



The Compact in Action

Education Commission of the States **Annual Report**

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The Compact for Education Renewed: Why State Cooperation Is Still Vital

2025 marked a meaningful milestone for Education Commission of the States: 60 years since our founding.

In 1965, governors, legislators and education leaders came together around a simple but enduring idea: when political and professional leadership work in partnership, grounded in the needs of real communities, states can learn from one another and strengthen education for all.

That idea became the Compact for Education.

Six decades later, the conditions around us may have changed, but the need for that kind of cooperation has not. In many ways, it has only grown more urgent.

Across the country, states are navigating complex challenges: preparing learners for a rapidly evolving workforce, strengthening the educator pipeline, improving student engagement and outcomes, and ensuring systems are responsive to the communities they serve. These challenges do not exist in isolation, and no state is solving them alone.

What we continue to see, year after year, is that the most durable progress happens when states work together. When leaders share what they are learning. When policy is informed by practice. And when systems are aligned around people.

I am reminded of this whenever I visit schools. It's not the program or the structure that stands out – it's the culture. You can feel it. Relationships at the center. Educators working together with intention. Students supported and engaging.

Schools are not made of individuals implementing a single approach — they are teams reflecting their communities.

That experience is not an outlier. It is a signal.

A signal of what becomes possible when systems are designed around connection, collaboration and shared responsibility.

At ECS, we are seeing that same signal across states.

We see it in efforts to better align education and workforce systems.

In stronger partnerships between policymakers and practitioners.

In communities shaping solutions that reflect their unique needs.

And we see it in the growing recognition that lasting progress requires not just good ideas, but alignment, across sectors, across roles and across states.

This is what we mean when we talk about renewing the Compact for Education.

Renewal does not mean starting over. On the contrary. It means recommitting to the core belief that states are strongest when they learn from one another, and that education systems are strongest when they are rooted in the communities they serve.

It also means evolving how we work.

At ECS, we are deepening our role as a connector, bringing together state leaders, elevating emerging policy signals and translating complex challenges into actionable insights. Our work is grounded in what we hear from states and shaped by what they need to move forward.

Because policy matters most when it changes what happens on the ground.

And that only happens when systems are designed with intention, when they reflect the people they serve and when leaders are working in partnership to achieve shared outcomes.

As we look ahead, the path forward is not defined by any single policy or program. It is defined by our collective ability to work together.

That was true 60 years ago.

It is just as true today.

And it is the work that will carry us forward.



A stylized, handwritten signature in black ink, likely belonging to José Muñoz.

José Muñoz
President
Education Commission of the States



ECS IN ACTION

DELIVERING KEY INSIGHTS ON EDUCATION POLICY ISSUES



51 new policy reports and blog posts published.

5,463 bills tracked.

1,064 bills summarized.



405 information requests answered.

ENGAGING & SERVING COMMISSIONERS



316 Commissioners appointed.

43 state connections made for leaders in **26** states.

24 policy consultations in **15** states.

22 testimonies in **15** states.

19 state visits.



CONVENING POLICYMAKERS

2,322

people attended
virtual events.



1,468

people attended
in-person events.

16 multi-state
technical assistance
opportunities, resulting in



201

Technical assistance engagements
in all **50** states and DC.

PROVIDING EXPERTISE & CRITICAL CONTEXT

145 mentions
by media outlets.



49 references
by government
offices, universities,
research agencies
and think tanks.

FORGING PARTNERSHIPS TO SUPPORT STATES

28 partnerships
renewed.



9 grants
secured.

3 new
partnerships
formed.

Strengthening STEAM Education Through State Action

ECS and the Arts Education Partnership (AEP) supported multiple states through a STEAM technical assistance network, helping leaders move from shared challenges to concrete strategies and implementation.

Across this work, ECS and AEP facilitated focus groups, peer learning and targeted support to help states strengthen how STEAM is designed, delivered and sustained.

The work doesn't stop at strategy or a report; it shows up in continued, targeted supports.

Related Resources

- [Lessons in Advancing STEAM Education](#) (Policy Report)

In **California**, ECS and AEP facilitated focus groups with state and local partners informed a statewide webinar series hosted by the California Department of Education in October 2025. The series supported local education agencies and community partners in advancing arts integration, leveraging funding and leadership, and building partnerships to sustain STEAM programs.



In **Oregon**, ECS and AEP supported engagement and feedback processes culminated in the release of a statewide STEAM toolkit, providing standards-aligned resources and practical guidance for K-12 educators implementing STEAM learning.



In **Wisconsin**, this work translated directly into classroom practice. The state launched a STEAM website and developed the Wisconsin STEAM Fellows program, which supported 18 educators in professional learning and led to:



- Eight district-hosted STEAM events.
- New lesson plans and professional development led by fellows.
- More than 3,500 students reached.

WHAT CHANGED: States moved beyond planning to implementation, developing statewide resources, strengthening partnerships and expanding access to high-quality STEAM learning in classrooms and communities.

Designing Student-Centered Pathways for the Future

State leaders are increasingly rethinking how students move from high school to postsecondary education, careers and civic life. Across the country, leaders are examining policies related to dual enrollment, college and career readiness and high school graduation requirements to better align learning with the knowledge and skills students need for long-term success.

