

2022 Maryland State Plan for Higher Education

This 2022 State Plan for Higher Education was approved by the Maryland Higher Education Commission on June 22, 2022.

MSAR #7594

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INTRODUCTION

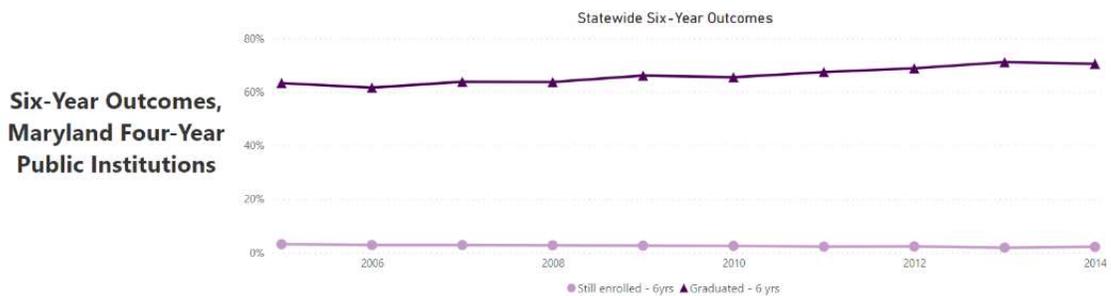
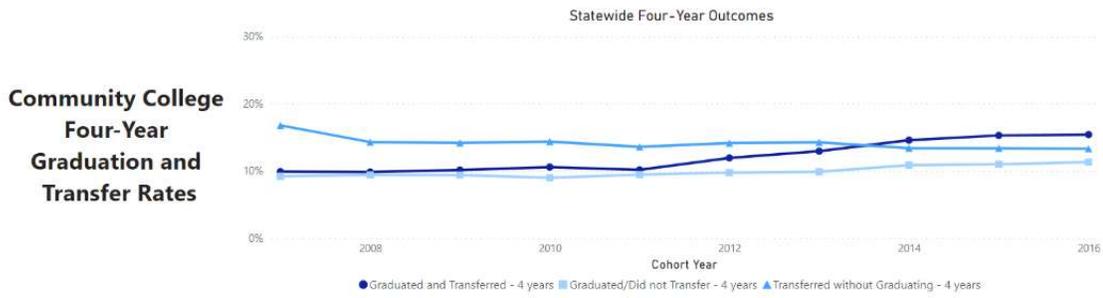
Maryland has one of the nation’s most honored systems of higher education. Through the decades of advancement and reform that have brought Maryland to its current status as a national leader, one thing has remained constant: the efforts to create and support student access and student success through innovation. Maryland residents have the opportunity to benefit from education that enriches their lives and advances their contributions to civic life, economic development, and the social progress of our state.

Over the last four years, the Maryland higher education sector has exhibited tremendous leadership and innovation, especially in championing the postsecondary response to the COVID-19 pandemic. This pandemic has magnified the necessity for all institutions to be innovative in the delivery of academic programs to our students and meeting workforce needs. This 2022 Maryland State Plan for Higher Education (“2022 State Plan”) continues to emphasize student access and student success through innovation.

Governor Larry Hogan has made historic investments in Maryland’s higher education institutions and places high importance on higher education’s transformative powers to fuel our vibrant state economy. The pursuit of our stated goals – student access, student success, and innovation – over the past four years has resulted in not only increased operational and capital funding, but most importantly the increase in retention and graduation rates of our students.

Let us also acknowledge the determination and resolve of our students, faculty, and institutional staff who continue to seek opportunities for intellectual and personal development to become contributors in their local and global communities making our state economy that much broader and stronger.

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Source: Maryland Higher Education Commission

The Maryland Higher Education Commission is tasked to develop and periodically update the State Plan for Higher Education. This document, the *2022 Maryland State Plan for Higher Education*, is an update to the 2017-2021 Maryland State Plan for Higher Education.

This 2022 State Plan is written during a time of pivotal change. The present and future needs for postsecondary education and research throughout Maryland are currently changing, particularly considering the following:

- The COVID-19 pandemic has changed how institutions provide education to the public and what kind of education is provided.
- The [expected national decreases in high school graduates](#) beginning in 2025 will potentially impact undergraduate enrollment.
- Advances in technology and changes in the economic infrastructure will continue to change the needs of the workforce,

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in which postsecondary education will need to adapt with these changes.

- Postsecondary education in Maryland will benefit greatly from an exercise that evaluates the systemic inequalities of access and success with the intent to engage innovation to dismantle those inequalities.

Maryland is fortunate to have an array of public, private, and independent schools, colleges, and universities in the state. With 13 public institutions of higher education, 16 community colleges, 20 private and independent institutions, and over 130 private career schools, Marylanders have access to a wide range of postsecondary educational opportunities.

This 2022 State Plan includes references to recent reports regarding progress towards the existing three goals: Access, Success, and Innovation. Additionally, there is commentary regarding the realities Maryland has faced in light of the COVID-19 pandemic and current considerations. Before moving into the long range and short range objectives and priorities for postsecondary education, this State Plan emphasizes the importance of an equity lens in addressing the goals and priorities. Finally, specific priorities regarding access and success through innovation are provided, as well as concrete action items.

This 2022 State Plan complies with Maryland’s equal educational opportunity obligations under state and federal law, including Title VI of the Civil Rights Act, and incorporates the goals and priorities for higher education identified in Maryland law (such as Education Article [§10–209](#) and [§12–106](#)).

The primary purpose of this 2022 State Plan is to serve as a guiding document for postsecondary education in Maryland. It is not a strategic plan for any one organization, but instead is a document that establishes three primary goals for postsecondary education in Maryland:

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1. Ensure equitable access to affordable and high-quality postsecondary education for all Maryland residents.
2. Promote and implement practices and policies that will ensure student success.
3. Foster innovation in all aspects of Maryland higher education to improve access and student success.

These goals were established in the 2017-2021 Maryland State Plan for Higher Education. However, new priorities are presented in this 2022 State Plan as a reflection of additional and evolving needs for Maryland students. Any individual or organization that is engaged with postsecondary education in Maryland, such as state agencies, employers, high school counselors, and state and federal social services, should consider this 2022 State Plan as a guiding document for alignment to statewide policies, initiatives, interventions, and strategic plans. Mission statements for public institutions should be consistent with this 2022 Maryland State Plan for Higher Education.

Terminology

Included at the end of this document is a glossary of terms. Readers are encouraged to reference those definitions. Among those terms, it is important to highlight the distinction between “higher education” and “postsecondary education.” As set out in Maryland law, “postsecondary education” is defined as an inclusive term. While this 2022 State Plan has “higher education” in the formal title, the goals, priorities, and action items presented here are inclusive of all postsecondary education in Maryland, and the 2022 State Plan uses the terms “higher education” and “postsecondary education” interchangeably. Similarly, the terms “institution,” “school,” “college,” “university,” and “campus” are also used interchangeably throughout this document to describe entities that provide postsecondary education.

Current Principles and Goals in Maryland Law

Maryland law establishes specific principles of public higher education ([§10–202](#)), which are provided below. These principles should be considered in addition to the goals and priorities outlined in this 2022 State Plan.

- (1) “The people of Maryland expect quality in all aspects of public higher education: teaching, research, and public service;
- (2) Public higher education should be accessible to all those who seek and qualify for admission;
- (3) Public higher education should provide a diversity of quality educational opportunities;
- (4) Adequate funding by the State is critical if public higher education is to achieve its goal;
- (5) The people of Maryland are entitled to efficient and effective management of public higher education; and
- (6) The people of Maryland are entitled to capable and creative leadership in public higher education [§10–202](#).”

Additionally, through Maryland law ([§10–204](#)), public institutions of higher education shall:

- (1) “Provide postsecondary education to students;
- (2) Transmit culture and extend knowledge through general higher education;
- (3) Teach and train students for careers and advanced study;
- (4) Protect academic freedom;
- (5) Promote civic responsibility;
- (6) Enhance economic development of the State through research, training, and extension services to business and industry;
- (7) Provide public services for citizens of the State; and
- (8) Assure that women and minorities are equitably represented among faculty, staff, and administration, so that the higher

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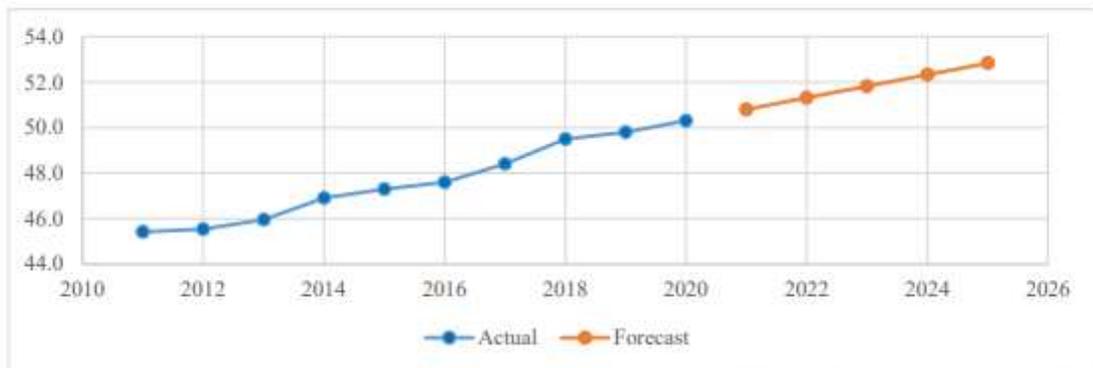
education community reflects the diversity of the State’s population.”

