

High-Level Analysis of State Postsecondary Governance Structures

Introduction

In March 2019, Education Commission of the States released a comprehensive summary of the postsecondary governance landscapes in each state and the District of Columbia. The [interactive data visualization](#), individual state profiles and 50-State Comparison capture state governance ecosystems that consist of coordinating boards/agencies and governing boards, administrative/service agencies, advisory groups and membership organizations. These resources are intended to assist policy and education leaders in understanding postsecondary governance systems in their states and others.

This analysis summarizes information about state postsecondary governance models, coordinating and governing boards and administrative/service agencies, and the appointing authority of higher education executive officers.

State Postsecondary Governance Models

Higher education governance systems across the states and District of Columbia are varied and complex. The structures are a mix of coordinating and governing boards at the state, system and institutional levels; and other agencies and organizations may play important roles in the postsecondary landscape.

While no two states have the same postsecondary governance system, the structures fall within general models — even though the categorization is not a straightforward process.¹ Beyond the basic approaches, numerous boards also govern other postsecondary systems, multi-campus institutions and individual institutions.

Single, Statewide Coordinating Board/Agency: Twenty states have a single coordinating board and/or agency that is responsible for key aspects of the state’s role with public postsecondary institutions and, in some cases, independent colleges.

States include: Alabama, Arkansas, Colorado, Illinois, Indiana, Kentucky, Louisiana, Maryland, Massachusetts, Missouri, Nebraska, New Mexico, Ohio, Oklahoma, Oregon, South Carolina, Tennessee, Texas, Virginia and Washington.

Single, Statewide Governing Board: Eight states have a statewide governing board that manages and oversees most functions of the public higher education system and typically has broad authority over institutions.

States include: Alaska, Hawaii, Idaho, Kansas, Montana, Nevada, North Dakota and Rhode Island.

One or More Systemwide Coordinating or Governing Board: Nineteen states have one or more coordinating or governing boards that oversee institutions within a postsecondary system.

These states do not have statewide coordinating or governing boards.

States include: Arizona, California, Connecticut, Florida, Georgia, Iowa, Maine, Minnesota, Mississippi, New Hampshire, New York, North Carolina, Pennsylvania, South Dakota, Utah, Vermont, West Virginia, Wisconsin and Wyoming.

Administrative/Service Agency: At least 11 states and the District of Columbia have higher education administrative agencies that may oversee financial aid and specific academic programs, institutional licensure approval and information/data services. The agencies' authority varies across the states and with respect to different types of institutions. These states also have system-level coordinating or governing boards and/or governing boards for individual institutions.

States include: Alaska, Arizona, Connecticut, Delaware, District of Columbia, Florida, Iowa, Minnesota, New Hampshire, New Jersey, New York and Pennsylvania.

Note: Michigan does not have a state-level board or agency, and the postsecondary systems and institutions are governed by individual boards.

Coordinating Boards/Agencies, Governing Boards and Administrative/Service Agencies

The following chart summarizes the number of statewide and major, systemwide coordinating boards/agencies and governing boards, as well as administrative/service agencies. See Notes 1 for further explanation of the boards and agencies. The numbers in parentheses indicate states with more than one board.

Type of Board	Number of States	Number of Boards or Agencies	States
Single, Statewide Coordinating Board/Agency	20	20	Alabama, Arkansas, Colorado, Illinois, Indiana, Kentucky, Louisiana, Maryland, Massachusetts, Missouri, Nebraska, New Mexico, Ohio, Oklahoma, Oregon, South Carolina, Tennessee, Texas, Virginia and Washington

Single, Statewide Governing Board	8	8	Alaska, Hawaii, Idaho, Kansas, Montana, Nevada, North Dakota and Rhode Island
One or More Major, Systemwide Governing Board	14	25	Arizona, California (3), Connecticut, Florida (2), Georgia (2), Iowa (2), Maine (2), Minnesota (2), New Hampshire (2), New York (2), North Carolina (2), Pennsylvania, Utah (2) and Vermont
One or More Major, Systemwide Coordinating Board	2	3	West Virginia (2) and Wyoming
Major, Systemwide Coordinating and Governing Board	3	6	Mississippi (2), South Dakota (2) and Wisconsin (2)
Administrative/Service Agencies	11 and DC	12	Alaska, Arizona, Connecticut, Delaware, District of Columbia, Florida, Iowa, Minnesota, New Hampshire, New Jersey, New York and Pennsylvania

Appointing Authority of Higher Education Executive Officers

The following table summarizes the authority or entity that appoints, approves or hires the higher education executive officers for statewide and major, systemwide coordinating boards/agencies and governing boards, as well as administrative/service agencies. See Notes 2 for further explanation of the appointing authority of boards and agencies, including some of the states marked with parentheses.