To support this work, ECS convened state leaders through communities of practice and targeted technical assistance focused on strengthening student-centered pathways. Through research, facilitation and cross-state learning, ECS helped states better understand their policy landscapes, identify gaps and explore opportunities for reform.

This work isn't about launching a new program; it's about building systems that last.

How ECS Supports Sustained State Progress

- Ongoing Communities of Practice.
- Regular cross-state check-ins.
- Targeted technical assistance.
- Connections to national experts.

Related Resources

- [State Policy Ecosystem for Student-Centered Pathways](#)

In **Wyoming**, ECS partnered with state leaders to design and conduct interviews with school and community college leaders to better understand how dual enrollment policies and practices were impacting students' access to postsecondary opportunities while still in high school. Insights from those conversations helped inform a plan for policy and practice reforms aimed at expanding equitable access to early postsecondary pathways for students across the state.

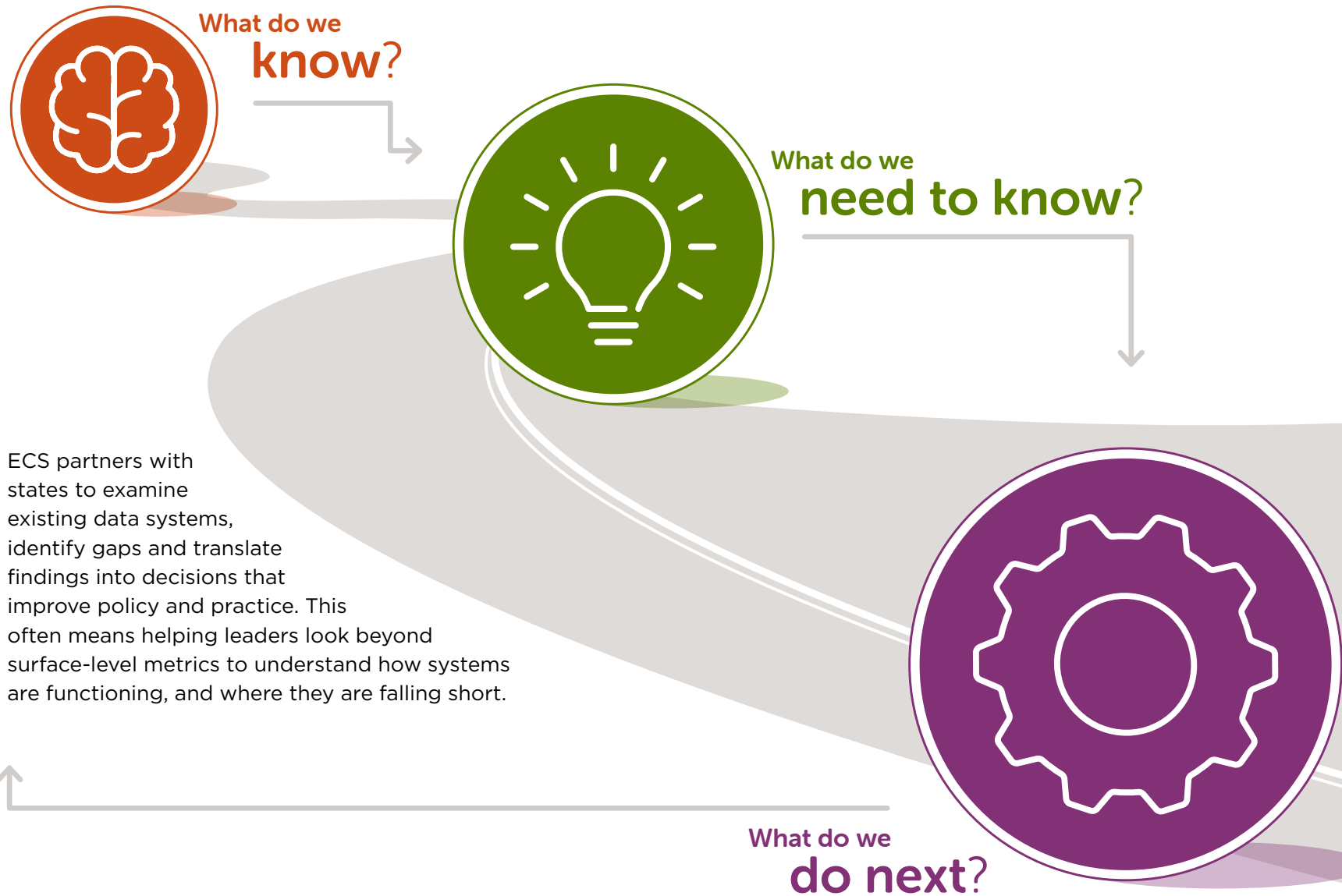
In **New Jersey**, ECS provided targeted research, presentations and connections to peer states to support efforts to strengthen the state's college and career readiness standards. With ECS-supported analysis and guidance, state leaders advanced recommendations to the state board of education designed to better prepare students for postsecondary education and the workforce.

Meanwhile, in **Washington**, the State Board of Education's Future Ready Task Force engaged ECS to provide a national landscape analysis of high school graduation requirements and facilitate discussion around opportunities for reform. Drawing on national research and state examples, ECS helped task force members examine how graduation policies can better align with future workforce needs, postsecondary pathways and civic readiness.