Last, Maryland law establishes two important goals ([§10–205](#)):

- (1) “It is the goal of the State that at least 55% of Maryland’s adults age 25 to 64 will hold at least an associate’s degree by the year 2025.”
- (2) “It is the goal of the State that all degree-seeking students enrolled in a public community college earn an associate’s degree before leaving the community college or transferring to a public senior higher education institution.”

The Maryland Higher Education Commission publishes an annual report regarding our [progress toward the 55% completion goal](#).

Actuals and Estimates of Annual Statewide Progress toward 55% Goal



Notes: Forecast assumes a standard .5% increase each year; this is based on the average, annual increase in the attainment rate for Maryland since 2011 (ACS Community Survey, Census data). The 2020-2021 data, while reported as an actual, is calculated using 2019 Census data.

Source: Maryland Higher Education Commission

Institutions of Postsecondary Education

There are several organizations that represent various common bodies of postsecondary education that work together with the Maryland Higher Education Commission (the Commission) to serve the needs of Maryland students. The University System of Maryland (USM) is the State of Maryland's public four-year higher education system composed of 12 degree-granting institutions. Maryland is also home to two additional public four-year institutions: Morgan State University and St. Mary's College of Maryland. Four of Maryland's 14 public four-year institutions are historically black colleges and universities (HBCUs): Bowie State University, Coppin State University, Morgan State University, and the University of Maryland Eastern Shore.

Maryland's four accomplished HBCUs continue to provide thousands of students with higher education opportunities. Morgan State University, founded in 1867 was legislatively designated as Maryland's "preeminent public urban Research University" in 2017. The University of Maryland Eastern Shore is recognized as the State's 1890 land grant institution. Morgan State University and the University of Maryland Eastern Shore both have achieved the high [Carnegie classification](#) as Research 2 institutions ("Doctoral Universities: High Research Activity"). Bowie State University, Maryland's oldest HBCU, was established in 1860, and Coppin State University was founded in 1900. Bowie State University and Coppin State University both started as higher education institutions providing teacher preparation programs.

Notably, these four universities were founded to serve African American students during Maryland's de jure era of segregation in higher education. Maryland recently enacted legislation to remedy the last policy traceable to de jure segregation – unnecessary duplication of the HBCU's academic programs at traditionally white institutions in Maryland – and to settle the long-standing court case challenging that policy. The United States District Court for the District of Maryland had found that the unnecessary duplication of HBCU programs exacerbated the racial identifiability of those institutions. Through this important legislation, Maryland also substantially increased the funding at each

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of the HBCUs for a period of ten years, in part to spur the growth of unique academic programs at each institution.

The goals, strategies, and action items provided in this 2022 State Plan intend to support Maryland's continuing efforts to enhance each higher education institution. Not only is the University System of Maryland charged to "enhance the historically African American institutions," all organizations must make explicit efforts to recognize and leverage Maryland's HBCUs as both institutions that provide high-quality higher education opportunities and as comprehensive universities with research facilities that support scholarship and innovation.

Maryland is also home to 16 independent community colleges. All community colleges in Maryland are open access campuses, meaning that there are no scholastic or academic admission requirements. Each community college serves their respective jurisdiction in Maryland, with three community colleges serving multiple jurisdictions. The Maryland Association of Community Colleges (MACC) serves as the unified voice for Maryland's community colleges.

In addition to 30 public institutions, Maryland is home to numerous private and independent degree-granting institutions. The Maryland Independent College and University Association (MICUA) represents 15 private, nonprofit 4-year colleges and universities, in which 13 receive State funding. Maryland law provides that the State's "private, nonprofit institutions of higher education are an important educational resource and vital to the provision of postsecondary education in the State. The State shall continue to provide financial aid as provided by law to private nonprofit institutions of higher education to foster this important educational resource ([§10-211](#))."

There are over 130 private career schools currently operating in Maryland. These schools provide non-degree specialized training in specific fields, such as allied health, real estate, personal care, and mechanical fields.

Other institutions in Maryland that serve students include for-profit degree granting institutions, institutions with a religious exemption, out-of-state institutions operating in Maryland, out-of-state institutions that provide distance education to Maryland residents, and regional higher education centers (RHECs).

Role of the Maryland Higher Education Commission

The Commission coordinates and regulates the overall growth and development of postsecondary education in Maryland. The Commission is overseen by a 12-person Governor-appointed governing board. A current list of Commissioners can be found inside the front cover of this publication. Several advisory councils and committees are responsible for informing and advising the Commission on issues concerning postsecondary education around Maryland.

PROGRESS: STUDENT ACCESS AND STUDENT SUCCESS THROUGH INNOVATION

The reports and statistics below demonstrate the significant growth of higher education in Maryland over the past several years. A summary of existing reports and resources are provided below.

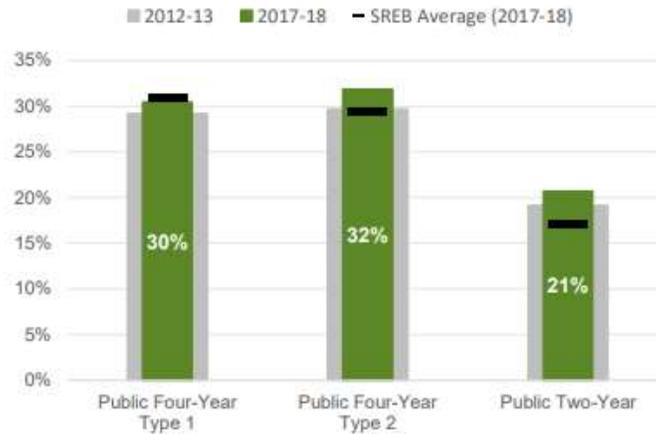
Student Access

Since 2017, the Maryland Higher Education Commission has implemented several statewide scholarships and other financial supports to improve college affordability, including:

- [Community College Promise Scholarship](#)
- [Cyber Warrior Diversity Program](#)
- [Cybersecurity Public Service Scholarship Program](#)
- [Richard W. Collins III Leadership with Honor Scholarship](#)
- [Student Loan Debt Relief Tax Credit Program](#)
- [Teaching Fellows of Maryland Scholarship](#)
- [Veterans of Afghanistan and Iraq Conflicts Scholarship Program](#)
- [Workforce Development Sequence Scholarship](#)

Similarly, according to the January 2021 Southern Regional Higher Education Board's (SREB) [Maryland College Affordability Profile](#), “the percentage of family income required to pay for college in Maryland was slightly lower than the SREB average” in 2017-18.

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U.S. Department of Education, Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System, Student Financial Aid Files and Directory Files 2012 and 2017, 12-Month Enrollment Instructional Activity Files 2013 and 2018. American Community Survey Public Use Microdata Samples 2012 and 2017. Institutional sectors based on SREB-State Data Exchange categories.

Four-Year Institution Type 1: four-year institutions that awarded at least 30 doctoral degrees in five different areas.

Four-Year Institution Type 2: all other four-year institutions.

Net Price: total cost of attendance (includes tuition, fees, room & board, etc.) minus federal, state/local government, or institutional grant and scholarship aid.

