

Governors' Top Education Priorities in 2019 State of the State Addresses

Sarah Pompelia and Heidi Macdonald



Change swept throughout the country with the 2018 elections, bringing 20 new governors into office. Whether returning or starting their first term, governors are taking the opportunity in their State of the State addresses to highlight achievements and outline plans for the future. To date, every governor who has given an address has mentioned an accomplishment or a proposal related to education. Nearly all governors have indicated the importance of education to their state's success, and the ideas they proposed underscore that sentiment. As **Idaho** Gov. Brad Little pointed out in his address, "Education policy requires long-term planning and commitment."

"The most important investments we make as public servants will impact ... [the state] long after we have completed our time in office. Foremost among them is ensuring that our kids, students and workers have a world-class education."

Gov. Steve Bullock
MONTANA

Each year, Education Commission of the States tracks, analyzes and identifies trends in education policy accomplishments and proposals featured in governors' State of the State addresses. To date, 48 governors have delivered their 2019 addresses, and these are the top six education priorities mentioned:

At least 36 governors spoke about **school finance**, addressing specific financial needs as well as larger changes to funding schools.

At least 35 governors highlighted accomplishments and plans related to meeting economic needs in their states through **workforce development**.

Governors dedicated attention to the importance of **teaching quality**, with at least 26 speaking about issues related to the profession.

Governors in at least 24 states addressed the needs of their youngest students through **early learning** initiatives.

At least 19 governors proposed **postsecondary financial aid** policies to address the need for more affordable higher education.

At least 18 governors highlighted the importance of **school safety**.

[Click here](#) for complete summaries of education policy priorities outlined in each governor's State of the State address.

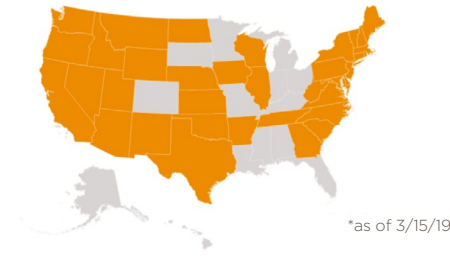
School Finance

"The investment we make in our kids today will yield dividends for generations."

Gov. Tony Evers
WISCONSIN

Consistent with years past, the majority of governors — at least 36 this year — mentioned school finance in their State of the State addresses. While some mentioned overall increases to per-pupil spending or proposals to make changes to the state funding formula, others spoke to dollar amounts they allocated to specific initiatives — including special education, facilities upgrades, after-school enrichment, pre-K expansion and teacher salaries. At least nine governors directly made a connection between finance and equity, seeking to ensure that districts and schools with the most need get a larger share of resources.

At least **36 governors*** spoke about **SCHOOL FINANCE**



Highlights



Gov. Gavin Newsom
CALIFORNIA

Proposed an investment of more than \$80 billion in public education, including \$576 million for special education.



Gov. Laura Kelly
KANSAS

Highlighted a proposal to fully fund public schools in the upcoming years.



Gov. Larry Hogan
MARYLAND

Asked lawmakers to pass the Building Opportunity Fund to help finance upgrades and repairs to school buildings.



Gov. Charlie Baker
MASSACHUSETTS

Proposed opportunities for underperforming school districts to invest jointly with the department of education in proven best practices like acceleration academies, professional development, after-school enrichment and leadership development programs.



Gov. Doug Burgum
NORTH DAKOTA

Proposed investing an additional \$25 million in the school construction revolving loan fund by leveraging more funds to drive a total of \$535 million in construction.



Gov. Gina Raimondo
RHODE ISLAND

Announced an additional \$30 million in school funding.



Interested in learning more about funding for at-risk students? This [report](#) analyzes how states fund at-risk students and how much additional money at-risk students receive from states.

