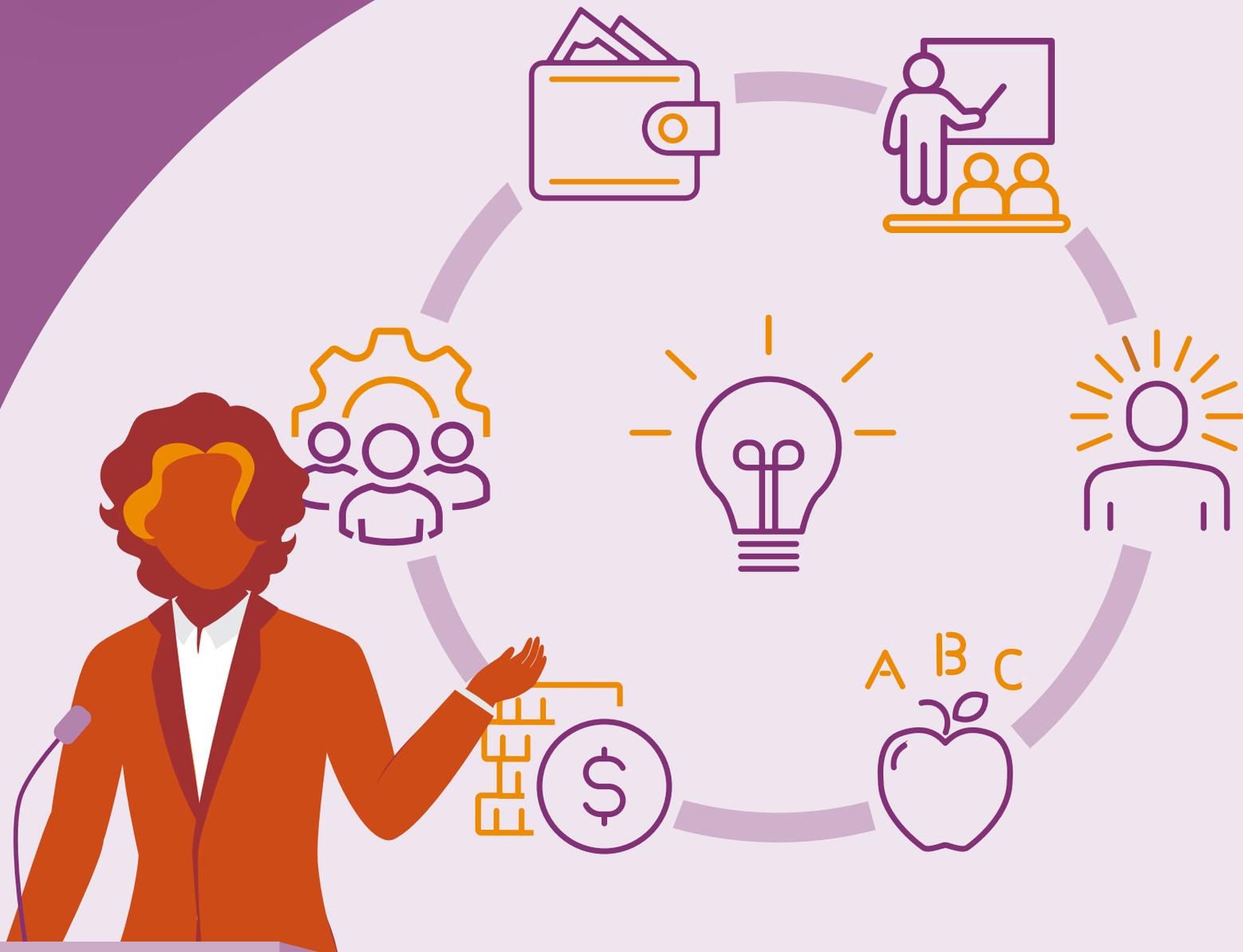


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# GOVERNORS' TOP EDUCATION PRIORITIES

in 2023 State of the State Addresses

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The 2022 election cycle brought shifts in leadership throughout the education landscape. Across the United States, 36 governors and the mayor of the District of Columbia were up for election, including 28 incumbent positions. Governors-elect established their [education priorities](#) on the campaign trail, and governors have used their 2023 State of the State addresses to celebrate state achievements and to introduce plans for the future across the preschool, elementary, secondary, postsecondary and workforce spectrum.

While governors seek to improve all sectors of their state, they regularly emphasize the impact that learning can have on a state's economic growth and overall wellbeing. As Gov. Albert Bryan Jr. of the **U.S. Virgin Islands** put it, "With the promise of prosperity on the horizon, there is nothing more crucial to our individual success than education."

