

GOVERNORS' TOP EDUCATION PRIORITIES!

in 2026 State of the State Addresses

Heena Kuwayama and Lauren Bloomquist

In their 2026 State of the State addresses, governors across the country celebrated student achievement and highlighted opportunities for continued student success. For the first time since Education Commission of the States (ECS) began analyzing all addresses in 2005, academic achievement and student supports topped the list of state education trends.

Governors highlighted students' academic advancements and rising graduation rates, and continued the call to support young learners — especially in early literacy efforts. **Oklahoma** Gov. Kevin Stitt said, "For some, the American dream might look like a home, but it starts with a strong education ... No career pathway program, no workforce initiative, no intervention later in school can succeed if students cannot read well."

Like years past, governors continue to focus on education funding as a key driver of opportunity for all students and a foundation for the public education system. As **Missouri** Gov. Mike Kehoe said, "As we modernize opportunity and outcomes, we must also ensure our public education funding model reflects today's realities and tomorrow's responsibilities."

“Our priority, always, must be the future. And our future is molded in our public schools.”

Kentucky
Gov. Andy Beshear

Teachers have been a top-trending issue in at least 10 of the years we have been tracking State of the State addresses. Governors continue to emphasize efforts to recruit and retain quality teachers for all students in their speeches. They continue to pursue

solutions to keep teachers in their classrooms through a range of efforts (e.g., increased compensation and innovative initiatives such as housing support).

Many governors highlighted the importance of providing educational opportunities for students along the continuum, from the earliest learners through K-12 and postsecondary and workforce development. For example, **Michigan** Gov. Gretchen Whitmer said, "Every parent should know that Michigan is committed to their child's lifelong academic success, from PreK through graduation."

For seven years, ECS and the National Governors Association (NGA) have collaborated on this project. To date, 45 governors, including those from **American Samoa, Guam** and the **U.S. Virgin Islands**, have given their 2026 State of the State addresses. This Special Report highlights the top five education policy topics mentioned by governors in their addresses.

TRENDING TOPICS



Governors in at least 35 states and territories mentioned **ACADEMIC SUPPORTS AND ACHIEVEMENT**, including continued efforts to implement and maintain early reading programs and close achievement gaps.



32 governors mentioned **K-12 FUNDING**. Many highlighted fully funded education budgets and historic investments to support students and schools.



CAREER AND TECHNICAL EDUCATION AND WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT were mentioned in at least 31 states and territories. Governors focused on efforts to smooth transitions between high school and postsecondary opportunities that meet workforce demands.



EARLY CARE AND EDUCATION was mentioned by at least 26 governors. Governors stressed the importance of pre-K opportunities for states' youngest learners and supporting families with investments in early childcare.




Supporting the **TEACHER WORKFORCE** through compensation and incentives for recruiting and retaining the best educators was brought up by at least 25 governors.



ACADEMIC SUPPORTS AND ACHIEVEMENT

At least **35 governors** addressed academic supports and championed student achievement. Governors continued to stress the importance of early literacy, especially the evidence-based science of reading. Governors also signaled an interest in expanding math instruction. While some governors highlighted student achievement in multiple areas, others continued to call for improvements and to maintain high standards. Finally, governors celebrated increasing high school graduation rates.



Literacy is moral infrastructure — and if we want our children to grow up and live free, purposeful lives, we must give them a strong foundation today. 

Utah
Gov. Spencer Cox

Highlights



Delaware
Gov. Matt Meyer

Highlighted that every elementary school in the state is now using literacy screeners, an early warning system to identify reading challenges, and noted that more schools are adopting the science of reading. He praised the Your Voice, Your Choice program for putting funds directly in teachers' hands, resulting in the purchase of 41,000 books and 18,000 instructional kits supporting over 4,000 classrooms. He also celebrated an \$8.7 million grant to improve evidence-based literacy in grades four through eight.



