

GOVERNORS' TOP EDUCATION PRIORITIES

MARCH 2024

in 2024 State of the State Addresses

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In their 2024 State of the State addresses, governors across the country celebrated achievements in education and shared their hopes for students' futures as well as potential obstacles their states still have to overcome. Some governors reflected on improvements that can be made across the education pipeline from early care and education through high school and career and technical education.

Many governors stressed the impact that education can have on students and the impact that students can then have on the state. For example, Gov. Bill Lee of **Tennessee** said in his address that the "ability for young Tennesseans to succeed is the key to Tennessee's long-term success. And without a doubt, education has the power to change the trajectory of a child's life forever."

Every year 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. This year marks the fifth year that Education Commission of the States and the National Governors Association have collaborated on this project. To date, 42 governors, including the **U.S. Virgin Islands**, have given their 2024 address. Below are six of the top education policy topics mentioned by governors in their addresses.



Education is the universal key, opening doors we never even dreamed existed, transporting us to distant lands, exploring the deepest oceans, and catapulting us to the moon. Education opens our eyes to new ideas. It invites us to dream big dreams and gives us the tools to turn those dreams into reality.

Colorado
Gov. Jared Polis



Governors in at least 36 states and the U.S. Virgin Islands mentioned **WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT AND CAREER AND TECHNICAL EDUCATION** during their addresses. They stressed the importance of ensuring students are prepared to join the workforce and noted how these programs impact economic development.



At least 32 governors highlighted **K-12 FUNDING** by sharing efforts to increase education investments and changes to funding formulas. K-12 funding has continued to be a top priority for governors for over ten years.



Efforts to build a strong **TEACHER WORKFORCE** through teacher compensation and recruitment or retention efforts was brought up by at least 27 governors.



At least 25 governors addressed **EARLY CARE AND EDUCATION** issues with many governors sharing how essential child care access and preschool services are for students in transitioning into kindergarten.



Governors in at least 24 states and the U.S. Virgin Islands mentioned **ACADEMIC ACHIEVEMENT AND LITERACY** efforts, including efforts to improve student achievement and how to strengthen early reading to ensure student success.



At least 20 governors discussed efforts to provide quality **PHYSICAL AND MENTAL HEALTH** services for students and school personnel.



WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT AND CAREER AND TECHNICAL EDUCATION

The importance of providing students with options for a clear, well-supported pathway into their careers was a stated priority for at least **37 governors**. Governors discussed career and technical education and workforce development as ways to strengthen their workforce and prepare students for careers. They talked about ways to expand pathways into in-demand fields such as health care or teaching.

Highlights



Arizona
Gov. Katie Hobbs

Noted continued investments in Future48 workforce accelerators to prepare Arizonans for future workforce industries. Celebrated that the [AZ Healthy Tomorrow](#) initiative is likely to produce over 2,500 health care professionals every year. Announced plans to double the number of apprentices in the [Build It AZ Apprenticeship](#) Initiative.



Colorado
Gov. Jared Polis

Highlighted dual enrollment and low-cost credentialing as different options to help Coloradans build good careers. Celebrated expanding free community college and technical college for in-demand careers and partnering with businesses to develop training pathways. Celebrated the work of the [Agricultural Workforce Development Program](#).



Florida
Gov. Ron DeSantis

Celebrated that, since 2019, students have earned more than 365,000 rapid credentials, and in 2023, over 235,000 high school students earned an industry certificate. Also acknowledged that there are 229,000 students enrolled in career and technical education programs at Florida colleges.



Iowa
Gov. Kim Reynolds

Celebrated reaching 70% of Iowans in the workforce attaining training or education beyond high school, which is up from 58% at the beginning of the administration. Credited the passage and implementation of the [Future Ready Iowa](#) Act for contributing to progress in workforce training. Noted the need for ongoing efforts to connect employers with skilled workers.



Mississippi
Gov. Tate Reeves

Called on the Legislature to enact an apprenticeship education model for high school seniors to ensure students are connected with the high-paying jobs that companies need filled. He asked the Legislature to establish a recruitment and retention incentive program to attract researchers at state universities to help lead the way on manufacturing and industrial innovation.