Since 2005, Education Commission of the States has tracked, analyzed and identified trends in education policy accomplishments and proposals featured in governors' State of the State addresses. We do this by reviewing addresses given in all 50 states, the District of Columbia and U.S. territories. For the fourth straight year, Education Commission of the States and the National Governors Association continue our partnership on this project to summarize and identify key trends in governors' agendas.



**Every child deserves a quality education that fits their unique needs, regardless of economic status or background.”**

Oklahoma Gov. Kevin Stitt



At least 35 governors discussed **K-12 FUNDING** by highlighting increased investments in education and adjustments to funding approaches. K-12 funding has been a top issue in the last two years.



Governors in at least 34 states highlighted efforts in **WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT AND CAREER AND TECHNICAL EDUCATION**, including a focus on apprenticeships and workforce participation specific to state needs.



At least 29 governors focused on **TEACHER STAFFING** through increased compensation and recruitment and retention efforts. In 2023, governors have generally approached the issue with more specificity than in previous years by announcing specific dollar amount or percentage increases for teacher salaries and bonuses.



**EARLY LEARNING** was mentioned by at least 28 governors in 27 states and the U.S. Virgin Islands, and an emphasis was placed on child care access and preschool opportunities.



At least 22 governors discussed **ACADEMIC SUPPORTS** for student learning, including specific strategies on reading and literacy, curriculum and student achievement.



Governors in at least 21 states emphasized efforts to support **PHYSICAL AND MENTAL HEALTH** for students and staff.



**POSTSECONDARY AFFORDABILITY** policy proposals to approach financial aid, tuition and student debt was an area of focus for at least 19 governors.



# K-12 FUNDING

As in [previous years](#), most governors detailed the importance of funding in K-12 education. At least **35 governors** discussed funding, and many celebrated recent increased investments in K-12 and proposed additional allocations for K-12 education. This year, some governors also mentioned reforms to state K-12 funding formulas.

## Highlights

 <b>Georgia</b> Gov. Brian Kemp	Proposed an additional \$1.9 billion to fully fund the Quality Basic Education funding formula.
 <b>Nebraska</b> Gov. Jim Pillen	Advocated to create a major structural reform to state education aid by allocating \$1,500 annually to every public school per student. This was in part to ensure a base level of support for rural school districts.
 <b>New Jersey</b> Gov. Phil Murphy	Noted the state's more than \$2 billion increased investment in public schools since taking office.
 <b>Rhode Island</b> Gov. Dan McKee	Proposed making modifications to the state funding formula and investing an additional \$57 million in K-12 education and out-of-school learning programs.
 <b>Utah</b> Gov. Spencer Cox	Promoted a 5% increase to the weighted per-student unit.
 <b>Washington</b> Gov. Jay Inslee	Called for increasing K-12 funding by \$3 billion and proposed increasing special education funding by \$120 million.



**My budget contains 2 billion dollars in new funding for our students. That's an increase of more than 22% from what was appropriated in the current biennium. That's 2 billion new dollars for literacy, for instruction, for our children."**

Nevada Gov. Joe Lombardo



To learn more about state policy action in this area, visit our [Funding](#) Key Issue page. Please also see NGA's [K-12 Education: Reflect and Redesign Webinar Series](#).



# WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT AND CAREER AND TECHNICAL EDUCATION

At least **34 governors** discussed career and technical education and workforce development as a strategy to help their respective states meet workforce needs. Some governors mentioned expanding apprenticeship opportunities for high school students. Others highlighted programs to increase workforce participation in specific careers in their locales.

## Highlights

 <p><b>Hawaii</b> Gov. Josh Green</p>	<p>Proposed increasing resources for the Hawaii State Loan Repayment Program to help pay off educational loans for primary care and behavioral health providers.</p>
 <p><b>Kansas</b> Gov. Laura Kelly</p>	<p>Celebrated creating the Office of Registered Apprenticeship in the Department of Commerce and highlighted increased funding for the Office of Registered Apprenticeships.</p>
 <p><b>Massachusetts</b> Gov. Maura Healey</p>	<p>Called for working with community colleges and vocational schools to ensure job training meets the needs of companies in every region.</p>
 <p><b>Montana</b> Gov. Greg Gianforte</p>	<p>Supported work-based learning to allow students to get on-the-job experience and apply that experience to their high school graduation requirements.</p>
 <p><b>South Dakota</b> Gov. Kristi Noem</p>	<p>Praised the Department of Labor and Regulation grants that created four apprenticeship pipeline programs for high school students.</p>
 <p><b>Virginia</b> Gov. Glenn Youngkin</p>	<p>Promoted the acceleration of dual enrollment partnerships between high schools and community colleges and promoted investments in the Earn to Learn Accelerator education program for healthcare workers.</p>



**Let's get them loving to learn again, with apprentice and career opportunities to put them on the path to success."**

Connecticut Gov. Ned Lamont



To learn more about state policy action in this area, visit our [Workforce Development](#) Key Issue page, including our recently updated career and technical education [50-State Comparison](#). Please also see NGA's [State Policy Playbook to Advance Youth Apprenticeship](#) and the [Skills-Driven State Community of Practice](#).



