual speeches. In past years, governors targeted their early learning investments at pre-kindergarten (pre-K) programs. This year, many governors took a more expansive view of early learning, using a P-3 approach that included the pre-K-third grade years. At least 16 governors prioritized the P-3 years, including everything from pre-K expansion to full-day kindergarten funding to early literacy development in their addresses.

“We cannot expect our schools to be successful, or our economy to flourish, if we fail our kids before they even enter their classrooms ... The **best way** to **close the achievement gap** is to **stop it before it begins.**”
– Minnesota Gov. Mark Dayton

Early Learning (P-3) Highlights

Arizona Gov. Doug Ducey	Proposed providing low-income schools with funding to expand full-day kindergarten and to improve early literacy.
Alabama Gov. Robert Bentley	Proposed aligning and integrating the most successful components of the pre-K model with the most successful parts of K-3 initiatives to ensure students continue to succeed through third grade. Requested a \$20 million increase to fund 160 more pre-K classrooms.
Minnesota Gov. Mark Dayton	Called for free full-day kindergarten for 5-year-olds. Requested an increase in state funding for quality child care, pre-K and other early childhood enhancements.
Montana Gov. Steve Bullock	Proposed a \$12 million preschool grant program to allow school districts, Head Start programs and high-quality private preschool providers to offer preschool for 4-year-olds at or below 200 percent of the federal poverty level.
Pennsylvania Gov. Tom Wolf	Proposed \$75 million in funding to expand high-quality early childhood education. Previous investments enabled nearly 200 school districts to make new investments in pre-K or kindergarten.
Texas Gov. Greg Abbott	Proposed creating high-quality pre-K standards and funding high-quality, optional, pre-K education.

Postsecondary Affordability

In order for states to expand opportunities for their citizens, postsecondary education must be an affordable and accessible option. Those who do not complete additional educational coursework or training sometimes face limited career opportunities, which may exacerbate state workforce insufficiencies. Unfortunately, for many students, financial concerns can hinder their ability to continue an education after high school. This year, at least 15 governors discussed strategies to improve access to a quality, affordable postsecondary education for those seeking to further their education. To address the issue of postsecondary affordability, governors outlined plans to manage tuition rates, expand scholarships and offer free community and technical college.

“We **don’t want cost to be an obstacle** anyone has to overcome as they pursue their own **generational change** for themselves and their families.”
– Tennessee Gov. Bill Haslam

Postsecondary Affordability Highlights

Hawaii Gov. David Ige	Proposed creating the Hawaii Promise Program to address college affordability for qualifying students and families by filling the gap between the cost of community college and what students can afford.
Maryland Gov. Larry Hogan	Requested an additional \$17.5 million for tuition relief, capping tuition growth at 2 percent for 14 Maryland colleges and universities instead of the proposed 5 percent. Called for the passage of the Student Debt Relief Act, allowing Marylanders to deduct 100 percent of the interest paid on their student loans from their state income tax returns.
New York Gov. Andrew Cuomo	Proposed tuition-free college at State University of New York, City University of New York and community colleges for students or families making up to \$125,000 per year.
Rhode Island Gov. Gina Raimondo	Proposed expanding the Rhode Island Promise program to ensure that Rhode Island becomes the first state to guarantee two years of tuition-free college for every student at Community College Rhode Island, University of Rhode Island or Rhode Island College.
Tennessee Gov. Bill Haslam	Proposed providing scholarships for adult learners to attend community college for free through the Tennessee Reconnect program, becoming the first state to offer all citizens access to a degree or certificate free of tuition and fees.

Technology

Access to, and experience with, technology is considered by many to be a crucial component to the success of students in the classroom and beyond. In their addresses, at least 11 governors expressed a commitment to improving access to technology for teachers and students. While the majority of governors called for improving access to high-speed internet, some focused on upgrading classroom technology. Of those governors that sought to improve access to high-speed internet, many proposed targeting investments to rural areas.

“Tonight ... **a high school student will sit in a parked car outside her town library.** She’ll huddle over her laptop ... as she tries to finish her paper, because **it’s the only place she can get wifi. This isn’t right.**”
– Colorado Gov. John Hickenlooper



Technology Highlights

Alabama Gov. Robert Bentley	Proposed delivering connectivity to rural areas as part of the Great State 2019 Plan.
Colorado Gov. John Hickenlooper	Called for ensuring that every school and household has access to high-speed internet. Announced the creation of a broadband office with the ultimate goal of achieving 100 percent coverage by 2020.
Idaho Gov. Butch Otter	Requested an allocation of \$10 million for classroom technology in addition to the \$18 million already invested.
Indiana Gov. Eric Holcomb	Called for a \$1 million increase in state funding to improve digital connectivity by enabling more schools to participate in the federal E-rate matching program, which helps schools access high-speed internet.
Montana Gov. Steve Bullock	Improved internet access for 40 percent of all K-12 students and requested \$2 million to further build out internet connectivity in schools.
Wisconsin Gov. Scott Walker	Proposed an additional \$35.5 million investment, for a total of \$52 million, to expand the broadband access grant program and to help upgrade technology and train teachers from small and rural school districts.

School Choice

Many states' education systems include school choice policies and the new federal administration has featured these policies as a priority issue. While it is too early to determine how the federal agenda will impact state school choice policies, the governors' addresses provide us with a small glimpse of potential choice efforts to come. This year, governors focused on charter school policies and offering or expanding education savings account programs (individual accounts that allow parents or guardians to purchase an array of educational services). Governors in at least 10 states prioritized school choice in their State of the State addresses.

"We've heard from thousands of Nevada families about how **crucial** it is that we give them **freedom of choice** in the education of their children. I look forward to building a **bi-partisan solution** to get this done."
- Nevada Gov. Brian Sandoval

School Choice Highlights

Kansas Gov. Sam Brownback	Proposed supporting education savings accounts and expanding eligibility for the existing tax exempt scholarship program.
Kentucky Gov. Matt Bevin	Proposed approving charter school legislation, bringing school choice to Kentucky.



Maryland Gov. Larry Hogan	Called for the passage of the Public School Charter Act of 2017, creating an independent authorizer and increasing autonomy for public charter schools. Requested a total of \$7 million for an initiative to provide students with the opportunity to attend a private school.
Missouri Gov. Eric Greitens	Proposed implementing an education savings account program for students with special needs.
Nevada Gov. Brian Sandoval	Requested \$60 million to fund the state's education savings account program.

AUTHORS

Alyssa Rafa is a policy researcher with Education Commission of the States. She has her master's degree in international relations from the University of Denver. When she's not reveling in education policy research, you can find her snowshoeing in the Rockies or board-gaming at a local brewery. Contact Alyssa at arafa@ecs.org or 303.299.3691.

Dave Rogowski is a policy researcher with Education Commission of the States. He has his degree in secondary education from St. Louis University and studied public policy at the University of Denver. Dave is a former high school social studies teacher who enjoys Colorado's outdoor activities and following Chicago sports. Contact Dave at drogowski@ecs.org or 303.299.3612.

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