New Jersey
Gov. Phil Murphy

Mentioned that apprenticeship programs are helping to address the nursing and educator shortages and highlighted doubling the number of apprenticeship programs in New Jersey in fields like the life sciences, home health care and renewable energy.



Once those kids graduate from high school, we need to make sure they have the freedom to chart their own course and determine for themselves their next steps in life ... If you're in the 10th or 11th grade and you're excited about being a welder or a plumber, we should celebrate that. And we should treat that career path with the same level of respect as someone who chooses to go to college.

Pennsylvania
Gov. Josh Shapiro

WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT AND CAREER AND TECHNICAL EDUCATION

Highlights (continued)



South Dakota
Gov. Kristi Noem

Celebrated that the state has more than doubled the amount of new apprenticeships from recent years through an effort to expand apprenticeship opportunities. Acknowledged the success of the [Jobs for America's Graduates](#) program, which is preparing high school students who may otherwise have barriers to success for college or a career once they graduate.



Wisconsin
Gov. Tony Evers

Highlighted the \$150 million investment in workforce programs, including employment and skills training and re-engagement efforts noting the investment supported training for 33,000 Wisconsinites.



To learn more about state policy action in this area, see our [Workforce and CTE](#) work as well as NGA's [Workforce Development and Economic Policy](#) page, [Postsecondary Education](#) page, and the [States' Role in Higher Education Quality Assurance](#).



K-12 FUNDING

Like past years, governors expressed a need to invest more funding into K-12 education. At least **32 governors** addressed funding and some governors shared historic increases in K-12 investments. This year, some governors also mentioned reforms to K-12 funding with targeted efforts to support specific student populations.

Highlights



Connecticut
Gov. Ned Lamont

Noted the state's expanded education cost sharing funding as well as \$400 million in federal relief funds schools have available. Promised to continue funding the state's [Learner Engagement and Attendance Program](#) to help reconnect children with education and address the chronic absence rate.



Georgia
Gov. Brian Kemp

Proposed continuing historically high investments in K-12 education by allocating \$1.4 billion in additional funds in 2024 and 2025 budget proposals.



Illinois
Gov. J.B. Pritzker

Celebrated investments made in education and having education serve as a central tenet of his administration's six budgets. Praised the evidence-based funding model, \$350 million increase to the budget and \$30 million increase in funding for school transportation. Proposed investing \$45 million in the teacher pipeline and \$150 million for the second year of the Smart Start early childhood program.



We know that guaranteeing Missouri's strong foundation starts with a quality education for our children. This year, we will once again fully fund the K-12 Foundation Formula with an additional \$120 million dollars over last year's levels. And we are also fully funding school transportation across the state of Missouri”

Missouri
Gov. Mike Parson

K-12 FUNDING

Highlights (continued)



Kansas

Gov. Laura Kelly

Celebrated five straight years of fully funding public schools and proposed a sixth year of full funding in the budget and cited using a line-item veto to protect rural school budgets in 2023.



Oklahoma

Gov. Kevin Stitt

Celebrated investing more in teachers and public education than ever before.



Pennsylvania

Gov. Josh Shapiro

Celebrated the largest single-year increase in basic education funding in Pennsylvania history last year. The state had budget increases in special education funding by another \$50 million and proposed to set aside \$1.5 billion — including \$300 million this year alone — to make schools healthy and safe.



Tennessee

Gov. Bill Lee

Highlighted that the state has increased public education funding by more than \$1.8 billion dollars since he became governor — by far the most in the state's history. Proposed to make another significant investment in the [Tennessee Investment in Student Achievement](#) formula.



Vermont

Gov. Phil Scott

Highlighted that the state is spending \$25,000 per student annually, which ranks among the highest in the country without requisite student performance.











To learn more about state policy action in this area, see our [Funding](#) work and NGA's [K-12](#) page.



TEACHER WORKFORCE

Ensuring states have adequate staffing for teaching positions remained top of mind for governors. At least **27 governors** mentioned teacher recruitment and retention or teacher compensation. Governors highlighted efforts to increase teacher pay. They spoke about creating new pathways into the classroom, recruiting a highly qualified teaching workforce and ensuring new teachers stay in the profession.