Workforce Development

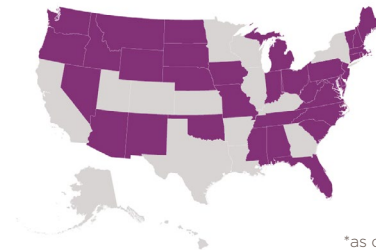
"The workforce is continually impacted by innovation and globalization. And we need an education system that adapts to those changes."

Gov. Kim Reynolds
IOWA

Workforce development has remained a top priority for governors in 2019. This year's analysis combines K-12 career and technical education programs and postsecondary or retraining proposals, and at least 35 governors spoke about such initiatives in their State of the State addresses. They spoke to both current and future workforce demands and how education can prepare students to contribute to state economies, align talent with needs and keep students in the state after graduation. Specific initiatives mentioned include apprenticeships; industry-credentialing; employer-driven education and retraining; and programs focused on such groups as veterans, middle-schoolers and adults in rural areas.

At least **35 governors*** spoke about

WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT



*as of 3/15/19

Highlights



Gov. Doug Ducey
ARIZONA

Proposed building and expanding skilled-trade programs through budget recommendations and aligning programs with future job demands.



Gov. Ned Lamont
CONNECTICUT

Emphasized the importance of aligning education with the workforce by increasing access to vocational-technical schools and apprenticeships.



Gov. Janet Mills
MAINE

Proposed a budget that increases funding for career and technical high schools so residents can compete for skilled jobs.



Gov. Mike Parson
MISSOURI

Proposed the creation of the Fast Track program and \$22 million in funding to provide advanced training in high-demand industries through state postsecondary institutions.



Gov. Kevin Stitt
OKLAHOMA

Promised to sign any legislation that breaks down silos between common education, career and technical education and higher education to better align these experiences with tomorrow's workforce needs.



Gov. Jay Inslee
WASHINGTON

Proposed a budget that will provide 100,000 students the opportunity to participate in paid internships and apprenticeships over the next 10 years.



Interested in learning more about the approaches states are taking with their workforce development systems? Read more in [this report](#), which draws on interviews in four states.

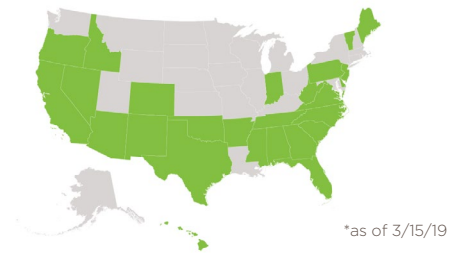
Teaching Quality

"We agree that we need to attract, train and retain the best teachers in the country."

Gov. Kate Brown
OREGON

Teaching quality remains at the forefront of governors' education concerns. This year, at least 26 governors referenced it in their State of the State addresses. The majority spoke about teacher compensation and diversified pay, including increased base salaries, to remain competitive regionally and nationally. Some also proposed pay raises across the board and others only for designated teachers. Additionally, governors prioritized recruitment and retention strategies, including expanding and providing increased funding for teacher academies, scholarships for teachers who intend to stay in the state to teach and student loan repayment for teachers in high-need schools or rural areas.

At least **26 governors*** spoke about **TEACHING QUALITY**



Highlights

 **Gov. Asa Hutchinson**
ARKANSAS

Proposed a \$60 million state budget allocation to raise teacher base pay by \$4,000 over the next four years.

 **Gov. John Carney**
DELAWARE

Proposed a budget that will more than double the funding for student loan repayment for teachers in high-need schools and noted that the program plans to reach 700 teachers.

 **Gov. Eric Holcomb**
INDIANA

Announced the creation of the Next Level Teacher Pay Commission to identify resources that can be made available to make sure teacher compensation is competitive with neighboring Midwestern states.

 **Gov. Tom Wolf**
PENNSYLVANIA

Proposed to raise the pay floor for teachers to \$45,000 a year.

 **Gov. Greg Abbott**
TEXAS

Proposed incentives to place effective teachers in schools where they are needed most and the creation of a pathway that would allow effective teachers to earn a six-figure salary.

