

Education Task Forces and Commissions

Damion Pechota and Mary Fulton

What Is the Issue, and Why Does It Matter?

Legislators and governors frequently establish task forces or commissions to study an idea or topic area related to education, often to inform future policymaking. Task forces and commissions typically engage a broad representation of stakeholders and may help build consensus and support for solutions to a state's short- and long-term education and workforce challenges.

Legislators and governors often have significant latitude in creating or reestablishing task forces and commissions for various reasons and in different forms, including:

- Legislative study committees charged with recommending legislation or other policies.
- Executive branch committees that examine policies and directives around specified policy areas.
- Existing task forces that require an extension or revised responsibilities to address changing circumstances or priorities.
- Councils or advisory groups led by state boards or agencies that explore topic areas and provide policy recommendations.

While the charge, composition and actions may vary, task forces can serve as an effective strategy to inform the policymaking process and advance state education and workforce goals. In some cases, states create task forces when policymakers are unable to agree on a course of action for a particular education issue. The outcomes of task forces and commissions are often based on the original intent and charge and may include policy action, a deeper understanding of issues for future consideration and/or continued collaboration on an education topic.

This Policy Snapshot highlights examples of task forces and commissions established in 2020, which fall under the following categories:

EARLY LEARNING AND K-12 EDUCATION: Childhood services, school safety, digital-media literacy and the systematic impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic.

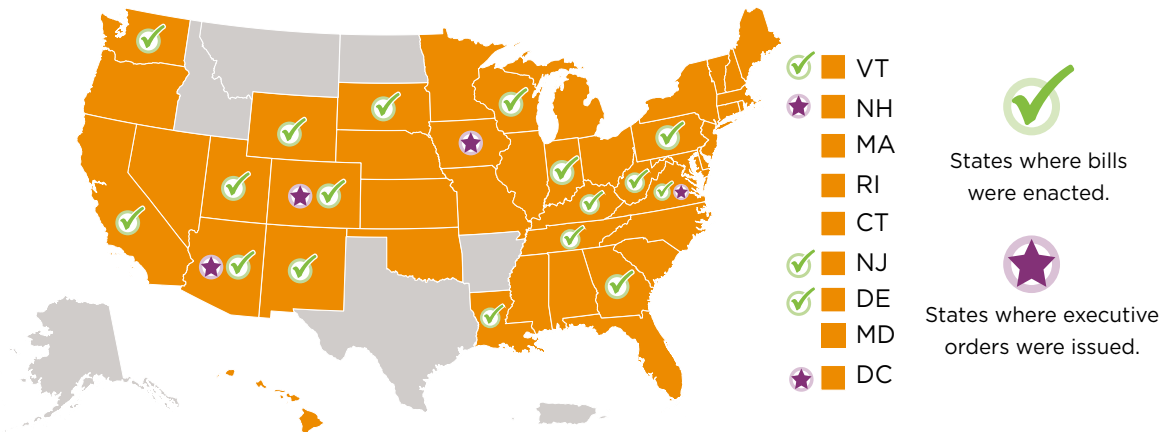
STUDENT POPULATIONS AND PROGRAMS: Education and services for vulnerable student populations across the P-20 continuum, including youths in the child welfare system, assessment accommodations for students with disabilities, after-school programs, and students in the juvenile justice system and other institutional programs.

POSTSECONDARY EDUCATION AND WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT: Educational opportunities for adult students, administrative services at four-year institutions and postsecondary attainment goals.

How Many States Considered Legislation in 2020?

Based on a review of 2020 legislative activity concerning task forces and commissions:

- At least **428 bills** were introduced in **44 states** and the **District of Columbia**.
- At least **40 bills** were enacted in **20 states**.
- Additionally, at least **seven executive orders** were issued in **five states** and the **District of Columbia**.