Highlights

 Alaska Gov. Mike Dunleavy	Called on policymakers to pass legislation that would provide teachers with incentive pay of \$5,000 to \$15,000 per year for three years. Made an open call to recruit teachers to Alaska and highlighted a tool on the governor's website for exploring teacher incentives by school district.
 Hawai'i Gov. Josh Green	Celebrated cutting the teacher shortage by 50% in one year. Lauded the new four-year contract with the Hawai'i State Teachers Association for its pay raises for new hires and bonuses for returning teachers.
 Illinois Gov. J.B. Pritzker	Highlighted that the teacher pipeline grant program brought 5,384 new teachers into the field and proposed investing another \$45 million into the program. Also celebrated that teacher retention was at the highest level on record.
 Michigan Gov. Gretchen Whitmer	Spotlighted providing scholarships for future educators, paying student teachers and helping teachers with student loans so they stay in Michigan. Emphasized that Michigan accepts out-of-state teacher certificates so teachers can move to Michigan without licensing barriers.
 Missouri Gov. Mike Parson	Allocated funding in 2024 to increase base teacher pay to \$40,000 per year, which will result in a \$15,000 increase over the course of the governor's administration. Also, proposed \$6 million in funding for the Missouri Career Ladder program — the state's teacher performance pay matching program.
 Utah Gov. Spencer Cox	Celebrated the largest increase in teacher salaries in Utah's history. Highlighted that Utah teachers are paid more than peers in neighboring states.
 Washington Gov. Jay Inslee	Proposed incentives to recruit more special education teachers and an increase in paraeducator pay.
 West Virginia Gov. Jim Justice	Proposed a 5% pay increase for teachers.



We want younger Iowans to see the teaching profession as something to aspire to. It's one of the highest callings one can have, so let's make sure that teacher pay sends that message. Tonight, I'm asking the Legislature to invest \$96 million in new money to increase starting pay by 50%, to \$50,000, and set a minimum salary of \$62,000 for teachers with at least 12 years of experience. ”

Iowa
Gov. Kim Reynolds











To learn more about state policy action in this area, see our [Teacher](#) work and NGA's webinar series called [State Snapshots for Strengthening the Educator Workforce](#).



EARLY CARE AND EDUCATION

For many governors, early care and education has risen on the list of priorities. At least **25 governors** discussed policies impacting preschool and kindergarten. This year, governors have called for the expansion of preschool and child care services with some financial relief opportunities for families to better serve children in their states.

Highlights

 <p>Connecticut Gov. Ned Lamont</p>	<p>Celebrated the budget investment into child care, including an additional \$90 million next year to support pay for early childhood educators and increased reimbursement for child care centers and family care homes. Highlighted investments allowing the provision of resources to help caregivers become certified and set up home-based child care centers.</p>
 <p>Delaware Gov. John Carney Jr.</p>	<p>Called attention to the importance of a continued focus on early childhood education and the impacts having access to quality education early. Praised the new Early Childhood Innovation Center at Delaware State University, which will train early childhood educators.</p>
 <p>Kentucky Gov. Andy Beshear</p>	<p>Called for the passage of universal pre-K for all four-year-olds. Cited the importance of early learning in ensuring students are ready for kindergarten.</p>
 <p>Maryland Gov. Wes Moore</p>	<p>Noted the relationship between increasing child care costs and decreasing rates of employment for women. Proposed the single largest increase in funding for child care in Maryland history to support 45,000 children this year.</p>
 <p>Nebraska Gov. Jim Pillen</p>	<p>Partnered with the Legislature to create a Micro-Center network that allows communities and businesses to meet child care needs through existing resources. Highlighted efforts to alter incentive credits to direct use toward child care and early childhood education.</p>
 <p>New Hampshire Gov. Chris Sununu</p>	<p>Highlighted that the state now has full-day kindergarten.</p>
 <p>North Dakota Gov. Doug Burgum</p>	<p>Celebrated the approval of a \$66 million package last year to address child care availability, affordability and quality.</p>
 <p>Virginia Gov. Glenn Youngkin</p>	<p>Praised transformational efforts to support the child care system. Announced the creation of the Building Blocks for VA Families child care program which allows working families to choose quality care that meets the needs of their families.</p>



We can't wait until kindergarten to start setting up our kids for a strong future. Children's experiences from birth to five determine the trajectory of their entire lives, from social development to academic achievement to career success."

