
MEMORANDUM

March 30, 2020

To: Governors' Offices
From: Bill McBride, Executive Director
Re: Postsecondary Strategies for COVID-19

Summary

Postsecondary education in states is a complicated ecosystem that connects oversight of adult basic education, workforce training programs, veterans' programs, community colleges, universities, and student support structures. In order to respond effectively and efficiently to the COVID 19 pandemic, it is necessary to align these systems.

Although the temporary closure of colleges and universities was necessary to slow the spread of the pandemic, the short-term impacts will be difficult, especially for communities that depend on their institutions for education, research, social services, and community enrichment. The unexpected closure of or move to whole-scale online learning for many institutions will have negative impacts on the most vulnerable students who are at risk of homelessness, food insecurity, and lack of access to the resources needed to remain in postsecondary programs. The least resourced institutions, many of which are rural or minority-serving, are already struggling under the weight of the ongoing health crisis. Governors should consider their colleges and universities as not only education locations, but as major employers and generators of economic activity and other community benefits, especially in rural areas. These institutions provide more than just education; they are often a backbone in communities through healthcare, housing, childcare, and food services for thousands of families.

However, colleges and universities can be part of the longer-term recovery effort. They contribute to broader state economic and community development objectives not only through education, but also through research, entrepreneurship, extension, and service to local, state, and regional goals. Mobilizing postsecondary resources in alignment with community assets and needs should be part of the longer-term effort toward economic and social recovery.

CARES Act

States should also consider how the recently signed Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security Act (CARES Act) can assist them in pursuing these strategies. The CARES Act provides \$30.75 billion in funding to states as well as school districts, institutions of higher education, and other educational entities. This includes the Governor's Emergency Education Relief Fund, which will be particularly noteworthy and flexible as it divides up just under \$3 billion to the states for governors to use to support education at their discretion. Governors and their staff should also note the Higher Education Emergency Relief Fund, which will grant directly to institutions of higher education, and the various authorizations that allow for temporary flexibility regarding student loans, work-study, and other important funding streams. For more detailed information, please see NGA's [Memo on Pertinent Higher Education Provisions in the CARES Act](#).

Strategies

- **Continue to urge institutions to refer to and follow the CDC’s interim guidance for institutions of higher education.**

Resources:

- [CDC Interim Guidance for Administrators of US Institutions of Higher Education](#)

- **Provide state-level guidance and information to systems of higher education that aligns with public health and federal guidance.**

- When appropriate, consider [utilizing college campuses](#) as emergency management zones due to their facilities such as clinics, residence halls and dining spaces. Governor Cuomo (NY) and Governor Murphy (NJ) have both proposed utilizing college dorms as overflow for strained hospital systems.
- Consider how universities with medical schools might provide flexibility in graduation requirements in order to provide more medical professionals to combat the crisis. [Several universities have already done so](#), and the medical school accreditation agency is developing guidance.

Resources:

- [A Guide for New Jersey Institutions of Higher Education](#)
- [Colorado Department of Higher Education](#)
- [Virginia Higher Education COVID-19 Information.](#)
- [Kansas Coronavirus Resource Center.](#)
- [Iowa Department of Education Guidance: COVID-19 Guidance and Resources](#)
- [Louisiana Guidance for Higher Education Institutions](#)

- **Take steps to prepare for the financial impact on colleges and universities.**

- All institutions, but specifically small, regional universities, may face liquidity issues due to mandated closures. Governors and their higher education system leadership may monitor and support these institutions. Moody’s has recently downgraded the status of US higher education from stable to negative.
- State leaders could consider the possible coordination of low- or zero-interest loans to institutions who are experiencing both increased expenses and lost revenues. The loss of room and board and other auxiliary revenues from the current semester/term—and the prospect of reduced enrollments and tuition revenues in upcoming periods—will inflict notable financial harm, even as many institutions were already adapting to projected reductions in enrollment.
- States may also consider contingency planning for the possible closure, consolidation, or financial exigency of institutions, and an orderly way to manage the strategic reconstruction of their higher education systems.
- State agencies can craft plans for coordinating teach-out/transfer agreements, transcript access, issues of licensure eligibility, and communication with students at affected institutions. Institutions will require resources for careful planning and strategic realignment.