WHAT CHANGED: State leaders gained a clearer understanding of how policies across K-12 and postsecondary systems shape student opportunities — and began advancing reforms designed to create more intentional, equitable and future-ready pathways for students.

State leaders are asking increasingly complex questions, but data systems don't always keep pace.

ECS helps states move from:



Connecting Data Systems to Support Learner Pathways

State leaders are increasingly seeking to connect early care and education, K-12, postsecondary and workforce systems to long-term outcomes. Answering those questions requires data systems that are aligned, transparent and built to follow learners over time.

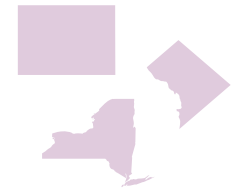
To support this work, ECS launched the Education-to-Workforce (E-W) Indicator Framework Toolkit, a set of practical, state-focused resources designed to help leaders assess, strengthen and better use their data systems. Built on a national framework developed by the Gates Foundation and Mathematica, the toolkit helps states move from asking questions about their data to taking action.

The toolkit guides states through a full improvement cycle, from identifying key questions and assessing data readiness to examining gaps, reviewing data definitions and understanding what information is currently reported across states. Together, these

tools help leaders move beyond siloed analysis and toward coordinated, learner-centered systems that support more informed policy decisions.

This work brings greater clarity to a complex and fragmented data landscape. While most states operate or are building statewide longitudinal data systems, they vary widely in what they collect, how they use it, and what questions they can answer. ECS' work helps states better understand their own systems, learn from peers and identify where targeted improvements can have the greatest impact.

Early adopters, including **Colorado**, the **District of Columbia** and **New York**, are already using the framework to assess gaps, align agencies and strengthen reporting, demonstrating how stronger data systems can support more effective policy decisions across the education-to-workforce continuum.



Related Resources:

- [Sustaining State Longitudinal Data Systems](#) (Policy Report)
- [Strengthening State Data Systems Through the Education-to-Workforce Framework](#)
- [State Data Reporting Dashboard](#)

WHAT CHANGED: State leaders now have a clearer, more actionable way to understand their data systems, and are using that clarity to strengthen alignment, improve decision-making and better support learner pathways from education to career.

Expanding Postsecondary Access for Justice-Impacted Learners

ECS continued its higher education in prisons work in 2025 by convening 14 states for an in-person Community of Practice meeting. Bringing together state leaders from across the country, the convening created space to share strategies, strengthen cross-state collaboration and advance efforts to expand access to postsecondary education for justice-impacted learners.

Before gathering for a day-long session to discuss policies to mitigate challenges faced by incarcerated learners, the group toured the Lansing Correctional Facility in Kansas. The tour provided the group with a field-level perspective into the conditions and experiences of justice-impacted learners who are incarcerated. The group toured classrooms and learning spaces and talked to students in the program about their experiences. In addition, attendees toured living facilities and spoke to individuals participating in work-release programs. The tour concluded with a panel featuring former students who shared the opportunities and challenges of attending the program while incarcerated, as well as the possibilities the education offered after release. The panel also provided the employer's perspective regarding the education and training required for employment after release.

The community of practice meeting brought together a variety of role groups, from state-level policymakers to practitioners, to gather insights on expanding prison education access. ECS created small groups with varied representation to engage

in small group discussions. Throughout the day, the groups worked on guided questions in three focused topics: governance, financial aid, and student support. Each group shared the results of their small group discussions with the larger group, highlighting common themes and policy solutions.

The site visit and community of practice convening were instrumental in shaping the depth and credibility of the resulting policy guide. It was important that this guide reflected the realities of prison education. The decision to organize the document around governance, financial aid and student supports emerged as the areas where state policy was most consequential and where participants from different sectors saw the clearest opportunities for action. The interconnection the guide names in its framing — that policy in one area inevitably affects the others — came from watching those conversations cross-pollinate in real time.

Participants saw the Kansas Department of Corrections and the Kansas City Kansas Community College collaborating around shared outcomes, an arrangement that brought into focus the governance and coordination conditions the guide addresses. Moreover, the convening and Lansing site visit grounded the financial aid section in the realities incarcerated learners face nationally, including state aid eligibility rules, residency requirements and the need for advising support to navigate complex application processes. On student supports, garnering student lived experiences during the

site visit illuminated what programming looks like in practice and helped the community of practice articulate the technology, advising, transfer and reentry conditions that shape student persistence and completion across state contexts.

Related Resource:

■ [Policymakers' Role in Expanding Prison Education Access](#)

WHAT CHANGED: States deepened alignment and accelerated progress on policies and programs that expand postsecondary pathways for incarcerated and formerly incarcerated individuals.

Advancing First-Year Student Success Through Strategic Engagement

In 2025, Strong Start to Finish advanced its North Star for first-year student success through a coordinated series of convenings, policy academies, conferences and network engagements designed to help states and institutions strengthen outcomes for students in their first year of college. Across 28 engagements, the initiative supported conversations shaping postsecondary policy, deepening cross-sector partnerships and accelerating efforts to ensure more students stay on track to graduate.

