

GOVERNORS' TOP EDUCATION PRIORITIES

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in 2025 State of the State Addresses

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In their 2025 State of the State addresses, governors across the country recognized student progress and shared optimism for their state’s future while acknowledging challenges that need to be addressed to support students’ future. Some governors showcased proposals to strengthen the entire education system from early care and education through high school and postsecondary opportunities. Others focused on specific proposals for funding, academic gains and teacher workforce development.

Many governors highlighted the importance of providing education opportunities to fuel future growth for students, communities and the economy. For example, newly elected **West Virginia** Gov. Patrick Morrisey said, “In order for us to grow long-term, education must be a top priority. Our classrooms should be centerpieces of excellence.”

For twenty years in a row, 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 sixth year that Education Commission of the States and the National Governors Association have collaborated on this project. To date, 49 governors, including the **U.S. Virgin Islands** and **Guam**, have given their 2025 State of the State address and this Special Report highlights seven of the top education policy topics mentioned.



We can’t talk about the future without talking about education. It is the great equalizer unlocking opportunity for all.”

New York
Gov. Kathy Hochul

TRENDING TOPICS



At least 33 states, the **U.S. Virgin Islands** and **Guam** mentioned **WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT AND CAREER AND TECHNICAL EDUCATION**. Governors focused on efforts to link postsecondary opportunities to workforce development needs that allow students to learn valuable skills through apprenticeships and internships.



At least 32 governors mentioned **K-12 FUNDING**. Many focused on refining school funding formulas or ensuring adequate funding to support great schools and students.



At least 26 governors brought up strengthening the **TEACHER WORKFORCE** through teacher compensation and recruitment or retention efforts.



At least 25 governors in states and the U.S. Virgin Islands mentioned **ACADEMIC ACHIEVEMENT**, including efforts to implement and maintain early reading programs and establish early math instruction.



At least 25 governors mentioned **EARLY CARE AND EDUCATION** in their addresses. They talked about the importance and value of ensuring high-quality programs are available for more students.



At least 21 governors stressed the importance of supporting students’ **MENTAL AND PHYSICAL HEALTH** by funding mental health programs and supporting universal free lunches.




At least 21 governors cited **SCHOOL CHOICE** as an area of focus. Some governors highlighted their view about the importance of choice, especially for specific student populations, while others cautioned the need for oversight of school choice programs.




WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT AND CAREER AND TECHNICAL EDUCATION

Creating pathways for students to engage in meaningful career opportunities was the top education policy trend in 2025 State of the State addresses. **Thirty-three governors** discussed career and technical education and workforce developments as ways to prepare students for entering the workforce and bolstering the economy. Governors discussed internships and apprenticeships as vehicles for young people to gain real-world skills that prepare them for workforce demands.


Highlights


Delaware
 Gov. Matt Meyer

Highlighted the importance of hands-on learning. He promised to sign an executive order directing the creation and expansion of job opportunities for students to learn and earn simultaneously.


Guam
 Gov. Lou Leon Guerrero

Celebrated tripling their number of apprenticeship opportunities, including programs for high school students that provide pathways to jobs.


North Carolina
 Gov. Josh Stein

Celebrated the benefits of apprenticeships that provide opportunities for good careers without a bachelor's degree. He proposed doubling the number of apprentices over the next four years. He also mentioned that a successful apprentice partnership between Surry-Yadkin Works and Surry Community College has helped address nursing shortages.


Further, he proposed free community college for students to earn certificates in high-demand sectors to secure good-paying jobs.


North Dakota
 Gov. Kelly Armstrong

Praised the work of CTE programs and showcased the funding and construction of 13 CTE centers.


Oklahoma
 Gov. Kevin Stitt

Encouraged the Legislature to pass a bill to create more internships and apprenticeships to help students leave high school college- or career-ready.



Rhode Island
 Gov. Dan McKee

Proposed a career and technical education program at the Community College of Rhode Island called [Ready to Build](#), which would create a pre-apprenticeship option for jobs in the building trades. He also proposed an investment to create 1,000 new work-based learning opportunities in Rhode Island and an enhancement to Real Jobs RI.



What I'm talking about is the future of our workforce. ... [W]e know how to solve problems here. So, let's get to work on it. It starts by respecting all paths to success. Some Pennsylvanians join the workforce right out of high school. Some complete an apprenticeship. Some join the military. Some go to college. There are many paths to success, and we've got to respect — and support — all of them.