Source: Southern Regional Education Board

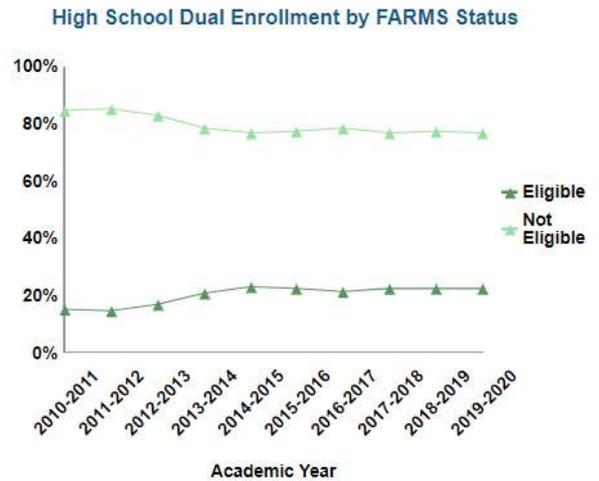
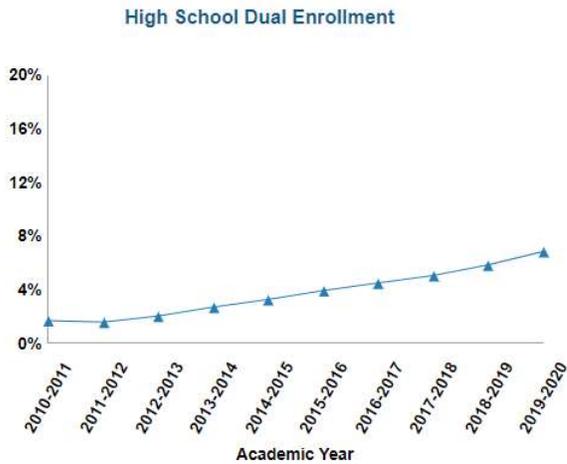
Completing the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) is often a significant step in paying for postsecondary education. FAFSA completion for Maryland students has remained fairly stable, with more than 41,000 Maryland high school students completing the FAFSA in 2021 according to the [US Department of Education FAFSA Completion Data](#).

Efforts around college readiness have increased with focused attention on dual enrollment. The Maryland Longitudinal Data System Center's (MLDS) [dashboard on Dual Enrollment](#) indicates a consistent year-over-year increase in dual enrollment over the past 10 years.

The Maryland State Department of Education (MSDE) continues to support the Pathways in Technology Early College High School (P-TECH) programs in Maryland. P-TECH programs allow high schools to enroll in a targeted program of study that leads towards a college credential, with the goal of students earning both a high school diploma and an associate's degree at the same time.

According to [MSDE's December 2021 report on P-TECH programs](#), six school systems offered P-TECH programs during the 2020-2021 school year with over 1,000 students enrolled.

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Dual enrollment is defined in the Education Article §18-14A-01, Annotated Code of Maryland as student concurrently enrolled in high school and college.

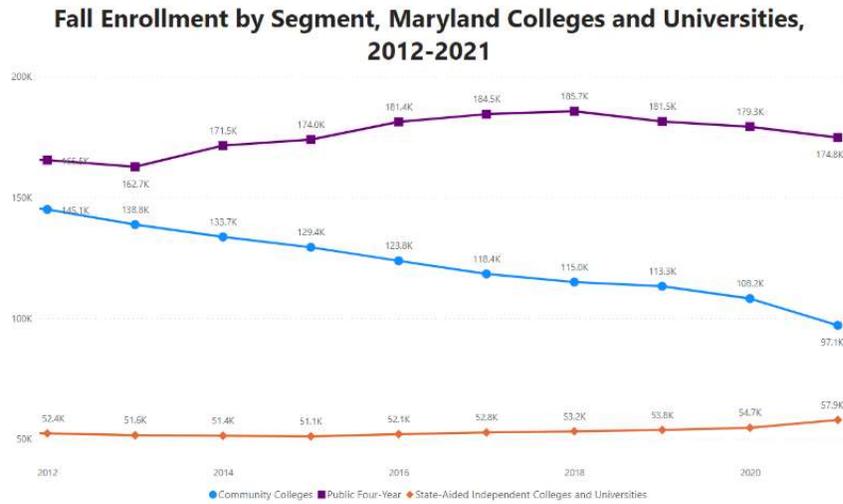
Source: Maryland Longitudinal Data System Center

In November 2019, MSDE published a [“Tool Kit to Determine Students’ College and Career Ready Designation under the College and Career Readiness and College Completion Act of 2013.”](#) The recently enacted 2020 Blueprint for Maryland's Future – Implementation legislation ([HB1300](#), [SB1000](#)), will likely lead to changes to the college and career readiness standards established by MSDE.

MSDE also coordinates statewide Career and Technical Education (CTE) opportunities. As of [January 2019](#), there are 11 career clusters that help high school students pair academic knowledge with technical skills for in-demand, high-skilled, and high-waged jobs. CTE programs of study provide the opportunity for students to earn industry-recognized certificates, acquire college credit, and gain work experience.

Enrollment at Maryland’s colleges and universities has remained relatively stable, with a recent decline likely due to the COVID-19 pandemic. [Enrollment dashboards](#) from the Maryland Higher Education Commission mirror national trends relative to the COVID-19 pandemic.

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Note: 2021 data are based on preliminary opening fall enrollment reports submitted by institution to the Maryland Higher Education Commission. Later figures may reflect different enrollment counts. 2020 and prior years' data are based on the final Enrollment Information System files submitted as of the institution's official census date.

Source: Maryland Higher Education Commission

There have been a number of recent programs that support and encourage college enrollment such as:

- [3D Scholars Program](#)
- [Achieving Collegiate Excellence & Success \(ACES\) Program](#)
- [MSDE College Application Campaign](#)
- [Terp Young Scholars](#)

The Maryland 529 Plan (previously named the Maryland Savings Plan) is also a great opportunity for families to invest in a college trust or investment plan. According to the [2020 Maryland 529 Annual Report](#), accounts were held on behalf of 258,977 unique beneficiaries in Maryland.

Last, new financial literacy programs are intended to help students understand financial skills, such as the [UMBC Money Smart Week](#) and the [CASH Campaign of Maryland](#).

Student Success

To enhance student success over the past several years, Maryland has made various improvements to existing policies and procedures. These include changes in statewide regulations, policies, and practices.

For example, targeted campaigns specific to near completers – individuals who have completed more than 75% of either an associate’s or bachelor’s degree – have been implemented at many of the colleges and universities in Maryland. The Commission has also implemented a statewide campaign to [help students find a college to finish their program of study](#) and apply for financial aid using the [Maryland Near Completer Grant](#).

The Commission has made significant changes to regulations, including:

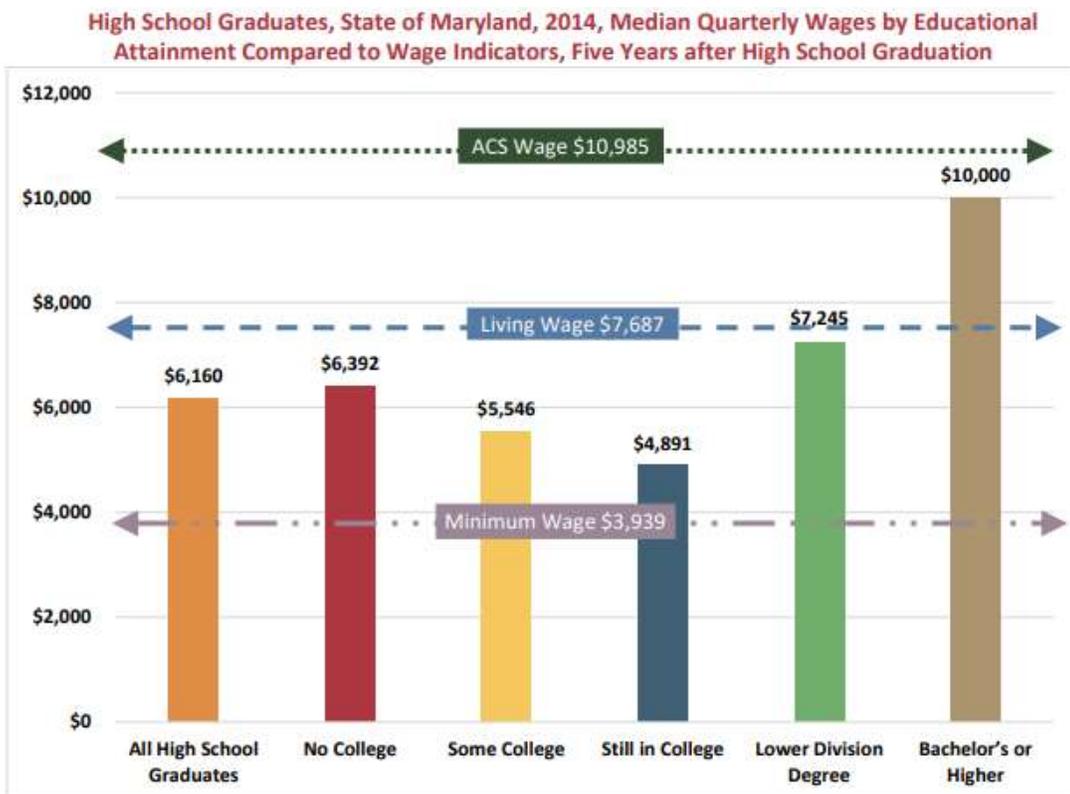
- Removing unnecessary barriers for institutions to offer academic programs via distance education.
- Establishing financial guarantee requirements for for-profit institutions to expand student protections when schools close.
- Revising regulations regarding program offerings at regional higher education centers.
- [Establishing a fund](#) to pay for certain attorney fees and costs for attorneys that represent students in a Title IX Proceeding.
- Implementing procedures for evaluating for-profit status for certain institutions.
- Establishing the Maryland State Financial Aid Application (MSFAA) for students that are ineligible to complete the FAFSA.