A Strong Start Policy Academy brought together state and system-level policymakers, faculty and institutional leaders from Kansas, New Hampshire, New Jersey and North Dakota to develop plans for strengthening placement practices, learning supports and math requirements. As a result of

this work, the North Dakota University System is advancing policy to scale co-requisite support across all institutions.

In Pennsylvania, engagement through a previous Strong Start Policy Academy contributed to the Pennsylvania State System of Higher Education adopting a policy requiring all institutions to implement co-requisite courses, helping more students access credit-bearing coursework and reducing barriers created by traditional remediation models.

WHAT CHANGED: These engagements helped states move from shared learning to concrete policy and practice changes — strengthening alignment across systems, increasing awareness of the importance of foundational skills and advancing reforms designed to improve first-year student success at scale.

Turning Strategy into Real-World impact: Reimagining the Teacher Pipeline Through Policy

Policy matters most when it changes what happens on the ground.

ECS supports states in translating policy into implementation by providing research, facilitating cross-state learning and offering targeted technical assistance that helps leaders turn strategy into action.

As an example, we launched a Community of Practice on State Action to Strengthen Educator Preparation in 2025, supported by the Hewlett Foundation. The Community of Practice features four state teams working on issues of critical importance to educator preparation within their states.

“Thank you again for the valuable experience [in the Community of Practice.] I learned so much about the educator preparation landscape and our needs as a state.”

In **California**, the Commission on Teacher Credentialing was charged with creating a multiple measures dashboard to demonstrate educator preparation program data and inspire continuous improvement. With ECS support, the CTC team outlined a drafting and stakeholder engagement plan to create such a resource – including connecting with other states and national leaders to gather input on design and implementation.



In **Colorado**, state leaders identified a gap between available data on the educator workforce required by statute and the use of such data within educator preparation programs. ECS-supported planning time helped the team outline a plan to bridge this gap – resulting in new guidance documents for educator preparation programs and one-on-one data conversations with leaders in those programs.



In **Utah**, a collaborative of state and local leaders identified an implementation challenge in the design of educator competencies. The team is developing a framework to improve competencies and their use in guiding novice educator training, including clarifying the roles of players in the system and the expectations around measurement.