Pennsylvania
Gov. Josh Shapiro



Tennessee
Gov. Bill Lee

Celebrated the impact of the [Tennessee Youth Employment Program](#) and announced an expansion of the program to operate year-round and double participation. He also highlighted efforts to clear waitlists for Tennessee Colleges of Applied Technology and to expand vocational, technical and agricultural education across all counties.



Wyoming
Gov. Mark Gordon

Highlighted the [Wyoming Innovation Partnership's](#) success in aligning postsecondary education with industry needs. The partnership reported a 690% five-year return on investment and contributions to the gross state product exceeded seven times its budget. He also shared plans to transition the Wyoming Innovation Partnership from one supported by state funding to one supported by businesses and communities.




To learn more about state policy action in this area, see our [Workforce and CTE work](#) and NGA's [Workforce Development and Economic Policy](#) and [Postsecondary Education](#) resources.



K-12 FUNDING


Like previous years, governors continued to express the need to invest more funding into K-12 education. At least **32 governors** addressed funding and several highlighted historic investments in K-12 funding and shouted out fully funded formulas for education. Other governors supported changes to funding formulas that would address specific student population needs.

Highlights




Colorado
Gov. Jared Polis

Committed to implementing the newly created school funding formula to ensure schools serving English learners and students from low-income households receive the resources they need and proposed a budget to fully fund K-12 schools.




Hawai'i
Gov. Josh Green

Requested additional funding in the budget for schools from the Legislature.



Mississippi
Gov. Tate Reeves

Highlighted continued investment in K-12 education to ensure all students have the foundational skills needed to succeed in the modern workforce.



Missouri
Gov. Mike Kehoe

Recommended a \$200 million increase to their foundation formula and [announced](#) a School Funding Modernization task force to rewrite the school funding formula.



Along with early childhood education and care, the smartest, most effective investment we can make in our next generation is through our public schools.”

Kansas
Gov. Laura Kelly



Nebraska

Gov. Jim Pillen

Prioritized improving the state’s school funding system. He mentioned seeking major changes to the state’s 30-year-old funding formula and announced plans to establish a blue-ribbon commission of experts to recommend a new school funding system model.

He also drew attention to legislation that would honor the state’s constitutional obligation to fund K-12 education by increasing the foundation aid per student across the state.



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



Nevada

Gov. Joe Lombardo

Celebrated the addition of over \$2 billion in new funding for Nevadan students and schools last session, which marked the largest education investment in state history.



New Jersey

Gov. Phil Murphy

Celebrated the school funding formula being fully funded for the first time and praised record investments to strengthen New Jersey public schools.



Oregon

Gov. Tina Kotek

Stressed that fiscal certainty for school districts is fundamental to improving student success. She called attention to a proposal to change the way current service level funding for the State School Fund is calculated and explained that the proposed budget will make progress toward changing the base funding for districts.



**EMERGING TREND:
CELL PHONES IN SCHOOLS**

This year, cell phone bans in schools emerged as a new trend. **Governors in at least 17 states** address the impact of cell phones on students’ mental health and the role cell phones play in distracting students and inhibiting teachers’ work.



Connecticut

Gov. Ned Lamont

Called for a ban on phones in classrooms.



Illinois

Gov. J.B. Pritzker

Announced legislation requiring all school districts to adopt a policy banning cell phone use during classroom instruction.



New Hampshire

Gov. Kelly Ayote

Proposed a cell phone ban in schools including a \$1 million investment for grants to school districts to develop individual approaches to stop cell phones from disrupting learning environments.



Utah

Gov. Spencer Cox


Called for a cell phone ban in schools.




TEACHER WORKFORCE

The teacher workforce remains top of mind for many governors as some stressed the impact of teachers on student outcomes. While some governors praised teacher pay raises from last year, others called for new pay raises in the coming year. Others stressed the importance of recruiting and retaining teachers by providing new pathways to the profession and removing barriers by paying student teachers and making debt-free pathways to the classroom. At least **26 governors** mentioned teacher recruitment and retention or teacher compensation.


Highlights


Connecticut
 Gov. Ned Lamont


Expressed interest in expanding the teacher apprenticeship program and highlighted outreach efforts to bring more men into the teaching profession.


Florida
 Gov. Ron DeSantis


Acknowledged the importance of recruiting and retaining great teachers. He celebrated a \$4.6 billion investment to raise teacher salaries and called for an increase in funds dedicated to raising teacher salaries.


Indiana
 Gov. Mike Braun

Highlighted legislation that will raise the minimum salary for public school teachers by \$5,000 and require that 65% of state school funding support to local education agencies go to teacher compensation.



Kentucky
 Gov. Andy Beshear

Called for higher teacher salaries citing that teachers deserve it.