More recently, the Commission is in the process of adopting statewide regulations regarding the transfer of credits or courses to ensure successful implementation of the Transfer with Success Act of 2021 ([HB460/SB886](#)). Additionally, the University System of Maryland will be making [significant changes to the transfer platform](#) currently known as ARTSYS.

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Motivated by the COVID-19 pandemic, the Office of Student Financial Assistance (OSFA) has fully transitioned to accepting electronic copies of required documents for the processing of State financial aid. This practice has increased the Office’s ability to process applications in a timely manner and has eliminated the need for individuals to mail documents to the agency.

Recent analyses indicate that completing college pays off. The [2020 Career Preparation Expansion Act Report](#) from the Maryland Longitudinal Data System Center (MLDS) notes in the executive summary “high school graduates who earned a bachelor’s degree had median quarterly wages that were almost \$4,000 higher than the overall population and resulted in a quarterly wage that was \$2,300 higher than the living wage. Certificate and associate’s degree earners also had median quarterly wages higher than the overall population by \$1,700 and \$960, respectively.” The 2021 report has a [supplemental report](#) that highlights some early trends in wages in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic.



Source: Maryland Longitudinal Data System Center

Innovation

Maryland continues to be on the cutting edge with academic programs. For example, as big data becomes more accessible and integrated into business operations, several institutions have implemented data science programs at the undergraduate and graduate level. Additionally, training in drone technology and aviation has become increasingly popular. These are only some examples of innovative and cutting edge academic programs to meet the needs of the 21st century workforce.

According to the [2020 report by the National Academy of Inventors and the Intellectual Property Owners Association](#), the Johns Hopkins University and the University of Maryland continue to be in the top 25 worldwide universities that have been granted United States utility patents.

Research activity continues to grow in Maryland. Six of our public colleges and universities have a [Carnegie Classification](#) of either very high research activity or high research activity: Johns Hopkins University, University of Maryland-Baltimore County, University of Maryland-College Park, Morgan State University, University of Maryland Eastern Shore, and the University of Maryland, Baltimore.

LOOKING FORWARD DURING A PANDEMIC

Beginning in March of 2020, higher education in Maryland was quickly challenged to respond to the COVID-19 pandemic in several ways. First, the safety of students, faculty, and staff became top priority. Campuses needed to quickly identify “essential workers” relevant to an airborne, highly contagious, respiratory infection. When Maryland’s Governor Hogan declared a State of Emergency by mid-March, campuses significantly limited on-campus operations, including the necessary pivot to remote learning and the closure of student housing. MHEC began to (and, at time of this publication, continues to) convene a biweekly meeting with institutional leadership and health experts to share challenges, best practices, and obtain guidance regarding the COVID-19 pandemic. Generally, campuses remained open and operational, but embraced a remote working and learning environment.

As such, campuses needed to continue to provide educational services remotely – meaning, students and faculty had to engage with one another using the internet and various virtual platforms. Faculty who had no experience teaching remotely were challenged to shift their teaching strategies to a remote environment. Similarly, students who had never learned remotely were challenged to engage with peers, learn course material, and be assessed in new and novel ways. Student services that provided essential resources were also challenged to continue providing those services, such as writing and tutoring centers. All of this was dependent on access to appropriate technology (laptops, computers) and reliable internet access (broadband internet). Students who were unable to return “home” (e.g., international students, students that consider student housing “home”) were allowed special provisions to remain on campus until a long-term solution was identified.

Many private career schools paused their educational training for a short time. Once clarity regarding limited indoor capacity was provided at the local level and safety protocols (e.g., masking, hand sanitizing) were circulated, private career schools reopened their facilities and continued to offer their specialized training.

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Specific academic programs worked with specialized accreditors and licensing boards to ensure that remote education (even temporary) would be acceptable and in what capacity.

At the same time, campuses were also leveraged as a critical statewide resource. Under the Maryland Institute for Emergency Medical Services Systems (MIEMSS), students studying to be nurses or respiratory therapists were eligible for emergency credentials to work. Over 1,500 students applied for the emergency credentials in an effort to support the surge of COVID-19 patients in hospitals and healthcare facilities. Campuses identified essential programs of study that either required continued in-person instruction (e.g., health programs) or provided direct training that aided in critical workforce needs (e.g., Commercial Driver's License training for continued supply chain resources).

Campuses also became central testing sites and physical locations that state and local health departments could utilize. As vaccinations became more accessible, campuses held community events to expand vaccination efforts.

Remote operations and remote education continued into the 2020-2021 academic year. With the exception of specific instruction and experiences that merited students and instructors to meet in-person (e.g., lab-based courses, specialized assessments, etc.), most but not all of higher education in Maryland remained remote. Faculty were provided extensive professional training on remote teaching, while student orientations covered essential skills in remote learning. Campuses made significant investments to their information technology structures, such as expanding the resources available through their learning management systems, improving advising resources, and ensuring students had reasonable access to remote student services.

With additional Federal and State funding, many campuses purchased laptops for students to borrow, portable internet hotspots for students with unreliable internet access, and other technology to ensure students continued to have access to high-quality education.

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Some campuses did return to in-person instruction and opened student housing, but with limited capacity and regular, on-going COVID-19 testing. Campuses worked closely with local health departments to ensure compliance with statewide and county-based mandates, guidelines and coordinated efforts regarding contact tracing.

By late Fall 2020, vaccines were approved by the U.S. Food and Drug Administration for emergency use. While the distribution of vaccines was prioritized for individuals in healthcare settings, campuses began to consider vaccine mandates and guidelines for the 2021-2022 academic year. By the end of Spring 2021, campuses increased in-person activities, including limited capacity graduation ceremonies. With vaccines becoming more accessible, all public 4-year institutions announced that vaccines would be required for the 2021-2022 academic year (with medical and religious exemptions allowed). Many of the private and independent schools, colleges, and universities followed with similar mandates and guidelines. For the Fall 2021 semester, many campuses returned to in-person operations with the understanding that there may be a need to pivot back to remote operations should an outbreak or surge in COVID-19 cases occur. Campuses handled such occurrences on a case-by-case basis and worked with local health officials to address relevant issues.

Before the pandemic, many schools, colleges, and universities provided remote instruction in a limited capacity. Many campuses did not have the capacity to offer the array of in-person student services remotely. However, the COVID-19 pandemic provided campuses with an opportunity to invest in tools that can support remote instruction and remote operations.

While higher education has had to pivot, so too has the general workforce. Companies have had to reconsider their operations and allow employees to work remotely to ensure their safety and well-being. The economy and its workforce have changed, which brought changes to some industries. Campuses will need to evaluate the utility of specific training and provide education that meets a post-pandemic workforce.

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Additionally, it is clear that the COVID-19 pandemic has taken a toll on the general population's mental health. Higher education will need to be responsive to this in at least three ways: (1) expanding programs that train mental health professionals; (2) providing mental health resources to students, faculty, and staff; and (3) accommodating the impact of mental health crises on student performance. The COVID-19 pandemic has led to physical distancing, which in turn has significantly limited social interactions. Learning, in many ways, is dependent on such social interactions. Higher education in Maryland will need to be cognizant of this dynamic to fully support students and maintain high-quality education.

AN EQUITY FRAMEWORK AND LENS

As of 2020, Maryland is the fourth most diverse state in the nation according to the United States [Census Bureau’s Diversity Index](#). More specifically, there is a 67.3% probability that two people chosen at random will be from different race and ethnicity groups.

Maryland has a dynamic and diverse population. Therefore, equity in higher education must be a central focus that goes beyond a simple diversity metric or diversity statement. For the purposes of this 2022 Maryland State Plan for Higher Education, equity is less about a statement and more about:

- Completing the work to ensure that all students have the opportunity to be successful in their educational goals; and
- Measuring and evaluating results, including the success or failure of specific initiatives that lead to equitable and inclusive outcomes.

It is important to distinguish between “equality” and “equity.” The two concepts are related but have significantly different implications for policies, initiatives, and interventions. As many organizations note, equality is about giving everyone the same opportunity, whereas equity is about giving what is needed to be successful, which can differ from student to student. It is important to recognize that not every individual seeking postsecondary opportunities starts with the same knowledge, abilities, skills, and resources.