# TEACHER STAFFING

State leaders continue to battle shortages of qualified teachers and other school staff. At least **29 governors** approached the shortages with proposals related to teacher compensation, recruitment and retention. Governors called for teacher salary increases, the creation and funding of pathways for new teachers and additional supports for teachers already in the classroom.

## Highlights

 <b>Iowa</b> Gov. Kim Reynolds	Celebrated that the state's teacher apprenticeship program is on track to have 1,000 apprentices by next year and proposed additional freedom for schools to use unspent, earmarked money to increase teacher salaries.
 <b>Kentucky</b> Gov. Andy Beshear	Proposed a 5% pay raise for every public school educator through the Education First Plan.
 <b>Maryland</b> Gov. Wes Moore	Urged the passage of the Maryland Educator Shortage Act to strengthen the pipeline of qualified teachers through new pathways.
 <b>Nevada</b> Gov. Joe Lombardo	Proposed using the interest from the state's Education Stabilization Account to provide scholarships to high school graduates that attend Nevada postsecondary institutions and agree to teach in the state for five years.
 <b>Tennessee</b> Gov. Bill Lee	Supported allocating \$125 million to increase teacher pay, including raising the minimum teacher salary to \$50,000.
 <b>Wisconsin</b> Gov. Tony Evers	Called for investing over \$20 million to recruit, develop and retain teachers and student teachers, including \$10 million for local, homegrown educators.



**That is why I am asking the Legislature to help me make this the 'Year of the Teacher.' Not only can we provide at least a 5% increase to the Weighted Pupil Unit, but we can also give every teacher the largest raise in our state's history."**

Utah Gov. Spencer Cox



To learn more about state policy action in this area, check out our [Teaching Profession](#) Key Issue page, including our recent [50-State Comparison on Teacher Recruitment and Retention](#). Please also see NGA's [School Leadership Hot Topics](#) series.



# EARLY LEARNING

Early learning is an emerging trend for governors in 2023. At least **28 governors** discussed preschool, kindergarten or other P-3 issues. A majority of states mentioned P-3 topics focused on child care access and opportunities.

## Highlights

 <p><b>Delaware</b> Gov. John Carney</p>	<p>Proposed an increase in the Purchase of Care program (a child care subsidy) to help families from low-income backgrounds access child care and proposed increased state investments in early childhood education.</p>
 <p><b>Mississippi</b> Gov. Tate Reeves</p>	<p>Mentioned establishing a child care tax credit and allowing families to write off child care expenses on state tax returns.</p>
 <p><b>Missouri</b> Gov. Mike Parson</p>	<p>Announced that the expansion of state pre-K options will result in 50% of families with pre-K students having the ability to enroll their children in expanded programs through their local school district or charter school at no cost.</p>
 <p><b>Pennsylvania</b> Gov. Josh Shapiro</p>	<p>Proposed \$66.7 million for Child Care Works to increase access to stable child care and increased investment in Pennsylvania Pre-K Counts.</p>
 <p><b>South Carolina</b> Gov. Henry McMaster</p>	<p>Celebrated the expansion of full-day, four-year-old kindergarten (4K program) to eligible children in the state who need the most support, including students from low-income backgrounds, students experiencing homelessness and students in foster care.</p>
 <p><b>U.S. Virgin Islands,</b> Gov. Albert Bryan Jr.</p>	<p>Established pre-K programs for all five year olds in nearly every public elementary school and invested in construction and renovation projects at Head Start centers.</p>



**We know that the earlier a child is reading on grade level, the better that child will do in later grades — and in life. We also know that what happens to a child before they start school determines their chances of success.”**

Ohio Gov. Mike DeWine



To learn more about state policy action in this area, visit our [Early Care and Education](#) Key Issue page. Please also see NGA’s [Child Care Action Lab](#) resource.



# ACADEMIC SUPPORTS

At least **22 governors** discussed supporting student learning and performance through academic supports in a variety of topic areas, including reading and literacy, curriculum and student achievement.