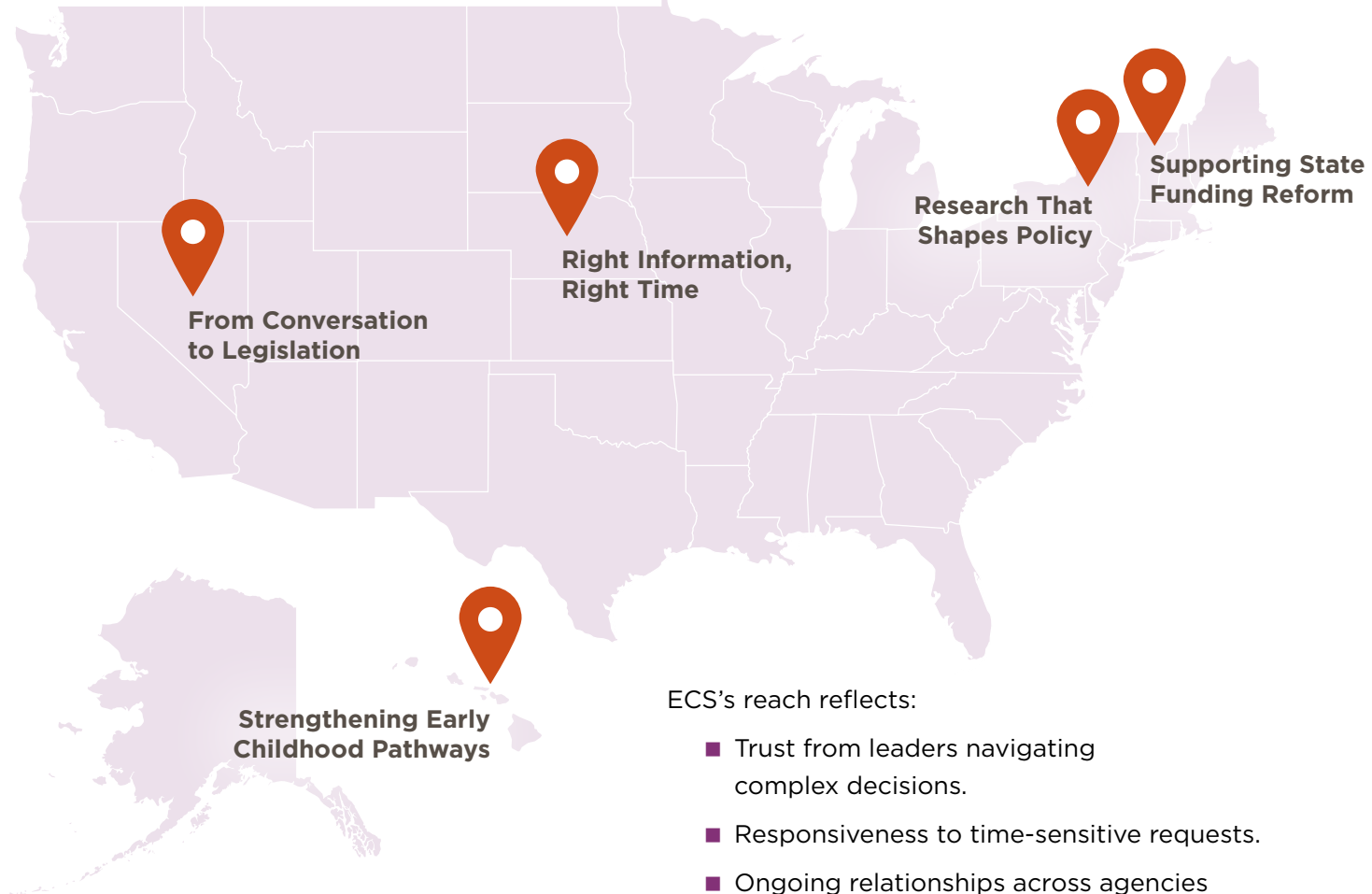
Related Resources

- [50-State Comparison: Teacher Recruitment and Retention](#)
- [Cultivating a Sustainable Educator Community](#) (updated)
- [Building Teacher Sustainability Through Mentorship](#) (success story)

A Trusted Resource for State Education Leaders Nationwide

State leaders across all 50 states turn to ECS for timely, nonpartisan insight on the issues shaping education policy.

Snapshots of ECS' Nationwide Work



ECS's reach reflects:

- Trust from leaders navigating complex decisions.
- Responsiveness to time-sensitive requests.
- Ongoing relationships across agencies and states.

This network enables ECS to support both immediate needs and long-term work, helping leaders move forward with confidence.



From Conversation to Legislation

A **Nevada** lawmaker developed a bill to require FAFSA completion for incarcerated individuals after a conversation at the ECS National Forum, turning peer exchange into policy action.



Research That Shapes Policy

New York leaders cited ECS research at least nine times in New York State's Foundation Aid Formula Study, relying on it to inform analysis and decision-making.



Right Information, Right Time

In **Nebraska**, an ECS information request directly informed the development of new legislation, clarifying rules for reemployed retirees, helping shape policy at a critical moment.



Supporting State Funding Reform

After ECS presented findings from its K-12 Funding Toolkit to legislative committees, **Vermont** enacted legislation to overhaul its funding model, adopting a student-based foundation formula informed by national best practices.

Strengthening Early Childhood Pathways



In **Hawai'i**, ECS helped to connect partners and align efforts to turn a fragmented system of services into a coordinated, lasting system. ECS support led to a statewide approach to strengthen early childhood services and improve outcomes for children and families.

Research That Advances the Field

ECS serves as a critical piece of the education policy knowledge infrastructure — providing data, analysis and comparative information that researchers, policymakers and national organizations rely on to inform their work. ECS resources and data have been cited in major policy studies, legislative analyses and national research publications, while ECS data-sharing partnerships help expand access to reliable, state-by-state education information.

For example, a 2025 Education Next analysis on instructional time across the United States relied on ECS's 50-state data on school time requirements to examine in additional time in school is associated with positive student outcomes.

WHAT CHANGED: By making complex state policy information accessible and comparable, ECS helps researchers and decision-makers build stronger analysis, ask better questions and advance more informed education policy conversations.

Accelerating State Impact

Philanthropic partnerships make this work possible, and more impactful.

They allow ECS to:

- Convene states.
- Translate research into action.
- Sustain long-term engagement.

Rather than one-time outputs, these partnerships enable ongoing, collaborative work that leads to real change in states.

WHAT CHANGED: States received deeper, sustained support, accelerating progress on complex challenges like teacher workforce development.

What Partnerships Enable:

- Multi-state collaboration.
- Research-to-policy translation.
- Technical assistance over time.
- Scalable policy solutions.

Partnerships make it possible to move from promising ideas to lasting systems.

What our partners value:

“...our collaboration allows [Texas Instruments] to be informed, to understand the education landscape, and to ensure that our work best aligns with local and national needs. The ECS staff is helpful, friendly, and ensures that we are able to remain relevant across all levels of the education landscape.”

2025 Partners

Champion



Promoter



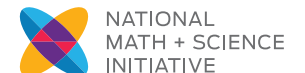
Trailblazer



CLASSWALLET



Supporter



The Executive Committee is made up of a bipartisan group of state leaders who provide strategic direction and oversight for the management, operations and financial policies.



CHAIR

Mark Gordon
*Governor
Wyoming*



VICE CHAIR

Bill Soules
*Senator
New Mexico*



TREASURER

Aaron Thompson
*President, Council on
Postsecondary Education
Kentucky*



IMMEDIATE PAST CHAIR

Laura Kelly
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Kansas*



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José Muñoz
*President
Education Commission
of the States*

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of Education
Alabama*



Charlene Russell-Tucker
*Commissioner
of Education
Connecticut*



Tony Sanders
*State Superintendent
Illinois*



Don Schaible
*Senator
North Dakota*

Welcome to Our Newest Commissioners

In addition to a number of re-appointments, we were excited to welcome the following new Commissioners in 2025:

Alabama

Ami Brooks, Secretary,
Alabama Department of
Early Childhood Education

Alaska

Sally Stockhausen, Chair, Alaska
Department of Education and
Early Development

Rebecca Himschoot, Representative,
Alaska State Legislature

Arizona

Matt Gress, Chair, House
Education Committee,
Arizona State Legislature

Nancy Gutierrez, Assistant Minority
Leader, Arizona State Legislature

California

Sasha Renée Pérez, Senator,
California State Legislature

Colorado

Scott Bright, Senator, Colorado
State Legislature

Delaware

Cindy Marten, Secretary of
Education, Delaware
Department of Education

Matt Meyer, Governor,
State of Delaware

District of Columbia

Jacque Patterson, President, DC
State Board of Education

Georgia

Matt Donaldson, Georgia Board
of Education, Board Member -
12th Congressional District

Indiana

Michelle Ashcraft, Senior Associate
Commissioner & Chief Operating
Officer, Indiana Commission for
Higher Education

David Buyze, Chief Policy Officer,
Indiana Department of Education

Mike Braun, Governor,
State of Indiana

Iowa

Lynn Evans, Chair, Education
Committee, Iowa State Senate

Kansas

Melanie Haas, Board Member,
Kansas State Board of Education

Renee Erickson, Chair, Committee
on Education, Kansas Senate

Susan Estes, Chair, Committee
on Education, Kansas House
of Representatives

Kentucky

Jonathan Jett, Full-Service
Community Schools Project
Director, Partners for Rural Impact

James Tipton, Chair, Postsecondary
Education Committee, Kentucky
House of Representatives

Louisiana

Beryl Amedee, Vice Chair, House
Education Committee, Louisiana
House of Representatives

Rick Edmonds, Chair, Senate
Committee on Education,
Louisiana Senate

Sabrah Kingham, Senior Education
Policy Advisor, Office of Governor
Jeff Landry, State of Louisiana

Maine

Kelly Murphy, Co-chair, Joint
Committee on Education and
Cultural Affairs, Maine State
House of Representatives

Maryland

Kimberly Lewis, Member, Maryland
State Board of Education

Rainya Miller, Founder, Consortium
of Accomplished Educators

Darryl Williams, Interim Chair for
Administration and Program
Director, Morgan State University

Massachusetts

Michael Moriarty, Executive
Director, OneHolyoke Community
Development Corp

Noe Ortega, Commissioner of
Higher Education, Massachusetts
Department of Higher Education

Michigan

Cheryl Carrier, President,
Ford Next Generation Learning

Glenn Maleyko, State
Superintendent, Michigan
Department of Education

Dayna Polehanki, Chair, Senate
Education Committee,
Michigan Senate

Minnesota

Patricia Mueller, Representative,
Minnesota House of
Representatives

Mississippi

Nicole Boyd, Chair, Universities
and Colleges Committee,
Mississippi State Senate

Missouri

Mike Kehoe, Governor,
State of Missouri

Montana

Erin Ellis, Director of Curriculum
and Assessment, Hellgate
Elementary School District

Susie Hedalen, Superintendent
of Public Instruction, Montana
Office of Public Instruction

Dan Lee, Former Dean,
University of Montana

Kerri Seekins-Crowe,
Representative, Montana
House of Representatives

Sue Vinton, Senator, Montana
State Legislature

Nebraska

Jana Hughes, Senator, Nebraska
State Unicameral Legislature

Margo Juarez, State Senator
Nebraska, State Unicameral
Legislature

Dan Lonowski, State Senator,
Nebraska State Unicameral
Legislature

New Hampshire

Kelly Ayotte, Governor,
State of New Hampshire

New York

Ashleigh Thompson, University
Dean for Education, The City
University of New York

Chris White, Vice Chancellor for
Workforce Development and
Upward Mobility, State University
of New York

North Carolina

Jeff Cox, President, North Carolina
Community College System

Maurice “Mo” Green, State
Superintendent of Public
Instruction, North Carolina
Department of Public Instruction

Josh Stein, Governor,
State of North Carolina

Ohio

Stephen Dackin, Director,
Ohio Department of Education
and Workforce

Mike Duffey, Chancellor, Ohio
Department of Higher Education

Kara Wente, Director, Ohio
Department of Children and Youth

Oklahoma

Lindel Fields, State Superintendent
of Public Instruction, Oklahoma
State Department of Education

Ally Seifried, Vice Chair, Education
Committee, Oklahoma Senate

Oregon

April Dobson, Vice Chair,
Education Committee,
Oregon Legislative Assembly

Emily McIntire, Vice Chair,
Education Committee,
Oregon Legislative Assembly

Charlene Williams, Agency Director,
Oregon Department of Education

Pennsylvania

Jason Ortitay, State Representative,
Pennsylvania House of
Representatives

Lynda Schlegel Culver, Majority
Chair, Senate Education
Committee, Pennsylvania
State Senate

Puerto Rico

Michael Ayala, Early Childhood
Education Specialist and
Advocate, Puerto Rico
Department of Education

Alayra Figueroa González,
Deputy Secretary of Special
Education, Puerto Rico
Department of Education

Jenniffer Gonzalez-Colon, Governor,
Commonwealth of Puerto Rico

Francisco Martínez Oronoz, Puerto
Rico Department of Education

Brenda Pérez Soto, Chair,
Committee on Education, Arts,
and Culture, Puerto Rico Senate