Public higher education in Maryland has existing legal obligations that directly reflect the elements of equity and diversity. Specifically, “public institutions shall... assure that women and minorities are equitably represented among faculty, staff, and administration, so that the higher education community reflects the diversity of the State’s population ([§10–204](#)).” Similarly, “the University System of Maryland shall... increase access for economically disadvantaged and minority students ([§10–209](#)).”

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Many of the schools, colleges, and universities in Maryland have adopted equity statements and initiatives, which are applauded and recognized. This 2022 State Plan reflects a commitment for Maryland to do the work of equity and measure the effectiveness of that work.

As part of a statewide diversity goal, this 2022 State Plan challenges all organizations that touch postsecondary education in Maryland to create initiatives around the goals, priorities, and action items outlined in the 2022 State Plan with an “equity lens.” Each priority and action item must be taken on with a consideration of the unique and special populations that an organization serves. Institutions should have measurable outcomes to evaluate the equity of a given policy, initiative, or intervention.

As the following priorities are considered, there are some immediate action items specific to leveraging an equity lens. These equity-focused action items are important to the diversity goals for Maryland. First, it will be important to identify special populations of interest. The most common variables used to evaluate equity gaps are race and ethnicity, gender, and age. Some populations are harder to identify than others with existing data mechanisms, which may mean a college or university will need to advance and improve how a group of individuals are identified and/or categorized. Other categorizations, such as students with disabilities, Veterans, socioeconomic status, students who are the first generation in their immediate family to attend college, non-native English speakers, etc., should be considered.

And, to further evaluate equity gaps, it may be helpful to take multiple categories into consideration, such as the cross-sectional attributions of race and ethnicity with age and gender. Disaggregating specific outcome data by specific subpopulations on a regular basis can help to explicitly identify gaps between specific groups of people.

Second, data can help campuses implement ways to eliminate gaps or evaluate recent initiatives that may have created gaps or diminished gaps. Such data also

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can be used to identify successful programs and best practices that can be replicated.

Last, it is worth noting that when thinking about initiatives with an equity lens, it is important to consider not only the students the campus *intends* to serve, but perhaps, more importantly, the students the campus *currently* serves.

2022 GOALS, PRIORITIES, AND ACTION ITEMS

The 2022 Maryland State Plan for Higher Education continues the same three goals presented in the previous plan:

GOAL 1: STUDENT ACCESS

Ensure equitable access to affordable and high-quality postsecondary education for all Maryland residents.

GOAL 2: STUDENT SUCCESS

Promote and implement practices and policies that will ensure student success.

GOAL 3: INNOVATION

Foster innovation in all aspects of Maryland higher education to improve access and student success.

Below is detailed information regarding the present and future needs for postsecondary education and research throughout Maryland, the present and future capabilities of the different institutions and segments of postsecondary education in Maryland, and the long range and short range priorities for postsecondary education and methods and guidelines (action items) for achieving and maintaining these goals and priorities.

STUDENT ACCESS:
**ENSURE EQUITABLE ACCESS TO
AFFORDABLE AND HIGH-QUALITY
POSTSECONDARY EDUCATION FOR
ALL MARYLAND RESIDENTS.**

Priority 1: Study the affordability of postsecondary education in Maryland.

The 2017-2021 State Plan for Higher Education held the tagline “Student Success with Less Debt.” The previous plan highlighted relevant existing or potential initiatives regarding student access, student success, and innovation. Now is the time to study the impact of various financial initiatives on student access and student success.

The cost of higher education is often a real or perceived barrier to accessing higher education. The [Higher Education Fiscal 2023 Budget Overview](#), prepared by the Maryland Department of Legislative Services, notes that for Maryland’s community colleges “according to the College Board, for the 2021-2022 academic year, the average rate for Maryland [tuition] was \$4,826, making it the twentieth (excluding Alaska) most expensive in the country with 7 competitor states having higher rates.” For Maryland public 4-year institutions, “According to the College Board, when compared to all states, at \$10,240, Maryland is in the middle of states (twenty-fifth) for the expensiveness of tuition and fee rate. This rate is also below the national average of \$10,816 and that of seven competitor states.” For the past several years, Governor Hogan has implemented plans to cap tuition increases at the public 4-year institutions.

Although the cost of higher education in Maryland is on par with the national average, the question remains: Is higher education in Maryland affordable? Scholarships and grants certainly help offset the costs for students and families.

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Maryland invests more than \$120 million a year in scholarships and grants. Over 26 different state-supported scholarship and grant programs provide financial assistance, including need- and merit-based scholarships intended to meet 100% of the financial need for full-time undergraduates from low-income households. These State-supported scholarships and grants are in addition to the Federal financial aid students can access and other scholarship and grant opportunities offered by the institutions or other organizations. Undoubtedly, scholarships and grants can help make postsecondary education affordable.

Loan Assistance Repayment Programs (LARPs) provide the option to make education more accessible. LARPs provide financial aid in the form of a forgivable loan in return for work or service in a particular field. In Maryland, there are [LARP programs](#) for individuals who provide public service in Maryland (such as lawyers, nurses and other health professionals, and teachers), prosecutors and public defenders, former foster care recipients employed by Maryland government, physicians, and dentists. LARPs and student loan assistance repayment plans may incentivize students to pursue public service, particularly in fields where public sector salaries are outpaced by private industry.

In addition to these state-based financial assistance programs, there have been other recent initiatives to help manage the cost of higher education. Employers often provide tuition remission for postsecondary education opportunities, particularly when the additional education benefits the organization. A [2019 Employee Benefits Survey](#) conducted by the Society for Human Resource Management found “More than half (56%) of employers offer tuition assistance for employees pursuing degrees.” Similarly, the most recent CARES Act legislation from the federal government [extends the provision](#) that allows employers to make tax-free contributions of up to \$5,250 a year towards an employee’s student debt (an initiative that the Maryland Higher Education Commission had been working on with federal colleagues for several years). The same report from the Society for Human Resource Management found that the number of companies that provide student loan repayment programs “have risen from 4% in 2018 to 8% in 2019.” There is a potential increase in the number of employers offering student loan assistance repayment plans.

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Along with existing financial aid assistance programs, institutions of higher education are pursuing innovative ways to minimize the financial barriers to higher education. Some of these recent initiatives, which have been previously discussed or will be discussed in detail, include: dual enrollment, which has increased significantly over the past five years; P-TECH programs; clarifying statewide standards related to the transfer of credits and courses; and expanding credit for prior learning opportunities, including collaborations with Apprenticeship Sponsors.

A pay-per-credit option, as opposed to standard full-time tuition rates, may help make postsecondary education more affordable by capping the overall cost of a degree or program. Under the standard full-time tuition rate, a student pays the same full-time tuition whether the student is taking 12 or 18 credits in a semester. Students taking 12 credits per semester toward a 60-credit associate’s degree or 120-credit bachelor’s degree will take longer to graduate than a student taking 18 credits per semester at the same institution, leading to significantly increased costs under the standard tuition model. A pay-per-credit model would reduce those costs and allow for greater flexibility in higher education.

Similarly, some institutions, like [Purdue University](#), have implemented an “Income Share Agreement,” by which students receive funding from the institution and, upon leaving school, the students pay a fixed percentage of their income for a set number of years. This kind of financial programming may attract students who would otherwise be hesitant to consider a postsecondary credential due to a perception that there is a limited financial return on investment. Institutions that offer Income Share Agreements are making an investment in their students by committing to their students that there will be a financial return on the investment.

In Maryland, Capitol Technology University, a private nonprofit institution, has recently adopted the “[Capitol Technology University Commitment](#).” Students who are unable to obtain at least one job offer in engineering, engineering technology, computer sciences, information technology, or business within 90 days of graduation will be provided up to 36 additional undergraduate credits —

tuition-free — while they continue their job search. This challenges Capitol Technology University to ensure that their undergraduate academic programs align with industry needs and prioritizes a student’s ability to obtain an industry-related job post-graduation.

As noted in the 2017-2021 State Plan for Higher Education, Open Educational Resources (OERs) can lower the cost of attendance. Creative Commons is a popular platform for housing OERs and [defines OERs](#) as “teaching, learning, and research materials that are either (a) in the public domain or (b) licensed in a manner that provides everyone with free and perpetual permission to engage in the 5R activities.” The 5R activities include retain, reuse, revise, remix, and redistribute. Many campuses in Maryland encourage faculty to develop courses that utilize OERs, which in turn lowers the cost by not requiring students to pay for textbooks.