Iowa
Gov. Kim Reynolds

Touted the focus on evidence-based literacy instruction, including teacher training, early identification and parental engagement. She highlighted that **Iowa** is one of three states where students are outperforming pre-COVID-19 shutdown reading and math levels. She also noted that grade 10 science proficiency is up and proposed applying evidence-based principles to math instruction.



Maine
Gov. Janet Mills

Directed the Department of Education to strengthen students' reading and math skills, which resulted in the Maine State Reading and Math Action Plans. These reading and math plans provide evidence-based instruction, educator training and academic partnerships. She also noted concern over declining National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) scores in the state.



Massachusetts
Gov. Maura Healey

Highlighted investments in literacy and high-dose tutoring intended to close learning gaps. Additionally, she recognized the importance of high school graduation standards, including financial literacy, in supporting student achievement post high school.



Michigan
Gov. Gretchen Whitmer

Stressed the importance of literacy for learning and set improving literacy outcomes as a priority. She celebrated signing science of reading legislation that will include proven literacy instruction methods, phonics instruction and support for students with dyslexia. She highlighted the need to fund more literacy coaches to support educators in teaching reading. She also noted a gender gap in literacy skills, including that boys are behind girls in reading at every age. Finally, she proposed the state's largest-ever literacy investment in this year's budget.



New Hampshire
Gov. Kelly Ayotte

Directed the Department of Education to examine districts with strong reading outcomes to identify effective practices. She also called for improvements in reading and math scores.



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

Academic Supports and Achievement Highlights (continued)



New Mexico
Gov. Michelle Lujan Grisham

Funded a new literacy institute and comprehensive science of reading programs in and outside of schools, including a six-week intensive tutoring program to combat summer academic practice lapses. She said that the state's programs served 17,000 students last year and led to an 8% increase in literacy proficiency. She noted the increase in elementary and middle school students who can read at grade level, which grew from just over a third three years ago to nearly half now — including significant improvements among Native American students. She also called for clear and consistent literacy requirements. In addition, she noted an 80% high school graduation rate, the highest in 15 years, and set a goal of graduating 2,400 more students than last year and reaching the national 87% average graduation rate.



Ohio
Gov. Mike DeWine

Highlighted the administration's requirement that all Ohio classrooms teach reading using the science of reading approach. He also celebrated the expansion of Dolly Parton's Imagination Library statewide so every Ohio child from birth to age 5 can receive free monthly books. He reported that about 70% of households with children under 5 are enrolled in the book program and noted that children in foster care under 5 are automatically enrolled and hospitals may enroll newborns. He cited research showing that children receiving the books demonstrate significantly stronger early literacy skills. He also directed the Department of Education and Workforce to establish regional Science of Reading Implementation Teams. He noted the expansion of the ReadOhio coaching program by adding 50 literacy coaches to support additional schools and the requirement of public preschool programs to adopt science of reading instructional practices. Last year, he celebrated the highest number ever of youth in foster care graduating from high school.



Oklahoma
Gov. Kevin Stitt

Identified the importance of early literacy for student success in career pathway programs, workforce initiatives and interventions later in school. He acknowledged that too many students are not reading at grade level.



South Dakota
Gov. Larry Rhoden


Highlighted improvements in reading outcomes through their science of reading initiative and announced revised reading standards.



K-12 FUNDING

Funding was top of mind for many governors. **Thirty-two governors** addressed K-12 funding. Like past years, governors expressed the need to reconsider K-12 funding priorities. Many governors celebrated record increases in education funding and fully funded budgets, while others called for more targeted, meaningful investments. In addition, several governors called for changes to funding formulas that will better address student needs.



To weaken education funding now is not fiscal restraint. It is to kneecap progress itself. 

Guam
Gov. Lou Leon Gurrero

Highlights



American Samoa
Gov. Pula'ali'i Nikolao Pula

Spotlighted the work of the Department of Education, attorney general's office and governor's office in successfully appealing to the U.S. Department of Education for the restoration of over \$40 million in American Rescue Plan Act funding that was under threat last year.