 **Gov. Jim Justice**
WEST VIRGINIA

Urged lawmakers to raise salaries for teachers in math, science, foreign language and special education.



Interested in learning more about policies pertaining to targeted teacher recruitment? See [this report](#), which captures legislation in six areas related to attracting teachers to high-need schools and subjects.

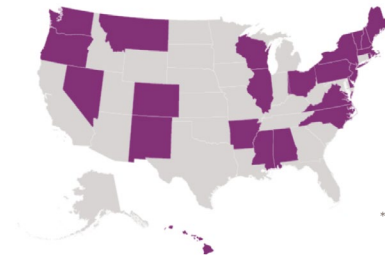
Early Learning

"We all realize that children learn early and retain those lessons and skills throughout their lives."

Gov. Phil Bryant
MISSISSIPPI

Recognizing that the early learning years are some of the most crucial in a child's development socially, emotionally and academically, governors continue to prioritize early learning opportunities. This year, at least 24 governors spoke about early childhood education in their State of the State addresses. Specific issues include increasing overall early learning funding, expanding or creating free pre-K or pilot programs, and increasing programmatic quality. Additionally, governors mentioned holistic approaches that connect parents of students in publicly funded, early childhood education programs with services in education, workforce training and health care; and creating statewide referral systems to connect families with early learning services.

At least **24 governors*** spoke about **EARLY LEARNING**



*as of 3/15/19

Highlights



Gov. Jared Polis
COLORADO

Proposed providing every community with free, full-day kindergarten by fall 2019 and expanding free pre-K to 8,000 more children, with the goal of offering full-day pre-K to every child in the state in the future.



Gov. David Ige
HAWAII

Proposed creating a universal, high-quality pre-K system with the goal of creating more than 300 public pre-K classrooms.



Gov. Janet Mills
MAINE

Proposed a budget that would make pre-K programs available to all 4-year-olds.



Gov. Chris Sununu
NEW HAMPSHIRE

Proposed a budget that will create a state director of early childhood education. The new position will coordinate and streamline early childhood services; bridge the divide between the departments of education and health and human services; and help to ensure investments in children are data-driven, coordinated and efficient.



Gov. Michelle Lujan Grisham
NEW MEXICO

Proposed universal pre-K for every child and a budget to expand statewide pre-K enrollment to 80 percent within the next five years by investing \$60 million in new pre-K classroom slots this year.



Gov. Andrew Cuomo
NEW YORK

Proposed a budget expanding pre-K for 3- and 4-year-olds.



Interested in how states approach early childhood governance? [This report](#) examines the different structures and strategies states are currently using.

Postsecondary Financial Aid

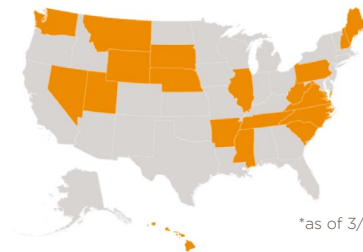
"If you're willing to put your newly acquired skills to work here in our Commonwealth, the least we can do is help you avoid carrying around a crushing burden of student debt."

Gov. Tom Wolf
PENNSYLVANIA

As states face the rising costs of higher education, many governors have proposed postsecondary financial aid initiatives as a way of making a degree or a credential more affordable. At least 19 governors mentioned postsecondary financial aid in their State of the State addresses this year. Their proposals include increasing scholarship funds, targeting financial aid to specific student populations, partnering with university foundations to increase need-based financial aid and expanding the number of programs for which state financial aid may be used.

At least **19 governors*** spoke about

POSTSECONDARY FINANCIAL AID



Highlights



Gov. Steve Bullock
MONTANA

Proposed a budget that will provide \$5 million for need-based aid, which would be matched by university foundations.



Gov. Pete Ricketts
NEBRASKA

Recommended the creation of the Nebraska Talent Scholarships program and 2,100 new scholarships for students to attend postsecondary programs.



Gov. Steve Sisolak
NEVADA

Proposed increasing funding for scholarship programs to provide more opportunities for students to earn degrees and credentials.