Currently, it is unclear whether these kinds of initiatives – scholarships, grants, tuition reimbursement, student loan assistance repayment programs, pay-per-credit options, income share agreements, open educational resources, etc. – help diminish financial barriers to accessing higher education, particularly in Maryland. A collection of studies specific to Maryland that address various college affordability elements are likely to help better understand the financial barriers that prevent students from accessing higher education. Policymakers and Marylanders at large also would benefit from such studies regarding the cost of attendance. The following action items can be implemented by institutions of higher education, other organizations, or within State government to “study the affordability of postsecondary education in Maryland.”

ACTION ITEMS

Priority 1: Study the affordability of postsecondary education in Maryland.

- ◆** Define “affordable” in the context of postsecondary education, focusing on affordability within specific subpopulations.
- Identify the cost of postsecondary education, including the potential of missed income while enrolled and consider non-tuition ancillary costs.
- Identify financial assistance programs that help pay for postsecondary education.
- ≡** Identify, evaluate, and address equity gaps in students accessing financial assistance programs.
- Evaluate the success of financial assistance programs.
- ◆** Consider innovative and alternative ways to keep postsecondary education affordable (without compromising high-quality education).

Priority 2: Examine and improve financial literacy programs for students and families to encourage financial planning to pay for postsecondary education.

As noted earlier (see section 2), significant progress has been made in the way of educating Maryland’s primary and secondary students in financial literacy. The Maryland State Department of Education (MSDE) has [six literacy standards](#) for students in grades 3-12. MSDE’s [2019-2021 Personal Finance Literacy Education Report](#) highlights how local school systems have implemented these standards. Several colleges and universities have actively engaged with local school systems to host events (e.g., [Hood College](#)), provide a college-level dual enrollment course (e.g., [College of Southern Maryland](#)), or provide curriculum for teachers (e.g., [University of Arizona](#)).

Maryland is well-positioned to extend these initiatives beyond the Maryland State Department of Education and into postsecondary institutions. [A 2019 report conducted by Silver Canady & Associates](#) suggests six recommendations “for postsecondary institutions to accelerate the presence, reach, and effectiveness of student financial education efforts while also enhancing the professional field.” The report also notes a distinction between financial aid planning (which may include a broad range of financial matters that go beyond finances and postsecondary education) and financial decision-making. Not all students take advantage of traditional financial aid, such as federal financial aid. Therefore, targeted financial planning programs must be expanded to include subpopulations of students that may not be aware of such planning services.

In addition to expanding financial literacy opportunities to all students – not only those seeking financial aid – there are opportunities to educate campus-based professionals on financial literacy. The [CASH Campaign of Maryland](#) (*Creating Assets, Savings, and Hope*) is a nonprofit organization that provides various financial services, such as tax preparation, financial coaching and planning, and benefits screening to individuals. Additionally, the CASH Campaign of

Maryland also provides staff training opportunities to organizations regarding financial literacy.

ACTION ITEMS

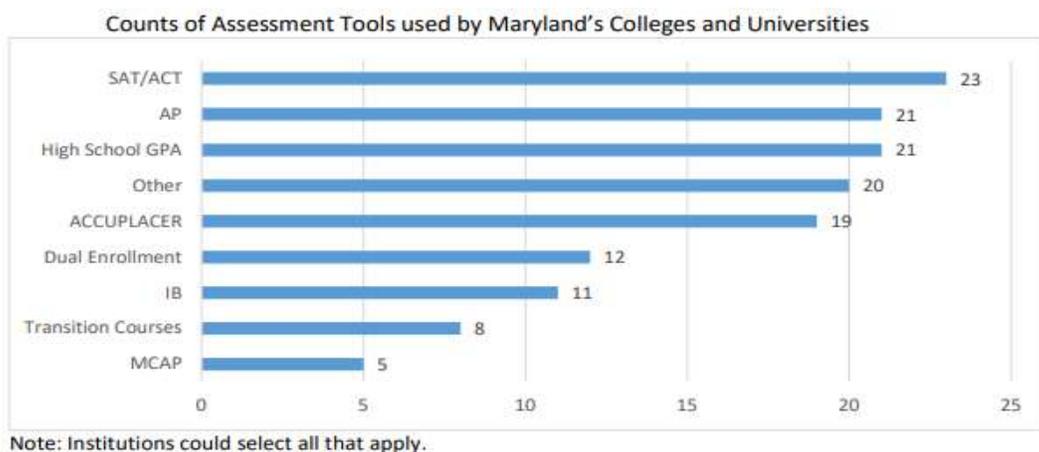
Priority 2: Examine and improve financial literacy programs for students and families to encourage financial planning to pay for postsecondary education.

- Identify and implement ideas and programs to support efforts regarding the MSDE Financial Literacy Standards.
- ≡** Educate all students on how to best pay for college prior to enrollment.
- Identify, initiate, and implement programs and initiatives to provide professional development regarding financial literacy to all student touch-points (such as faculty, high school counselors and academic advisors), not just staff in traditional financial aid offices.
- ◆** Engage students and recent alumni in the development and dissemination of financial literacy tools to prospective students.

Priority 3: Analyze and improve systems that inform and evaluate a student’s academic readiness for postsecondary education.

Maryland is home to numerous open-access institutions, meaning these campuses are nonselective in their admission standards (in contrast to institutions that engage in selective admissions, whereby students that meet the minimum admission criteria are not guaranteed admissions to the college or university). Regardless of admission standards, not all students who enroll are considered “college-ready,” and campuses are often challenged to ensure that students are academically ready for college-level coursework. Therefore, many campuses adopt testing procedures in order to implement remedial or developmental coursework to assist students who need additional academic supports. Sometimes developmental or remedial courses are provided as co-requisite courses, meaning a student takes the developmental or remedial course *at the same time* as the college-level course. Other times, developmental or remedial courses are provided as pre-requisite courses, meaning a student takes the developmental or remedial course *before* the college-level course.

One challenge around determining “college-readiness” is which tests and scores are used to evaluate college readiness. A [2021 report regarding assessment tools](#) indicates that using multiple measures to evaluate a student’s readiness is becoming more common.



Source: Maryland Higher Education Commission

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The Maryland Association of Community Colleges (MACC), on behalf of all 16 Maryland community colleges, annually enters into a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with the Public School Superintendents' Association of Maryland (PSSAM). The MOU identifies college readiness placement scores for all community colleges on a number of examinations. While this is an important first step in ensuring that the same metrics are used at all community colleges, all postsecondary institutions should convene to identify criteria for evaluating college readiness, complementing and mirroring many of the same measures used by MSDE. Relatedly, the [Blueprint for Maryland's Future](#) is an important piece of legislation to consider. The legislation redefines college and career readiness and the steps that MSDE must take to support students in earning college and career readiness status.

Maryland could greatly benefit from a reevaluation of the models and assumptions about what constitutes readiness to learn, succeed, persist, and ultimately secure employment. Measures and definitions regarding college-readiness should be evaluated in the context of specific student populations, such as adult and returning students who are not enrolling directly from high school.

Institutions that are not open-access often leverage admissions requirements to ensure that students are college-ready (e.g., using the same standardized tests that determine “college-readiness” at an open-access institution for the purposes of admissions to a non-open-access institution). However, institutions with admissions policies are not precluded from admitting students that may not be “college-ready.” Competitive colleges with admissions criteria are admitting students who show great promise but may lack specific academic preparation experiences or skills. This is seen as an explicit equity practice because not all potential students come with the same secondary educational opportunities. Campuses that recognize this equity gap are adjusting admissions practices and implementing support structures, like remedial courses or summer bridge programs, for students who need additional academic resources to be successful. Even in the absence of leveraging admissions criteria to determine college

readiness, admission practices in general may create barriers for students who have the experiences, abilities, skills, and knowledge to be successful.

Opportunities in high school can help bridge the skills gap students may have before entering postsecondary education. MSDE has adopted a progression of [work-based learning experiences](#) in which career exploration can start as early as elementary school and into middle school, and career preparation starts in middle school and continues into high school. Opportunities like dual enrollment, career preparation with youth apprenticeships, and Career and Technical Education (CTE) programs are excellent ways for students to engage with college and career opportunities to demonstrate aptitude and readiness to excel in postsecondary education. The Blueprint for Maryland's Future expands these opportunities by having high school students participate in dual enrollment, early college, and CTE in grades 11 and 12.

ACTION ITEMS

Priority 3: Analyze and improve systems that inform and evaluate a student's academic readiness for postsecondary education.