Kansas
Gov. Laura Kelly









To learn more about state policy action in this area, see our [Early Care and Education](#) work. Please also see NGA's [Children and Families](#) page, [Optimizing Federal COVID Relief Funds: State Perspectives On Bolstering Child Care And Early Childhood Systems](#), and [State Strategies To Address The Impact Of COVID-19 On Maternal And Child Populations: Child Care And COVID-19](#).



ACADEMIC ACHIEVEMENT AND LITERACY

At least **25 governors** addressed academic achievement and literacy. In some addresses, governors highlighted efforts to improve students' academic proficiency through efforts such as intensive tutoring, increased funding for academic progress plans and efforts to support comprehensive testing plans. Governors also stressed the importance of focusing on early literacy and the importance of using updated literacy instruction to improve reading outcomes.

Highlights

 Alabama Gov. Kay Ivey	Mentioned how the Governor's Commission on Teaching and Learning provided a report that will serve as a blueprint for improving student outcomes for the next three years. Celebrated the efforts of the Turnaround Schools Initiative and its impact on student achievement.
 California Gov. Gavin Newsom	Mentioned budgeting \$25 million to support trainings for educators to administer literacy screenings and \$20 million to develop and provide training for math coaches and leaders who can provide training and support to math teachers.
 Idaho Gov. Brad Little	Spoke about increasing funding for literacy by 500% over the course of his administration.
 Indiana Gov. Eric Holcomb	Committed to improving third grade reading policies to ensure mastery by every student.
 New Mexico Gov. Michelle Lujan Grisham	Highlighted a 4% increase last year in reading scores for students in third through eighth grade and a 5% increase for Native American students. Noted the U.S. has some of the lowest literacy rates of any wealthy nation and called for greater investment in literacy for New Mexico.
 Rhode Island Gov. Dan McKee	Shared that the student achievement goal will be met by improving three main areas: Rhode Island Comprehensive Assessment System scores, student attendance and FAFSA completion. Proposed \$15 million for math and English language arts coaching for students and professional development for teachers. Announced that 38 out of 39 cities and towns have joined the Learn365RI effort.



We must continue to invest in early literacy and professional development in the science of reading. This will ensure that all children can be reading on grade level by the end of third grade. We know that students who cannot read proficiently by third grade are four times more likely to drop out of high school.

South Carolina
Gov. Henry McMaster

ACADEMIC ACHIEVEMENT AND LITERACY

Highlights (continued)



Virginia

Gov. Glenn Youngkin

Highlighted intensive tutoring efforts in math and reading between third and eighth grade to support student achievement through the [ALL-IN Virginia Plan](#). Highlighted the impact of interrupted instruction on students and praised the role of the state's tutoring program in catching students up. Called for an overhaul of the state funding system.



U.S. Virgin Islands

Gov. Albert Bryan Jr.

Praised the state education agency for ongoing implementation of the state's strategic plan for student achievement. Noted that each school has developed school improvement plans aligned to the [state's strategic plan](#) and that each principal was awarded \$250,000 to support implementation. Praised schools for deploying tools to close achievement gaps, such as iReady and the Apps for Gaps literacy program.



To learn more about state policy action in this area, see our [Student Learning](#) work and NGA's [webinar series](#) called State Strategies For Addressing K-12 Student Needs.



PHYSICAL AND MENTAL HEALTH

Student health and wellness was another trending topic this year with at least **20 governors** mentioning it. Governors continued to address student mental health by proposing plans to expand the access of quality mental health services in school settings. Other governors also mentioned efforts around suicide prevention and ensuring students have access to healthy nutrition options.

Highlights



Alabama

Gov. Kay Ivey

Shared a need to continue to invest in critical mental health care for students.



Idaho

Gov. Brad Little

Proposed a new Statewide Student Behavioral Health Initiative for additional suicide prevention measures through the [IdahoWorks](#) program. Urged the Legislature to consider policies protecting student health and well-being from social media.



Maine

Gov. Janet Mills

Celebrated providing universal free school meals and noted that Maine was one of the first states to adopt this approach.