Appointing Authority	Number of States	Number of Boards or Agencies	States
Agency Board or Agency Committee	2	2	Alaska (1) and Delaware
Coordinating Board	18	19	Alabama, Illinois, Indiana, Kentucky, Louisiana, Mississippi (1), Missouri, Nebraska, Oklahoma, Oregon, South Carolina, South Dakota (1), Tennessee, Texas, Virginia, Wisconsin (1), West Virginia (2) and Wyoming (1)
Coordinating Board, With Approval of Governor	1	1	Arkansas
Governing Board	23	31	Alaska (1), Arizona, California (3), Connecticut (1), Florida (1), Georgia (2), Hawaii, Iowa (1), Kansas, Maine (2), Minnesota (2), Mississippi (1), Montana, Nevada, New Hampshire (2), New York

			(2), North Carolina (2), North Dakota, Pennsylvania (1), Rhode Island, South Dakota (1), Vermont and Wisconsin (1)
Governing Board, With Approval of Governor and Senate	1	2	Utah (2)
Governor	2	2	New Hampshire (1) and Pennsylvania (1)
Governor, With Approval of Senate or Legislature	7	7	Colorado, Connecticut (1), Maryland, Minnesota (1), New Jersey, New Mexico and Ohio
Governor, on Recommendation of Coordinating Board	1	1	Washington
State Board of Education or Commission/Secretary of Education	6	6	District of Columbia, Florida (1), Idaho, Iowa (1), Massachusetts and New York (1)

Notes 1

As indicated in the section on postsecondary governance models, several states have more than one system-level coordinating or governing board and may also have a statewide administrative agency.

- Florida, Iowa, New Hampshire, New York and Pennsylvania have postsecondary divisions within their K-12 departments of education that function as administrative/service agencies.
- Kansas and Montana’s statewide boards serve governing and coordinating roles for different institutions. However, the boards typically are categorized as governing.
- Mississippi, South Dakota and Wisconsin have a governing board for the four-year systems and a coordinating board for the two-year systems.
- New Mexico does not have a board affiliated with the department of higher education, which serves as a statewide coordinating agency.
- New York’s state board of education has certain governing responsibilities for all public K-12 and higher education. However, governing boards for the City University of New York and the State University of New York exercise significantly more authority over their institutions.
- Ohio’s Board of Regents serves an advisory role to the executive director of the department of higher education, which is a statewide coordinating agency.
- West Virginia has separate coordinating boards for the four-year and two-year systems.
- Wyoming has a coordinating board for two-year institutions and a governing board for the University of Wyoming, which is not considered a system.

Notes 2

The following notes describe the appointing authority of executive directors for various boards and agencies within the states.

- The Alaska Commission on Postsecondary Education's executive director is appointed by a board that oversees the agency. The University of Alaska Board of Regents appoints the system's executive director.
- Connecticut's Board of Regents for Higher Education appoints the system's executive director, and the governor appoints the director of the state office of higher education.
- Florida's governing board for the four-year system appoints its executive director, and the K-12 commissioner of education appoints the Division of Florida Colleges' director within the department of education.
- The Iowa Board of Regents appoints the system's executive director, and the K-12 commissioner of education appoints the director of the Division of Community Colleges and Workforce Preparation.
- Massachusetts' Board of Higher Education appoints the executive director with the approval of the secretary of education, who is appointed by the governor.
- Minnesota's governing boards appoint their system's executive director, and the governor appoints the director of the state higher education office.
- Mississippi, South Dakota and Wisconsin's coordinating and governing boards appoint their systems' executive directors.
- New Hampshire's governing boards appoint their system's executive director. The governor appoints the Division of Higher Education director after consultation with the K-12 education commissioner, higher education commission and state board of education.
- New York's two governing boards appoint their system's executive director. The governor appoints the director of the office of higher education within the department of education.
- The Pennsylvania State System of Higher Education Board of Governors appoints the system's executive director, and the governor appoints the director of the Office of Postsecondary and Higher Education within the department of education.
- Rhode Island's governor serves as an additional voting member of the Council on Postsecondary Education for the purpose of appointing, retaining or dismissing the commissioner.

Education Commission of the States Staff Contact

Mary Fulton, senior policy analyst

mfulton@ecs.org

¹ Aims C. McGuinness, *State Policy Leadership for the Future: History of state coordination and governance and alternatives for the future* (Denver: Education Commission of the States, 2016), <https://www.ecs.org/state-policy-leadership-for-the-future-history-of-state-coordination-and-governance-and-alternatives-for-the-future/>, 46-47.