STATE	LEGISLATION	EXECUTIVE ORDER
Arizona	H.B. 2684	Executive Order 2020-05 Executive Order 2020-06
California	A.B. 89	
Colorado	H.B. 20-1418 S.B. 20-023	Executive Order B 2020-001
Delaware	S.B. 260	
D.C.		Order 2020-035
Georgia	S.R. 833 S.R. 1035	
Indiana	H.B. 1153 H.B. 1419 S.B. 346	
Iowa		Executive Order No. 2
Kentucky	H.R. 135	
Louisiana	H.B. 251 H.R. 34 H.C.R. 81 S.B. 312 S.C.R. 63	
New Hampshire		Executive Order 2020-03
New Jersey	S. 788	
New Mexico	H.J.M. 2 H.J.M. 3	

STATE	LEGISLATION	EXECUTIVE ORDER
Pennsylvania	H.B. 1210 H.R. 180 H.R. 867	
South Dakota	S.B. 55	
Tennessee	S.B. 1974	
Utah	H.B. 372	
Vermont	H. 961	
Virginia	H.B. 30 H.B. 916 H.B. 1355 S.J. 30 S.B. 41 S.B. 853 S.B. 904 S.B. 957	Executive Order No. 48
Washington	H.B. 2116 H.B. 2711	
West Virginia	H.B. 4414 S.B. 839	
Wisconsin	A.B. 110	
Wyoming	H.B. 40	

Examples of Enacted Legislation and Executive Orders

Early Learning and K-12 Education

COLORADO

S.B. 20-023 creates an interagency working group to enhance school safety through cost-effective, evidence-based practices. The working group is required to study and implement recommendations from a 2019 state auditor's **report** on school safety; identify shared metrics to examine program effectiveness; facilitate and address data sharing across the state; facilitate interagency coordination and communication related to school safety; and fulfill other responsibilities. The working group is required to provide an annual report on its activities to the governor and legislative leadership. The act repeals the working group on Sept. 1, 2022, but the department of regulatory agencies will conduct a review before it sunsets.

NEW HAMPSHIRE

Executive Order 2020-03 establishes the **Council for Thriving Children** and identifies the departments of health and human services and education as the lead agencies. The council is required to make recommendations for strengthening the early childhood infrastructure in child care, schools and community settings; ensuring an integrated and coordinated early childhood governance structure; enhancing data systems to inform and monitor program and service access, equity and quality; and performing other tasks. The council is required to submit an annual report to the governor on its activities, recommendations and plans.

TENNESSEE

S.B. 1974 creates the **Tennessee Commission on Education Recovery and Innovation** to examine the short- and long-term systemic effects of the COVID-19 pandemic and natural disasters on the state's educational systems. The commission is required to make recommendations to the General Assembly, state education boards and agencies, and postsecondary institutions on strategies to close educational gaps resulting from school closures. The recommendations also should address ways to create flexibility in delivering education across the P-20 continuum. In December 2020, the commission offered a **preliminary report** and identified four primary areas of focus for its work: learning loss; well-being; postsecondary and career preparedness; and technology gaps. The members must submit a final report by June 30, 2022, and the commission is scheduled to end July 1, 2022.

UTAH

H.B. 372 establishes the Digital Wellness, Citizenship and Safe Technology Commission to ensure that students are digital-media literate and able to use technology safely and ethically. The commission is required to identify best practices for training every student in digital citizenship; compile resources and emerging research on several digital citizenship topics, including cyberbullying; collaborate and coordinate efforts on programs related to digital citizenship; and perform other duties. The commission is required to annually report its activities and outcomes to the education interim committee and state board of education. The commission is repealed on July 1, 2023.

Student Populations and Programs



Executive Order 2020-05 continues the Governor’s Council on Child Safety and Family Empowerment to align, leverage and coordinate public and private resources to solve challenges facing vulnerable children and families within — or at risk of entering — the child welfare system. The council’s charge includes providing support to strengthen families that are caring for foster and adopted children; collaborating with state, faith-based and community partners to decrease the number of children in foster care by facilitating and providing support for prevention and trauma-informed services; working with the Governor’s Office of Youth, Faith and Family to prepare and update a state master plan; and fulfilling other responsibilities. The council, which is required to submit an annual progress report to the governor, ends June 30, 2025.