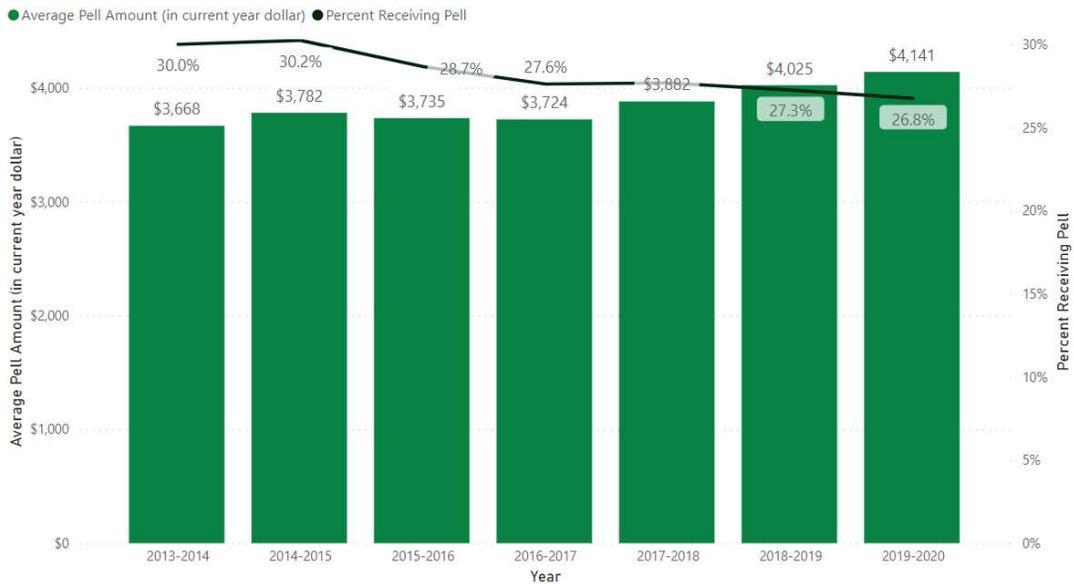
- Develop a statewide definition of college readiness.
- ≡** Reevaluate models and assumptions about what constitutes readiness to learn, succeed, persist, and ultimately secure employment.
- Support dual enrollment opportunities.
- ◆** Support career exploration opportunities in middle school and career preparation during high school, such as youth apprenticeships and programs that utilize federal funding.
- Engage with recent high school graduates and young adults to better identify barriers to access.
- ≡** Consider how admission practices may or may not benefit certain student populations and determine the purpose of admissions criteria.

Priority 4: Analyze systems that impact how specific student populations access affordable and high-quality postsecondary education.

Our Maryland colleges, universities, and postsecondary schools are systems of their own accord and function within larger systems. These structures, while necessary, likely create unseen challenges for unique student populations. For example, first-generation students, by definition, will be the first in their family to attend college, and they may be navigating a system that is unfamiliar to them and (potentially) their immediate support network. This is one reason why high school counselors and community leaders are so important to first-generation students. For example, without explicit instruction or advice, a first-generation student may not understand the importance of attending a campus open house. Yet, campus open houses often provide clarification on admissions protocols, identify appropriate points of contacts on the campus (such as financial aid advisors), and identify academic programs. This is valuable information that helps students navigate campus-specific requirements and choose a campus that best fits their needs and interests. Therefore, it is not enough for a campus simply to hold an open house for potential students; campuses should examine whether they are effectively reaching all potential students, particularly first-generation students, and take action to close identified gaps.

In addition, students may not be familiar with the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) or understand how important it is to complete the FAFSA to be eligible for Federal and State financial aid. This may be further exacerbated with first-generation students, who may not have the social supports or knowledge on how to navigate the FAFSA. Recent [dashboards regarding Pell grant recipients](#) (federal funding) indicate that “around 30% of Maryland undergraduate students receive Pell grants, which is slightly lower than the national average of 34%.”

Percent of undergraduate students receiving Pell grants (AY2013/14 - AY2019/20)



Note: Sample includes the students enrolled in academic year 2013-14 to 2019-20. Pell amount is presented in current year dollar (inflation-unadjusted).

Source: Maryland Higher Education Commission

The FAFSA not only determines eligibility for Federal financial aid, but the Commission (like many other states) has an agreement with the US Department of Education to obtain FAFSA data when a student indicates a Maryland college, university, or applicable postsecondary school on the FAFSA form. The Commission’s Office of Student Financial Assistance (OSFA) then uses that information to make an initial determination of eligibility for Maryland specific state financial aid.

MHEC awards over \$120 million dollars in State financial aid every year, and eligibility often starts with completing the FAFSA. The importance of educating students, and particularly first-generation students, about completing the FAFSA cannot be overstated: Without the FAFSA, students will either use cash (out-of-pocket) or credit (private loans) to pay for college. To ensure all interested students are evaluated for eligibility for State-based financial aid, Maryland has created the [Maryland State Financial Aid Application](#) (MSFAA). MHEC implemented the MSFAA to assist students that are not eligible to complete the FAFSA. High school students that miss the opportunity to learn about the

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FAFSA and MSFAA are experiencing explicit barriers to access postsecondary education.

Physical proximity to educational institutions also can pose challenges for Maryland students to access affordable higher education. While Maryland is home to over 50 in-state institutions, several out-of-state institutions with physical presence in the state, and over 130 private career schools, there are still local jurisdictions in Maryland without a postsecondary campus within the jurisdiction's borders. To alleviate these gaps, Maryland has been successful in operating several regional higher education centers (RHECs). These RHECs are physical spaces that an existing institution can use to provide academic programming outside the main campus. For example, the University System of Maryland at Hagerstown is a RHEC located in Hagerstown, a city in Western Maryland. The University System of Maryland at Hagerstown is home to 13 undergraduate and eight graduate programs offered at existing institutions, such as an undergraduate Nursing program (offered by Towson University) and a Social Work undergraduate and graduate program (offered by Salisbury University). Instead of students needing to relocate to Baltimore or the Eastern Shore for these programs, they can stay local in Western Maryland to complete their program of study and likely meet an immediate workforce need for the local community. Institutions can leverage RHECs to offer existing programs to students who are unwilling or unable to relocate to their main campus. Similarly, institutions that leverage RHECs may be able to attract faculty and staff who are similarly unwilling or unable to relocate for employment. To enhance these opportunities, institutions should conduct a cross analysis of workforce need in specific communities and the current academic programs offered at their main campus.

Institutions also can enhance access and affordability by utilizing different modalities and innovative scheduling. Responses to the COVID-19 pandemic demonstrated that students' ability to access postsecondary education often depends on technology. The conversion to remote learning with asynchronous learning models was very common in the fall semester of 2020 in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. While campuses contemplate the continued use of

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remote learning modalities (either synchronous, asynchronous, or “hy-flex”), these changes will likely attract enrollment from new student populations that previously were unable to access postsecondary education. MHEC has focused on improving both access and success through the deployment of innovative online delivery modalities. MHEC altered processes and suspended fee structures to improve flexibility and support institutional pivots to online distance education during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Similarly, campuses can analyze their schedules and adjust to student demands and needs. The traditional fall and spring schedules are becoming less common, with “mini-mesters” and 8-week intensive courses becoming more popular. The inclusion of evening and weekend schedules allows students greater flexibility to balance other demands on their lives (e.g., work schedules, child care availability, access to transportation, etc.). Block scheduling or [structured scheduling](#), in which students take courses in a predictable fashion or with a specific cohort of students, may assist students in maintaining schedule stability from one semester to another (and may create unintentional benefits like positive cohort dynamics). Campuses should evaluate how the modality of their academic programming and the schedules they utilize may impact student enrollment in specific courses.

Initial analyses indicate a decline in enrollment during the COVID-19 pandemic. Coupled with an expected 2025 decline in high school graduates, campuses should be cognizant of the potential long-term overall decline in enrollment. Campuses should consider these enrollment trends and strategically plan to address them. Additional action items related to enrollment can be found in Priority 7: Enhance the ways postsecondary education is a platform for ongoing lifelong learning.

ACTION ITEMS

Priority 4: Analyze systems that impact how specific student populations access affordable and high-quality postsecondary education.

- ≡** Consider how first-generation students navigate the higher education “system” for the first time (e.g., [challenges](#)/resistance in filling out the FASFA or MSFAA).
- ◆** Leverage RHECs to offer relevant and accessible academic programs to address education deserts in Maryland, reduce costs associated with student relocation, and meet local workforce needs.
- Evaluate the use of different learning modalities (without compromising academic quality) as a way to attract students not otherwise able to access postsecondary education.
- ◆** Examine how specific scheduling structures may prevent students from accessing postsecondary education.
- Incorporate enrollment trends and projected enrollments in long-term strategic planning.

**STUDENT SUCCESS:
PROMOTE AND IMPLEMENT
PRACTICES AND POLICIES THAT WILL
ENSURE STUDENT SUCCESS.**

Student success is synonymous with Maryland’s success. Attracting students to our campuses is a critical first step; we also need to ensure that students are successful once they arrive. Success can be defined in a number of ways: student retention, completion of an academic program, less student debt, and workforce outcomes. Much like the access priorities, the following student success priorities are intended to provide direction to all entities involved in postsecondary education that are committed to student success.