Eliezer Ramos Parés, Secretary
of Education, Puerto Rico
Department of Education

South Dakota

Damon Alvey, Superintendent,
Vermillion School District

Mary Jo Fairhead, Founder & CEO,
Onward Learning

Lana Greenfield, Chair, Education
Committee, South Dakota
State House of Representatives

Larry Rhoden, Governor,
State of South Dakota

Curt Voight, Vice Chair,
Education Committee,
South Dakota State Legislature

Tennessee

Dawn White, Chair, Senate
Education Committee,
Tennessee State Senate

Texas

Wynn Rosser, Commissioner,
Texas Higher Education
Coordinating Board

Utah

Geoffrey Landward, Commissioner
of Higher Education, Utah System
of Higher Education

Molly Hart, State Superintendent
of Public Instruction, Utah State
Board of Education

Washington

Bob Ferguson, Governor,
State of Washington

Susan Lathrop, Chief Education
Officer, Washington Office
of Superintendent of Public
Instruction

Logan Noel-Endres, Director of
Strategic Advocacy, Washington
State School Directors' Association

West Virginia

Lori Dittman, Chair, Higher
Education Committee, West
Virginia State House of Delegates

Rollan Roberts, Chair,
Workforce Committee,
West Virginia State Senate

Patrick Morrissey, Governor,
State of West Virginia

Wisconsin

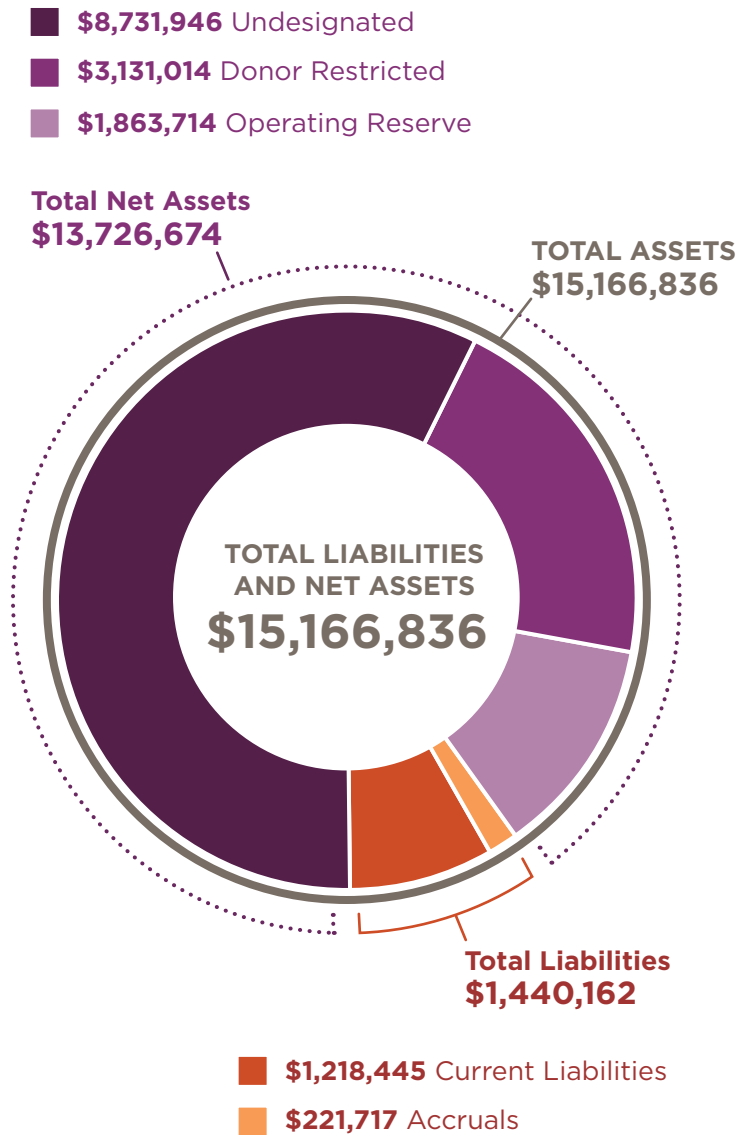
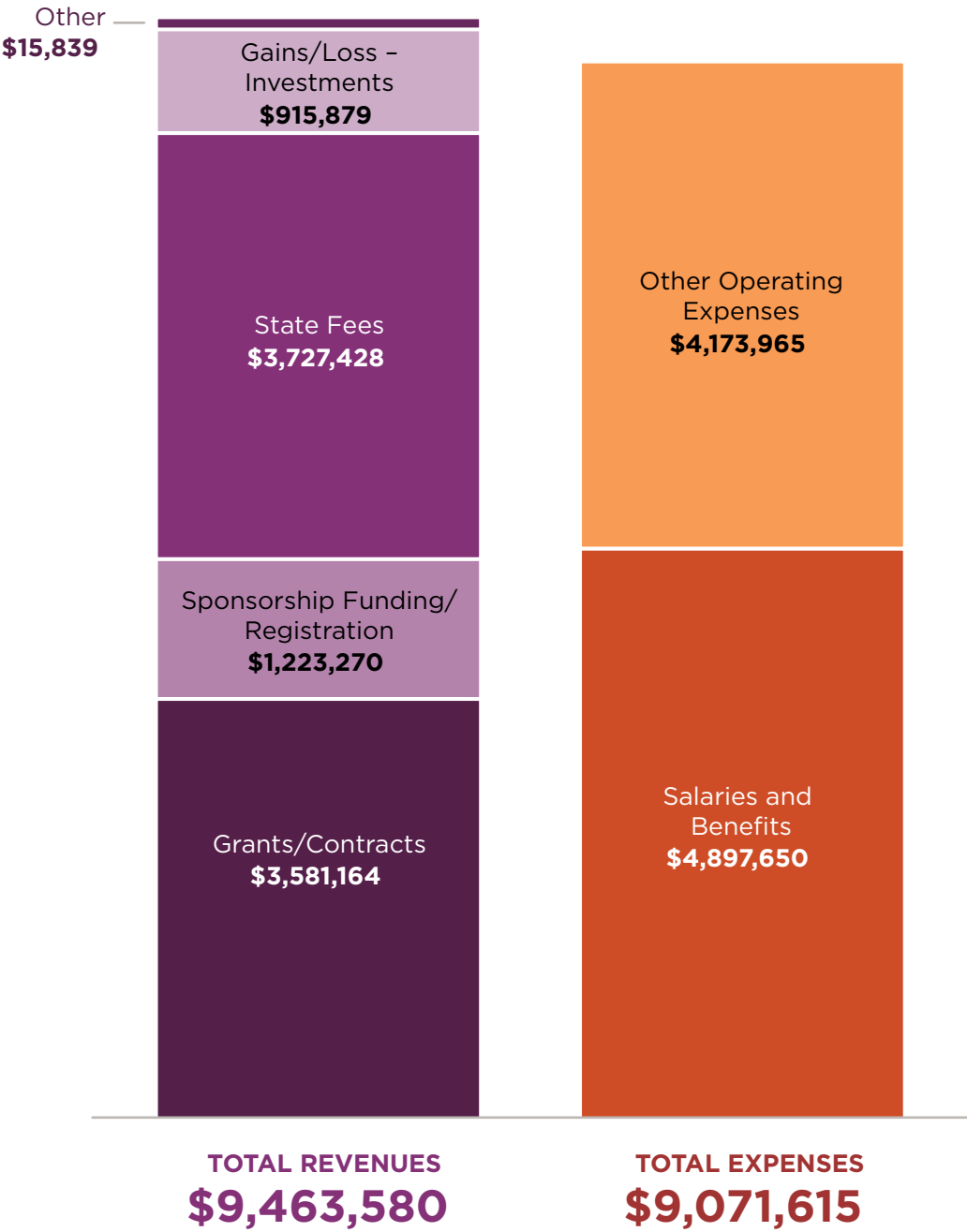
John Jagler, Chair,
Education Committee,
Wisconsin State Senate