Maryland
 Gov. Wes Moore

Lamented the teacher shortage as the single largest barrier to achievement in schools and announced recruiting and retaining teachers as a first-order priority. He asked for legislative authority to launch a national campaign to recruit top educators to Maryland.


He also called for building an educator workforce that looks like the student body and proposed building debt-free paths to teaching.


Montana
 Gov. Greg Gianforte

Celebrated the [TEACH Act](#) for boosting starting teacher pay and announced a historic \$100 million investment to raise teacher pay, which focuses on early-career educators.


Pennsylvania
 Gov. Josh Shapiro

Praised the state for certifying more new teachers than at any other time in the past seven years and created a new initiative to fund student teacher stipends.


Vermont
 Gov. Phil Scott

Stated that, despite high spending on education, districts face the issue of inadequate teacher pay.



Teachers know uniquely what is working for our students and what isn't. We need to listen to them.

New Hampshire
Gov. Kelly Ayotte



To learn more about state policy action in this area, see our [teacher](#) resources. Please also see NGA's [State Snapshots for Strengthening the Educator Workforce](#) webinar series.



ACADEMIC ACHIEVEMENT

At least **25 governors** addressed academic achievement, numeracy and literacy. Governors stressed the importance of early literacy skills for life-long achievement and highlighted the science of reading as a major contributor to building early literacy skills. Governors also focused on science, technology, engineering and math education and particularly on foundational math proficiency.

Highlights



Alabama
Gov. Kay Ivey

Celebrated Alabama's growth in reading scores and praised the [Alabama Literacy Act](#) for positive results by showcasing reading score gains for all fourth graders across all demographics.

She also highlighted placing 100 math coaches in schools to increase math achievement and noted the impact Alabama is seeing through the [Turnaround Schools Initiative](#) to support schools identified as low performing.



Alaska
Gov. Mike Dunleavy

Celebrated the implementation of the [READS Act](#). According to his speech, early data shows that the percentage of Alaskan students who met early literacy benchmarks grew from 41% to 57%.

The governor also noted that Alaskan students outpaced national reading growth in kindergarten, first and second grade.



Michigan
Gov. Gretchen Whitmer

Stated that the literacy crisis is urgent and highlighted that last year's bipartisan legislation required the science of reading strategies, like phonics, and will require schools to test for dyslexia to help identify students who need help earlier.



New Mexico
Gov. Michelle Lujan Grisham

Praised the [Summer Literacy Programs](#) that enrolled 10,000 students and resulted in an 11% increase in reading proficiency. She celebrated the structured literacy program that teaches the science of reading and resulted in high scores. She also called for a STEM program to match the achievements of the literacy program.



Ohio
Gov. Mike DeWine

Touted the results of implementing the science of reading by the Legislature two years ago and celebrated growth in the school report cards that showed significant improvement in English Language Arts performance for elementary students.

He proposed to continue funding literacy coaches to support teachers in implementing the science of reading in schools with the lowest performance. He also announced a Reading Recognition Program to honor schools that are aligned with the science of reading and where students' reading scores are improving.



Iowa
Gov. Kim Reynolds

Noted the importance of math proficiency as a predictor of future success and proposed a bill to identify and provide personalized help for students who are struggling with math curricula.



For the fundamentals, I thank the Legislature for being a partner with me in early literacy and summer learning investments. I really believe these solutions – retooling the way school districts teach our students how to read through incentivizing evidence-based practices and reducing learning disruption through reliable summer education programs – will make a difference in the future trajectory of our children and youth.”

Oregon
Gov. Tina Kotek



U.S. Virgin Islands
Gov. Albert Bryan Jr.

Announced plans for new STEAM centers in the territory's two districts that incorporate cutting-edge technology to support careers in science, technology, engineering, arts and math.



Wisconsin
Gov. Tony Evers

Emphasized releasing \$50 million in approved funds to improve statewide reading outcomes.



To learn more about state policy action in this area, see our [student learning](#) resources. Please also see NGA's [Student and School Staff Academic Supports and Well-Being Projects](#).



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 childcare, 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



Iowa
Gov. Kim Reynolds

Celebrated the number of four-year-olds participating in preschool. She proposed the Early Childhood Continuum of Care program that would provide three-year grants for preschool programs and childcare providers that come together to integrate their services. She also touted the work of the [Community Solutions Funds](#) for helping raise wages for childcare workers.



Massachusetts
Gov. Maura Healey

Highlighted a \$1.5 billion investment in childcare and noted that 36,000 more children now receive childcare as a result of these investments.