California
Gov. Gavin Newsom

Announced that the budget will include a significant investment in public education, including a proposal for funding of \$27,418 per student. He also proposed including \$1 billion for community schools in addition to the \$4.1 billion already invested to support nearly 2,500 schools that are the least resourced.



Idaho
Gov. Brad Little

Noted that public school funding was not cut after the state forecasted a revenue decrease and that support for public schools has increased 70% during his time in office. He also noted that his budgets have added more discretionary funding for public schools.



Kansas
Gov. Laura Kelly

Highlighted seven straight years of fully funding public schools. She noted that when she took office, schools were underfunded and many resorted to four-day school weeks as a result.



Maryland
Gov. Wes Moore

Celebrated investments in public schools and proposed an additional \$10 billion investment for public schools.



Missouri
Gov. Mike Kehoe

Affirmed that the proposed budget does not cut the K-12 foundation formula. He highlighted that the previous legislative session provided record funding for the K-12 formula, equivalent to roughly ten years of increases, and emphasized that last year's funding would provide districts with financial stability. He called for changing the current school funding formula because he believes it simply does not work and referenced the ongoing work of the School Funding Modernization Task Force, which is expected to make recommendations in December.



Nebraska
Gov. Jim Pillen

Noted that the state will continue to invest in elementary and secondary education.



Pennsylvania
Gov. Josh Shapiro

Highlighted a new school funding formula and a record amount of public education funding with an increase of nearly 30% over three years. He emphasized that the adequacy formula directs \$565 million more to the schools that demonstrate high need. He also highlighted \$250 million in savings this year, which was driven by cyber charter reform from the previous year. He stated that the budget proposal provides increases in basic education and special education funding.



To learn more about state policy action in this area, see our [Funding work](#), and NGA's [K-12 Education webpage](#).

K-12 Funding Highlights (continued)



Vermont
Gov. Phil Scott

Stated the need for a comprehensive approach to school funding rather than reforms focused on single issues like funding levels, property tax burdens and small governance changes. He mentioned that **Vermont's** pre-K through 12 education spending rose from \$1.6 billion to \$2.5 billion, and roughly \$800 million flowed to the Education Fund from sources beyond property taxes. He projected that education spending will require an additional \$200 million and noted that Vermont has among the highest per-pupil spending in the country. He stated that education spending continues to rise while schools cut courses, teachers and staff. He expressed that he will not sign a budget, education or tax bill that deviates from Act 73 — a major education reform bill aimed at restructuring school governance and funding.



Washington
Gov. Bob Ferguson

Suggested using revenue from his proposed Millionaires' Tax to put more money into K-12 schools and bolster students' access to a world-class education.



CAREER AND TECHNICAL EDUCATION and WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT

Supporting opportunities for students to engage in skill-building that leads to meaningful employment opportunities was highlighted by at least **31 governors**. Governors continue to support the connections between learning and current workforce requirements by investing in and strengthening career and technical education (CTE) and workforce development programs. Governors emphasized the need to offer students education pathways that help them become highly skilled, adaptable and career ready. There was an emphasis on pathways that allow students to earn credentials that prepare them for high-demand fields and on opportunities that enable them to earn as they learn through apprenticeships and internships.

Highlights



Alaska
Gov. Mike Dunleavy

Introduced a workforce plan that will expand internships, apprenticeships and other earn-as-you-learn programs. He also highlighted legislation that will provide job training to support **Alaska's** building boom.



Arizona
Gov. Katie Hobbs

Highlighted connecting thousands of Arizonans to apprenticeships through the [Arizona Promise](#). She also highlighted support for state universities and community colleges, which educate and train the state's workforce.



Georgia
Gov. Brian Kemp

Highlighted a historic investment in education and workforce training programs over the last seven years, including an additional \$368 million investment into programs that directly prepare workers for jobs. He announced a \$40.7 million budget proposal for healthcare facilities and medical workforce training programs and touted \$26 million in funding for additional medical residency slots.




Louisiana
Gov. Jeff Landry

Proposed to increase funding for the [Promise Program](#) to expand access to community and technical colleges for students seeking in-demand jobs. He also called for supporting work through direct funding to training and job placement in **Louisiana**.