We also invested in campus safety and mental health and made breakfast and lunch free. When kids are unsafe ... struggling ... or starving, they cannot reach their full potential.

Michigan
Gov. Gretchen Whitmer

PHYSICAL AND MENTAL HEALTH

Highlights (continued)



Massachusetts
Gov. Maura Healey

Praised the universal school meals program and recognized the role of nutrition in allowing students to focus on learning. Addressed the crisis in youth mental health.



New York
Gov. Kathy Hochul

Pledged to make historically high mental health investments to ensure mental health services are available to every school-aged child and mental health clinics are available in every school that wants one. Proposed expanding peer support programs so students can share safe spaces with other students with similar challenges



South Carolina
Gov. Henry McMaster

Shared significant progress in providing school-based mental health services to school-aged children. The governor shared that the number of school-based mental health counselors available for public schools has doubled from Jan. 2022 to Sept. 2023. He also shared that 200 additional schools now have access to mental health counseling and that all traditional school districts now have access to mental health counseling.



Wisconsin
Gov. Tony Evers

Praised the investment in the [Get Kids Ahead Initiative](#) to provide school-based mental health services statewide. Noted concerns about student mental health and pointed out that one-third of high school students experience feelings of sadness and hopelessness every day. Praised students for their efforts to expand the [Raise Your Voice](#) mental health program.



Wyoming
Gov. Mark Gordon

Noted mental health challenges in schools and committed to increasing funding for mental health services.





To learn more about state policy action in this area, see our [Student Health and Wellness](#) work and NGA's K-12 Education's Student and School Staff Well-Being [Project](#), Children and Families' [Policy Academy](#) to Drive Thriving You Mental Health and Well-Being, and Strengthening Youth Mental Health: [A Governor's Playbook](#).





ADDITIONAL CONSIDERATIONS

Other topics frequently mentioned by governors included **school choice** and **postsecondary affordability**. These issues were not mentioned as often as the issues above but were notable as emerging issues.

At least **19 governors** spoke about school choice across multiple issue areas, including choice/open enrollment, school vouchers, charter schools and tax credit scholarships. Some governors highlighted efforts to increase educational opportunities for parents and students by removing barriers and costs. Others were apprehensive about education voucher programs citing impacts on school funding and concerns about accountability.

 Arizona Gov. Katie Hobbs	Shared concerns about accountability and transparency in the state's Empowerment Scholarship Account program. Proposed a new requirement that ESA recipients must have attend a public school for at least 100 days.
 New Hampshire Gov. Chris Sununu	Praised the passage of the state's Education Freedom Accounts and noted that they are ranked as the most effective and popular school choice program in the country. Urged the passage of legislation to expand the Education Freedom Accounts school choice program.

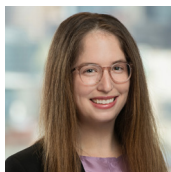
At least **15 governors** spoke about postsecondary affordability. They highlighted efforts to decrease the cost of higher education for students and to establish loan forgiveness programs for specific populations or career pathways.

 Michigan Gov. Gretchen Whitmer	Highlighted the Michigan Achievement Scholarship and Michigan Reconnect, which lowers the cost of college. Stated that community college and training for medical techs and electricians was free for anyone 21 and older with Michigan Reconnect. Called for tuition-free community college for all high school graduates.
 West Virginia Gov. Jim Justice	Praised the state's West Virginia Invest free college policy for supporting 4,500 students.

About the Authors

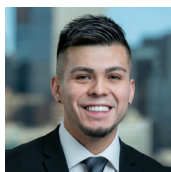


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As a policy researcher, Lauren provides quality research on a variety of education topics. Prior to joining Education Commission of the States, Lauren earned a master's degree in public policy from the University of Michigan. Before attending graduate school, Lauren spent four years teaching and three years working with a community-based neighborhood center in Denver. Lauren strongly believes in the importance of creating education policies that allow all children to excel. Contact Lauren at lpeisach@ecs.org.

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ABOUT NGA



Founded in 1908, the National Governors Association is the voice of the nation's governors and one of the most respected public policy organizations in the country. The association's members are the governors of the 55 states, territories and commonwealths. Members come to the association from across the political spectrum, but NGA itself is boldly nonpartisan.