S.B. 346 establishes the **Indiana Standards and Assessment Accommodation Task Force** to determine whether appropriate accommodations are available to accurately measure learning aligned with a student’s individualized education, special education or service plan. The charge also requires the task force to explore the possibility of creating separate reading comprehension and academic standards. In November 2020, the task force issued a **final report** with seven recommendations, including researching strategies to assess reading comprehension in separate skill areas and allowing accommodations on statewide assessments to ensure accessibility to all students. The task force ends July 1, 2021.



H.R. 180 creates an **advisory committee** to study the return on investment in after-school programs and offer strategies for capturing and bolstering their outcomes. The resolution specifies the outcomes for the committee to consider, including the improvement of social-, emotional-, academic- and career-readiness competencies of school-age children. The committee will examine strategies to reduce violence and crime; adolescent pregnancies; tobacco, alcohol and substance abuse; disengagement from school; school suspension and truancy; and health-compromising behaviors. Also, the committee members must consider ways to ensure that children of working families have access to safe after-school environments. The committee must report findings and recommendations to the chief clerk of the house of representatives.



H.B. 2116 establishes the **Improving Institutional Education Programs and Outcomes Task Force** to examine the educational services delivered to youths in the juvenile justice system and students with specialized needs. The task force issued a **final report** in December 2020 with 12 recommendations, including creating smooth transitions throughout the institutional education system; supporting safe school environments and related services to meet the complex needs of students; and building an equitable, long-term funding model to prioritize education delivery and support services. The task force ends June 30, 2021.

Postsecondary Education and Workforce Development



S.R. 1035 created the Senate Educating Adult Students Study Committee to examine a range of opportunities for adults over the age of 20 to access education and workforce training. The committee was required to study the conditions and issues related to providing educational opportunities to adults with and without a high school or GED diploma. The resolution indicated that committee members may adopt findings or recommendations that include suggestions for proposed legislation and submit a report. The **committee** ended Dec. 1, 2020, and did not adopt recommendations or provide a report.



S.B. 55 requires the state board of regents to assemble a **task force** to examine possible program and administrative efficiencies and cost effectiveness through the shared administration of public, four-year institutions. The task force is required to examine the following issues: combining operations, functions and program administration across multiple institutions; duplication of program offerings; academic majors with low enrollments and low numbers of graduates; efficiencies through the board of regents' central office; and other topics. The board must present the task force's findings to the governor and joint committee on appropriations by Nov. 15, 2021.



S.B. 839 creates the State Advisory Council on Postsecondary Attainment Goals. The council's purpose is to ensure that K-12 students are provided the knowledge and skills to earn relevant industry-demanded postsecondary credentials and support education and industry partnerships in developing high-value, in-demand credentials. The council is also charged with developing a plan to achieve the state's goal that by 2030 60% of residents ages 25-64 will hold a degree, certificate or other postsecondary workforce credential of value. The law requires the council to annually report its conclusions and recommendations to specified legislative committees until its termination Dec. 31, 2023.

Related Resources

- COVID-19 Series: State Task Forces and Advisory Groups
- Lessons from the Chair of a State School Safety Task Force



About the Authors

Damion Pechota



As a policy analyst, Damion provides research and analysis on a diverse set of state-level education issues. Prior to joining Education Commission of the States, Damion worked as a senior policy analyst with Legislative Council at the Colorado General Assembly. Damion is dedicated to the idea that a nonpartisan perspective can enhance the discussion and understanding of state education issues from early learning to workforce development. Contact Damion at dpechota@ecs.org.

Mary Fulton



As a senior policy analyst, Mary focuses on issues related to postsecondary governance and contributes to other K-12 and postsecondary education policy projects. Mary brings more than 20 years of experience with Education Commission of the States and has worked on numerous K-12 and postsecondary issues during her career. Beyond a commitment to serving our constituents and supporting educational opportunities for all students, Mary has a passion for community service and the arts. Contact Mary at mfulton@ecs.org.



**EDUCATION
COMMISSION**
OF THE STATES

Your education policy team.