Wyoming

Joe Schaffer, President, Laramie
County Community College

FINANCIAL SUMMARY

Financial summary for the fiscal year ended Dec. 31, 2025.



What Leaders Are Prioritizing Next

Across states, a clear set of priorities is emerging, shaped by both progress and persistent challenges.

Governors' 2026 State of the State addresses point to a renewed focus on student outcomes, with academic achievement and student supports rising to the top of state education agendas for the first time in two decades of tracking.

At the center of this work is a continued emphasis on early literacy and foundational skills. States are investing in evidence-based reading instruction, early identification and targeted supports to help students succeed from the earliest grades. In Michigan, leaders are advancing science of reading policies and proposing one of the state's largest-ever literacy investments, including funding for literacy coaches to support educators. In Delaware, statewide literacy screeners and classroom investments are helping identify and address learning gaps earlier.

States are also continuing to invest in education funding and system modernization, not just increasing funding but rethinking how it is allocated. In Pennsylvania, leaders are directing additional funding to schools with the greatest need through a revised formula, while in Missouri, policymakers are exploring broader changes to modernize the state's funding system to better reflect current realities.

Another strong signal is the focus on connecting education to workforce pathways. States are expanding career and technical education, apprenticeships and credential pathways aligned to high-demand fields. In South Carolina, more than 120,000 residents have received workforce credentials through technical

college programs, while Wisconsin is investing in workforce training programs tied to advanced manufacturing and emerging fields like AI.

Leaders are also prioritizing early care and education, with growing attention to access and affordability. In New York, leaders are pursuing universal child care and expanding access to early learning, while Hawai'i continues to invest in preschool expansion and affordability initiatives.

Finally, states remain focused on strengthening the teacher workforce. Leaders are pursuing a range of strategies, from compensation increases to innovative supports. In Colorado, educator housing initiatives are helping teachers afford to live in the communities they serve, while Illinois is expanding grant programs to recruit and retain teachers.

Taken together, these signals point to a broader shift: States are moving toward more connected systems — linking early learning, K-12, postsecondary and workforce policy to improve outcomes over time.

With a significant number of elections and leadership transitions across states this year, priorities may shift, but the underlying challenges remain. Ensuring continuity and helping new and returning leaders quickly access trusted, nonpartisan insight will be critical to maintaining momentum.

ECS will continue to help state leaders make sense of these trends, connect with peers and translate emerging priorities into actionable policy, ensuring that insight leads to impact.