Gov. Henry McMaster
SOUTH CAROLINA

Proposed a budget that triples new lottery funding for workforce scholarships and grants to help students at state technical colleges.



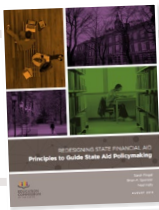
Gov. Kristi Noem
SOUTH DAKOTA

Announced support for legislation to make home-schooled children eligible for the South Dakota Opportunity Scholarship.



Gov. Mark Gordon
WYOMING

Announced support for additional funding for scholarships to attract in-state students to the University of Wyoming.



Interested in learning more about financial aid redesign? [This resource](#) outlines principles for state leaders to focus on in their reform efforts.

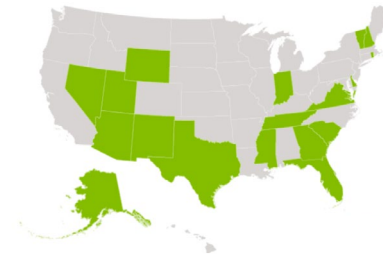
School Safety

“Whatever else happens in the classroom, the safety of our children and teachers is paramount for my administration and for all of our elected leaders.”

Gov. Bill Lee
TENNESSEE

This year, at least 18 governors mentioned school safety in their State of the State addresses. Their proposals include investing in school facility upgrades that specifically target school safety improvements and launching a “See Something, Say Something” public service. Governors also mentioned implementing recommendations from state school safety task forces, which include enhancing student support services in schools, providing more funding for safety equipment and requiring active shooter training and threat assessments. Additionally, governors mentioned enhanced training for school resource officers.

At least **18 governors*** spoke about **SCHOOL SAFETY**



*as of 3/15/19

Highlights



Gov. Brian Kemp
GEORGIA

Included \$69 million in one-time funding for school security grants so that school boards, administrators, teachers, parents and students may determine school security priorities.



Gov. Phil Bryant
MISSISSIPPI

Requested the passage of the Mississippi School Safety Act to protect students and teachers.



Gov. Steve Sisolak
NEVADA

Announced an allocation of a portion of the recreational marijuana tax revenue to prevent violence in schools.



Gov. Gary Herbert
UTAH

Proposed investing over \$100 million in school facility upgrades, allocating two-thirds of that investment specifically for school safety improvements.



Gov. Phil Scott
VERMONT

Proposed using budget adjustments to fund \$1.5 million in safety improvements, suggested capital investments to ensure more schools are [E911-compliant](#) and announced the launch of a “See Something, Say Something” public service campaign with the Vermont National Education Association.



Gov. Ralph Northam
VIRGINIA

Proposed that all school resource officers receive training approved by the Virginia Department of Criminal Justice Services.

Interested in learning more about school safety? This [50-State Comparison](#) provides a comprehensive review of school safety policies in state statute and regulation.

Emerging Trends

While many issues highlighted in this resource come up in governors' addresses year after year, there are a few new topics emerging that did not land in the top six. These are the emerging trends of 2019:

Closely related to financial aid, **postsecondary affordability** appeared in at least 17 addresses where governors noted the high cost of higher education and efforts to mitigate it.

At least 16 governors mentioned **school health** initiatives in their addresses, with many recognizing a need for mental health supports in schools.

At least 15 governors spoke about **high school** issues, including Advanced Placement, dropout prevention, college readiness, early college, dual enrollment and graduation requirements.

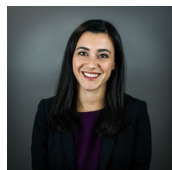
Technology appeared in at least 12 addresses this year, with a focus on ensuring broadband access to all schools.

At least 12 governors mentioned **rural education** issues, specifically technology, teacher shortages and higher education or workforce opportunities in rural areas in their states.



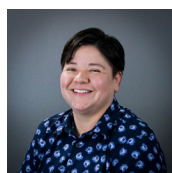
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About NGA



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