New Mexico
Gov. Michelle Lujan Grisham

Celebrated creating [a constitutional right](#) to childcare and called for the Legislature to make childcare truly universal by investing \$205 million more into the program. She highlighted that the free childcare program has given 30,000 children access to care.



New York
Gov. Kathy Hochul

Lamented the high costs of daycare and pledged to partner with the Legislature to put the state on a pathway to universal childcare. She also pledged \$110 million to build new childcare centers, renovate existing centers and expand childcare options. Further, she promised to establish a corps of substitute childcare professionals.



As many of you have heard me say before, a strong early childhood system is necessary for a prosperous economy. We know that when investing in our children, we are not only preparing them to be ready for school and to be successful later in life; we are also helping the workforce today.

Missouri
Gov. Mike Kehoe

Early Care and Education Highlights (continued)



South Carolina
Gov. Henry McMaster

Proposed continued investment in the state-funded, full-day four-year-old kindergarten [program](#), which has seen significant enrollment growth and benefits for children from low-income households. Over 18,000 students are enrolled in the full-day, four-year-old kindergarten, and First Steps expects a 7% increase in enrollment of students from low-income backgrounds next year.



Tennessee
Gov. Bill Lee

Announced adjustments to the [Smart Steps Child Care Program](#) to ease the benefits cliff and cover more middle- and low-income families. He highlighted plans to provide more child care workers with more pay through expanded eligibility in the state's WAGES program.



To learn more about state policy action in this area, see our [Early Care and Education](#) resources. Please also see NGA's [Children and Families](#) resources.



MENTAL AND PHYSICAL HEALTH

The physical and mental health of students was mentioned by **21 governors**. Governors highlighted expansions to youth mental health programming and stressed the importance of the availability of these programs for students. Governors also highlighted school meal programs, including healthy meals or universal free meals for students.

Highlights



Arkansas
Gov. Sarah
Huckabee Sanders

Announced that medical marijuana money will be used to sustainably fund free lunch and breakfast programs with the hope that school breakfast will become free statewide.



Georgia
Gov. Brian Kemp

Celebrated funding behavioral and mental health programs that enabled a response to the recent tragedy at Apalachee High School in Winder, GA.



Idaho
Gov. Brad Little

Proposed working with the Legislature on mental health as part of a larger school funding plan.



Maine
Gov. Janet Mills

Celebrated becoming the second state in the nation to fund universal free meals in public schools and proposed another \$6 million to continue the popular free school meals program. She talked about substance use disorder prevention programs in schools.



When our kids get a great start, they get a strong foundation to build a good life. It's why we feed all 1.4 million public school students free breakfast and lunch."

Michigan
Gov. Gretchen Whitmer

Mental and Physical Health Highlights (continued)



Massachusetts
Gov. Maura Healey

Highlighted the success of free breakfast and lunch programs in school. She also called for more mental health resources in schools and announced more funding for behavioral health support in schools.



Washington
Gov. Bob Ferguson

Announced legislation to guarantee free breakfast and lunch for all K-12 public school students.



To learn more about state policy action in this area, see our [Health and Wellness](#) resources. Please also see NGA's [Youth Mental Health](#) resources.



SCHOOL CHOICE

Governors emphasized providing quality education opportunities for all students. Some governors stressed the importance of oversight and accountability in school choice, while others noted the importance of making more students eligible for programs like Education Savings Accounts (ESA) or school vouchers. At least **21 governors** mentioned school choice.

Highlights



Arizona
Gov. Katie Hobbs

Called for increased accountability for the ESA program, including responsible income caps.



Kansas
Gov. Laura Kelly

Announced a budget proposal to fully fund public schools for the seventh year in a row and plans to reject proposals to decrease public school funds, including re-routing funds to private schools.



Kentucky
Gov. Andy Beshear

Emphasized the importance of funding public education rather than diverting public funds to private schools.



Texas
Gov. Greg Abbott

Highlighted the success of ESAs for special education students. He also stressed that parents should be empowered to choose the school that meets their child's needs. Further, he declared school choice an emergency item that must pass.



Virginia
Gov. Glenn Youngkin

Proposed \$50 million for Virginia Opportunity Scholarships for low-income families. The scholarships will offer \$5,000 each to 10,000 low-income families without reducing existing education funding.



West Virginia
Gov. Patrick Morrisey

Highlighted the early success of the HOPE Scholarship in expanding education options for West Virginia students.



Beginning next school year, these ESAs will give more Alabama families greater flexibility in choosing an education that suits their child's individual needs. Importantly, we are funding students, not systems.

Alabama
Gov. Kay Ivey



To learn more about state policy action in this area, see our [School Choice](#) resources.

About the Authors



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