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



Attracting major job creators requires sustained investment in our most valuable resource — our people. We have built a pipeline of qualified workers with the skills and training to fill the high-growth sectors of the future, but we still need more. 

Illinois
Gov. J.B. Pritzker

Career and Technical Education and Workforce Development Highlights (continued)



Pennsylvania
Gov. Josh Shapiro

Celebrated the expansion and increased investment in vocational-technical programs, CTE and apprenticeship programs by 50%. He noted that 3,000 more students are enrolled in career and technical education courses and more than 39,000 Pennsylvanians participated in an apprenticeship during his term. Further, 231 new pre-apprenticeships and apprenticeships were added. He called for an increase in CTE funding by \$18 million this year, which brings the total investment to over \$200 million. He emphasized the need to cut red tape for CTE students, so they don't have to repeat classes that they've already taken as part of their general education requirements. He also acknowledged that students have various workforce pathway options — from entering the workforce immediately after high school to enrolling in an apprenticeship and joining a trade.



Rhode Island
Gov. Dan McKee

Noted the addition of nearly 100 CTE programs that increased enrollment by nearly 3,000 students since the start of his administration. He also called for a dedicated CTE bond of \$50 million to build and upgrade classrooms statewide and strengthen preparation for high-demand careers.



South Carolina
Gov. Henry McMaster

Reported that more than 120,000 residents have received free technical college scholarships for workforce credentials, including supported programs such as manufacturing, nursing, IT, logistics and construction. He linked the importance of technical college training to meeting employer demand and attracting business investment.



Virginia
Gov. Abigail Spanberger

Emphasized the importance of expanding apprenticeships, paid internships and programs that lead to credentials in high-demand fields.



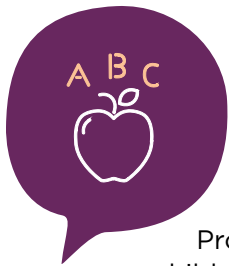
Wisconsin
Gov. Tony Evers

Announced achievement of the highest ever enrollment in youth and registered apprenticeship programs in state history. He also announced over \$7 million to support new workforce training programs focused on developing the state's advanced manufacturing and AI workforce. He celebrated that over 127,000 workers have received career and skills training.



Wyoming
Gov. Mark Gordon

Spotlighted students enrolled in a high school CTE program that allows them to explore careers using real-world problem-solving and celebrated the public university's contributions to the state's economy, specifically highlighting agriculture, fossil fuel industries, computing and engineering, education, and CTE.



EARLY CARE AND EDUCATION

Providing high-quality child care, preschool and kindergarten options for families remains a priority for many governors. At least **26 governors** mentioned early care and learning. Governors emphasized the need to address rising costs and make child care affordable for working families. Governors also highlighted efforts to increase funding and expand access to pre-K programs in many states.



Statistics clearly show that a child from a low-income household enrolled in a state-funded, full-day 4-K program, will be better prepared for kindergarten than their peers who do not participate ... From experience we know that 4-K works. Children who succeed in kindergarten are better prepared to succeed in first grade, then second grade, then third grade. And we know if third graders are proficient in reading and mathematics, they are likely to be successful high school graduates.

South Carolina
Gov. Henry McMaster

Highlights



Alabama
Gov. Kay Ivey

Celebrated increases in pre-K classrooms.



Alaska
Gov. Mike Dunleavy

Announced several new initiatives focusing on childcare.



Hawai'i
Gov. Josh Green

Celebrated efforts to expand preschool access statewide. He highlighted an increase in the child and independent care tax credit during the first year of the administration and noted efforts to increase preschool access that will reduce the cost of child care for everyone in the state. He also proposed \$600 million for food security and child care efforts.



Indiana
Gov. Mike Braun

Committed to exploring ways to invest in making child care more affordable.



New Hampshire
Gov. Kelly Ayotte

Reported that the state fully funded child care scholarships in the prior budget. She claimed that the administrative barriers to accessing child care scholarships have been reduced. In addition, she highlighted the expansion of childcare and early learning facilities, including the creation of the largest such facility in the country.