## Highlights

 <b>Alaska</b> Gov. Mike Dunleavy	Applauded the bipartisan passage of the Alaska READS Act as a strong literacy policy that sets benchmarks for accountability and that provides tools for school districts and teachers.
 <b>Colorado</b> Gov. Jared Polis	Proposed new investments in math curricula to improve student achievement.
 <b>Connecticut</b> Gov. Ned Lamont	Urged superintendents, principals and teachers to implement ideas to help students' academic recovery.
 <b>North Carolina</b> Gov. Roy Cooper	Announced a plan to make historic investments in whole person health and touted the allocation of \$10 million to mental health first aid in schools for children undergoing a crisis.
 <b>Oklahoma</b> Gov. Kevin Stitt	Called for the most expansive reading initiative in the country to get students reading at grade level.
 <b>Vermont</b> Gov. Phil Scott	Proposed to do more to reverse interrupted learning by leveraging federal funds for after-school and summer programs, expanding access to computer science education and supporting quality standards.



**We all want to improve outcomes and ensure our kids are prepared for success. And we'll start by making sure our kids can bring their full and best selves to our schools and our classrooms."**

Wisconsin Gov. Tony Evers



To learn more about state policy action in this area, check out our [Student Learning](#) Key Issue page. Please also see NGA's [Governors' Education Policy Advisors Institute](#).



# PHYSICAL AND MENTAL HEALTH

Governors continued the trend of highlighting the importance of student health as at least **21 governors** discussed the topic. Governors typically highlighted the importance of mental health and expanding access to mental health services and supports for students. Several governors also addressed students' physical health.

## Highlights

 <b>Maine</b> Gov. Janet Mills	Asked for a 30% increase for school- and community-based mental health services and celebrated becoming the second state in the nation to provide universal free food in public schools.
 <b>Michigan</b> Gov. Gretchen Whitmer	Touted investing in improving air and water quality in schools and funding mental health services.
 <b>New York</b> Gov. Kathy Hochul	Emphasized the need for preventative mental health services in schools for children and proposed to reduce the unmet need for children's mental health services by half.
 <b>Texas</b> Gov. Greg Abbott	Called for providing more mental health professionals in schools.
 <b>West Virginia</b> Gov. Jim Justice	Emphasized the importance of community schools to meet the needs of students and families and noted the strategy's growth across the state.
 <b>Wyoming</b> Gov. Mark Gordon	Supported an advisory group's recommendation to use innovative models for addressing mental health and behavioral issues.



**Leading in prioritizing youth mental health through comprehensive means that don't just connect kids with resources but empower parents and educators to identify negative signs and provide positive support."**

New Jersey Gov. Phil Murphy



To learn more about state policy action in this area, check out our [Student Health and Wellness Key Issue](#) page. Please also see NGA's [2022-23 Chair's Initiative on Strengthening Youth Mental Health](#).



# POSTSECONDARY AFFORDABILITY

Governors seeking to expand postsecondary access focused on addressing the costs associated with a postsecondary education. At least **19 governors** highlighted postsecondary financial aid, tuition or student debt. Governors discussed establishing new scholarship programs and increasing funding or award amounts for existing scholarships or grants, especially for in-state students and students from specific populations.

## Highlights



### Arizona

Gov. Katie Hobbs

Expanded the Arizona Promise Scholarship Program by including funding capacity for an additional 10,000 students.



### Idaho

Gov. Brad Little

Established funding to create the Idaho Launch Scholarship to provide \$8,500 to graduating high school students to attend an Idaho postsecondary institution.



### Illinois

Gov. J.B. Pritzker

Celebrated paying off \$230 million in debt for the College Illinois 529 Prepaid Tuition Program.



### Indiana

Gov. Eric Holcomb

Proposed automatically enrolling all financially eligible students in the 21st Century Scholarship Program.



### New Mexico

Gov. Michelle Lujan Grisham

Highlighted postsecondary enrollment gains because of tuition-free college.



### North Dakota

Gov. Doug Burgum

Called for doubling the investment in the Native American Scholarship program to expand educational and employment opportunities for tribal members.



Let's keep funding the bipartisan Michigan Achievement Scholarship, which lowers the cost of higher education — community college, private or public university — by thousands of dollars for most students and makes college tuition-free for 65% of graduating seniors.”

Michigan Gov. Gretchen Whitmer



To learn more about state policy action in this area, visit our [Postsecondary Affordability](#) Key Issue page. Please also see NGA's [FAFSA Completion Action Lab](#) resource.

# About the Authors



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## ABOUT NGA



Founded in 1908, the National Governors Association (NGA) is the bipartisan organization of the nation's 55 governors. Through NGA, governors share best practices, address issues of national and state interest, and share innovative solutions that improve state government and support the principles of federalism.