Resources:

- [Massachusetts HD.4936](#) designates \$125 million for an emergency fund to compensate institutions for lost revenue and unexpected expenses, as well as lost wages and sick time for college and university employees.
- [Illinois Board of Higher Education Thought Paper on Institutional Closure](#)



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- **Develop, coordinate, and share virtual learning resources for students and adjunct faculty not on-campus.**

Resources:

- [NGA Memo on Considerations for Postsecondary Virtual Learning](#)
 - [NGA Memo on Dual Credit during COVID 19](#)
 - [Guide for New Jersey Institutions of Higher Education](#)
 - Colorado [Planning for Institutions of Higher Education](#)
 - [New England Board of Higher Education Distance Education Resources and Compliance](#)
 - Faculty entrepreneur created an online course management system (CN www.thecn.com) - offering free learning management systems to schools that are in need
 - UPCEA has collated resources to support online ed and teaching: <https://upcea.edu/coronavirus-covid-19-response-from-olc-qm-upcea-and-wcet/>
- **Address and monitor federal changes on food, housing, and other types of financial insecurity for students, especially student-parents.**
 - States should support postsecondary institutions in ensuring that students’ basic needs are met throughout the public health emergency. Even before the onset of COVID 19, the Hope Center’s 2019 survey of 86,000 students at two- and four-year colleges found that 42 percent were food insecure, 46 percent were housing insecure, and 12 percent were homeless.
 - Governors are particularly well-positioned to direct agencies and institutions to coordinate the variety of programs that can support the least-resourced students through this crisis. Governor Wolf (PA) [submitted a waiver](#) to the Food and Nutrition Service of the U.S. Department of Agriculture to waive the student eligibility criteria for the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program.
 - See all approved [state COVID-19 SNAP waivers here](#).

Resources:

- [NGA Memo on Steps to Address Food and Financial Insecurity](#)
 - [CLASP Overview on SNAP for College Students](#)
 - [Family First Coronavirus Response Act Guidance on ABAWD Time Limits](#)
 - [ACF Guidance on the use of TANF to support Students](#)
 - [Temple University Hope Center Supporting Students During COVID-19 Guide](#)
- **Work with higher education systems to provide financial support and flexibility to learners.**
 - Expand state financial aid opportunities by relaxing requirements for students effected by COVID-19.
 - Explore the possibility of pivoting state financial aid to be used as emergency aid support for students to cover basic needs to cover costs for food, housing, transportation, and childcare.
 - Ensure students can rapidly re-enroll in financial aid programs for the fall.
 - Allow work-study students to continue to receive funding even if they can no longer fulfill their roles, as permitted by the CARES Act.



- Consider halting the collection of student debt owed to the state.
- Facilitate collaboration between institutions and school districts to solve dual enrollment issues.

Resources:

- U.S. Department of Education: [Addressing the Risk of COVID-19 in Schools While Protecting the Civil Rights of Students](#)
- The West Virginia Higher Education Policy Commission and Technical College Education [voted to provide more flexibility](#) for students in accessing and using state financial aid, including eliminating GPA requirements and renewing the state’s PROMISE program.
- Missouri [suspended](#) or reduced eligibility requirements for a key state scholarship program.
- Both [Oregon](#) and [Washington](#) terminated in-person classes and called for a limited on-campus footprint. Notably, both allow for dormitories to remain open and for the continuation of program affiliated laboratory courses where social distancing can be practiced, and Oregon’s executive order prioritized laboratory programs that could contribute to response efforts.
- Texas [waived](#) state regulations to allow college work-study students to continue to receive funding for work-study jobs.
- New York Governor Cuomo [announced](#) that the state will temporarily halt the collection of some debts, including student debt owed to the state of New York, for at least 30 days. This action also suspends interest accrual on state-held student loan debt.
- Education Commission of the States has published [state profiles](#) that depicts dual enrollment governance structures in all 50 states.
 - The Washington Office of Superintendent of Public Instructions provided [guidance](#) for dual credit during long-term school closure. The guidance calls for institutions and school districts to collaborate to establish procedures that ensure equitable access for all students.
 - Iowa Department of Education issued a [guidance](#) that applies to student enrollments through school districts into postsecondary coursework in concurrent enrollment.
- **Encourage institutions and businesses to think creatively about how to support work-based learning and apprenticeship activities.**

Resource:

- [NGA Memo on Adjustments to Work-Based Learning in Response to COVID-19](#)
- **Work with research universities, businesses and community organizations to respond to short-term and long-term economic and community development**
 - Universities can contribute to economic and community development by leveraging applied research, education efforts, public engagement, and assistance to small businesses.

Resources:

- <https://www.aplu.org/news-and-media/communications-resources/coronavirus/aplu-member-covid-19-research.html>



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- <https://www.aau.edu/newsroom/mary-sues-desk/fighting-covid-19-multiple-fronts>
- [Dekalb County UNITES](#)
- [COVID-19 Business Recovery Resource Center](#)

Other Resources

- [American Association of Colleges for Teacher Education COVID resources](#)
- National Association of Student Financial Aid Administrators: [Coronavirus Web Center](#)
- [VA Guidance for Payout of GI Bill Student Benefits](#)
- [Federal Student Aid Office Guidance](#)
- [Association of Public and Land Grant Universities COVID resources](#)
- [Association for Career and Technical Education Distance Learning for COVID resources](#)
- National Conference of State Legislatures: [Higher Education Responses to Coronavirus \(COVID-19\)](#)
- [American Association of State Colleges and Universities COVID resource page](#)
- [State Higher Education Executive Officers \(SHEEO\) Association COVID resources](#)

For questions or concerns related to the contents of this memo, please contact NGA staff:

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