New Jersey
Gov. Mikie Sherrill

Acknowledged the high cost of child care that rivals college tuition.



New York
Gov. Kathy Hochul

Praised the state's expansion of child care over the past four years and emphasized commitment to more affordable childcare for parents and families. She stated that child care in New York City costs between \$26,000 and \$40,000 a year and announced a plan to establish Universal Child Care for all families in **New York**. She also announced a community-wide pilot program, which will provide year-round, full-day, affordable care for newborns to 3 year-olds. She lauded the success of the State Child Care Assistance Program and the state voucher system for helping families access child care for no more than \$15 per week. She stated her commitment to work with employers and improve tax incentives for those who invest in child care benefits. She stated that her administration has made over \$8 billion in child care investments since 2022. She announced a commitment to achieving universal pre-K for every 4 year old by 2028, and shared that the state will fully fund the first two years of New York City Mayor Mamdani's Universal 2-Care program while also helping the city realize the full promise of Universal 3-K.



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

Early Care and Education Highlights (continued)



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

Celebrated that pre-K classrooms are in all public schools and recalled his promise to do so when he took office. He mentioned renovating or rebuilding six Head Start learning centers and announced the opening of four additional Head Start centers in 2026.



TEACHER WORKFORCE

Highlights

Governors remain focused on strengthening the teacher workforce. At least **25 governors** mentioned teacher recruitment, retention or compensation. Many governors highlighted the essential role that teachers play in supporting academic growth and achievement. Some celebrated state investments in teacher salary increases or retirement benefits, while others announced programs aiming to improve teacher recruitment and retention through alternative certification pathways, affordable educator housing initiatives or other related efforts.



Colorado
Gov. Jared Polis

Celebrated that average teacher pay increased by over \$13,000 per year. He celebrated the Educator Housing Initiative that helped 3,000 teachers buy their first home. He also highlighted the [Miller Flats Apartments](#) in the Eagle County School District that was built for district employees as an example of the Housing Opportunities Made Easier (HOME) Act. The initiative includes higher education and school district partnerships to build housing on underutilized land.



Connecticut
Gov. Ned Lamont

Praised state investments that will ensure that retirement is secure for teachers and other state employees.



Florida
Gov. Ron DeSantis

Discussed the state's dedicated provision within the education budget for teacher salary increases that resulted in the highest average minimum teacher salary in the Southeast region. The state provided nearly \$6 billion toward teacher compensation over the course of the administration. He celebrated the enactment of paycheck protection against automatic school union dues.



Idaho
Gov. Brad Little

Noted that his budgets have increased teacher pay.



Illinois
Gov. J.B. Pritzker

Praised the record number of teachers employed in the state. He also highlighted the Teacher Vacancy Grant Pilot Program, which has invested \$120 million to recruit and retain teachers, and announced that the program will be extended for a fourth year.



Kentucky
Gov. Andy Beshear

Proposed a budget with \$159 million earmarked for mandatory teacher raises. He also included a proposal to raise teacher take-home pay by 7% and to add \$560 million to teachers' retirement benefits.



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

Teacher Workforce Highlights (continued)



Tennessee
Gov. Bill Lee


Thanked the General Assembly for raising the starting salary for teachers from \$35,000 in 2019 to \$50,000 in 2027.



West Virginia
Gov. Patrick Morrisey

Called for a 3% pay raise for all state workers, including teachers.



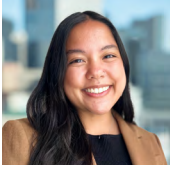
If we want to build the best education system in the nation, we **MUST** make sure teachers have what they need in every classroom, every district, and every school across the state. So, I want to be **VERY** clear, we can no longer ask teachers to go at it alone. Because we all know —and the data proves —the most important thing we can do for our kids' education is expose them to high-quality, well-resourced teachers who have the tools to grow professionally. 

Vermont
Gov. Phil Scott



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