Priority 5: Maintain the commitment to high-quality postsecondary education in Maryland.

Maryland is home to over 200 colleges, universities, and postsecondary schools as either in-state or out-of-state institutions, providing in-person, remote instruction or both. We know that all campuses are committed to providing a high-quality postsecondary education in Maryland. Degree-granting institutions have a unique mission with goals and objectives consistent with the purposes of higher education and the philosophy of the institution's board. The [institutional mission](#) should indicate the institution's identity, constituencies served by the institution, and the institution's instructional program emphasis. Academic programs and the general operation of the institution should be consistent with the mission of the institution. Missions should demonstrate a commitment to high-quality postsecondary education to ensure every student is successful. It is important that our Maryland institutions support one another (as opposed to compete with one another) in their unique identity and missions. Institutional missions are reviewed for congruency with MHEC's State Plan.

With a fast-changing economy, campuses are constantly working to update academic programs to meet industry needs and ensure a quality workforce, support faculty development, consider innovative credentialing models, and provide low-risk high-reward experiential learning opportunities for self-exploration and career development. Need analysis and demonstrated market demand can help to ensure that academic programs are relevant to student success.

By regulation, campuses should demonstrate a critical and compelling regional or statewide need (present and future) before requesting a new academic program or proposing substantive changes to an existing program. There are several types of need:

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- 1) The need for the advancement and evolution of knowledge.
- 2) Societal needs, including expanding educational opportunities and choices for minority and educationally disadvantaged students at institutions of higher education.
- 3) Occupational and professional needs relative to upgrading vocational/technical skills or meeting job market requirements.
- 4) The need to strengthen and expand the capacity of historically black colleges and universities to provide high-quality and unique educational programs.

Market demand (different from need) is another consideration when implementing a new academic program or changing an existing program, particularly for non-liberal arts and sciences programs. It is important that students have a reasonable opportunity for a job upon completion of a degree. Market demand can be operationalized as the availability of openings in the job market to be served by the new program. Data regarding market demand may include workforce and employment projections prepared by the [Maryland Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics, Census Data](#), the [Maryland Department of Commerce](#), accrediting organizations, licensing boards, and professional and trade associations. The Maryland Department of Commerce currently identifies ten key industries for Maryland:

- Aerospace and defense;
- Advanced manufacturing;
- Agribusiness;
- Life sciences;
- Cybersecurity and IT;
- Distribution and logistics;
- Energy and sustainability;
- Financial services;
- Military and federal, and
- Tourism.

Two new dashboards from the Maryland Department of Labor, one on [occupations](#) and one on [industries](#), analyze data to examine employment, growth, wages, employment concentration, and more.

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In addition, recently collected, existing, or new market surveys containing quantifiable and reliable data from prospective employers on the education and training needs of their workforce and the anticipated number of vacancies can shed light on the specific market demand for skilled employees. A market demand analysis should also consider the current and projected supply of prospective graduates of existing programs in the state and region.

Demonstrating need and market demand for emerging fields can be particularly difficult. Campuses should work with the Maryland Department of Commerce and local chambers of commerce to better understand local workforce needs and emerging fields.

At the same time, institutions should be extremely thoughtful in academic program development over the next several years. Due to a decline in birthrates as a result of the 2008 recession, there is expected to be an “[enrollment cliff](#)” of high school graduates beginning in 2025. Institutions should consider becoming more specialized in their current academic offerings as opposed to expanding offerings beyond existing programs. This can make the difference between offering many programs with small enrollment and offering a few programs with significant depth of specialization and greater overall enrollment (and perhaps a more robust use of faculty and resources).

Similarly, campuses should regularly evaluate academic programs and identify obsolete programs. In some cases, campuses may need to completely eliminate an obsolete program, while other options may be to reallocate faculty resources and courses to create a new program or supplement or strengthen existing programs through a modification.

Academic programs should include real-world experiences, such as internships, externships, or cooperative learning opportunities. Registered Apprenticeships are also valuable unique experiences that are regulated by the [Apprenticeship and Training Council](#) under the Maryland Department of Labor.

Such real-world experiences can provide several benefits to students and their potential for success when entering the workforce. First, they provide low-risk/high-reward learning opportunities to discover what a potential career may include. Second, they provide hands-on experiences for students to apply what they have learned in the classroom. And third, they allow students the opportunity to network for jobs post-graduation.

These real-world experiences should, when possible, be paid experiences. Unpaid internships or other formal real-world learning experiences likely create inequities between students who can afford to forego a salary to complete an internship and those who cannot due to other life circumstances. Additional hidden costs, like transportation, should also be an ongoing consideration when requiring real-world experiences as an academic requirement for graduation. These costs can be barriers to participation.

The benefits of applying academic experiences to real-world experiences can also be actualized through project-based learning, micro-internships, the blending of classroom and workplace learning, and prior learning assessments. Opportunities that specifically emphasize the applied and workplace relevant knowledge, skills, and abilities are essential strategies for ensuring more students experience the direct connections between the classroom and the workplace.

Faculty are essential to ensuring high-quality academic programming. Institutions can support faculty by providing ongoing pedagogical training opportunities. Additionally, campuses should make explicit efforts to support the academic pipeline with graduate students and graduate training in pedagogy. This can be done by requiring pedagogical training for all graduate students. At some point in any career, an expert will need to teach and train the next generation of experts; it is important that people learn how to teach well, regardless of their interest in a formal academic or teaching career. Of note, the pandemic successfully demonstrated the use of institutional resources for professional development for online and remote pedagogy.

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As noted earlier, Maryland law has prioritized that “women and minorities are equitably represented among faculty, staff, and administration, so that the higher education community reflects the diversity of the State’s population.” It is essential that campuses make explicit efforts to expand academic pipelines to underrepresented populations for a long-term goal of diversifying faculty, both in Maryland and across the nation. Maryland’s diverse state population is primed for doing just that: providing every opportunity for any individual to consider a long-term career as a faculty member in academia. Campuses can do this by considering their undergraduate research opportunities and the pipelines into graduate training and explicitly evaluating equity gaps in those pipelines. Institutions that are committed to diversity, equity, and inclusion efforts should explicitly include and consider the elements of a diverse faculty and staff.

As a function of pedagogy and best practices, explicit training on assessment tools and strategies should be provided to faculty. Assessments should be used to evaluate a student’s skill and knowledge for real-world application. Assessments should be purposeful, and institutions should actively support faculty and provide training to identify best assessment strategies and provide ongoing evaluations of assessment. Similarly, capstone projects for upcoming graduates can often provide an opportunity to demonstrate collective knowledge and skills.

Further, to ensure high-quality education, campuses should consistently evaluate the quality of their online or remote academic programs to ensure that they maintain the same learning outcomes, assessments, and curriculum as in-person or hybrid programs. Students who engage in online or remote learning may have different challenges than students enrolled in more traditional modalities. Campuses should be sensitive to these differences between modalities of instruction and learning. Campuses should regularly evaluate their programs both in-person and online to ensure there is equity in the quality of education regardless of modality.

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Maryland is fortunate to have the University of Maryland Global Campus as a leader in providing online academic programs. Additionally, MarylandOnline and Quality Matters are entities that help institutions provide quality assurance in an online environment and advocate for collaboration, research, and sharing of best practices. In 2011, the [Council of Regional Accrediting Commissions \(C-RAC\) Guidelines](#) was established, creating national standards for the evaluation of distance education; Maryland regulations cite these guidelines to ensure quality. Maryland institutions can leverage these resources to ensure distance education is provided in a high-quality manner and accessible to students.

Regional higher education centers (RHECs) are often a physical location where colleges and universities can offer degree programs (as noted in earlier sections). Therefore, RHECs can play a key role in planning for and building robust pathways that serve students. For example, the Maryland RHECs have strong connections to local employers and are well-positioned to provide experiential learning opportunities that are tailored to the regional workforce need. Campuses should leverage Maryland's RHECs as a resource of data analytics to plan for and evaluate degree-to-career pathways, as a hub for cross-campus faculty innovation, and as partners regarding regional and statewide workforce needs.

ACTION ITEMS

Priority 5: Maintain the commitment to high-quality postsecondary education in Maryland.

- Support all institutions, each with a unique mission.
- Identify innovative fields of study.
- Evaluate equity gaps in undergraduate to graduate pipelines for academic careers to ensure a diverse higher education faculty, administration, and staff.
- Consider specializing as opposed to expanding academic programs.
- Expand faculty development and training in pedagogy, including graduate student training in pedagogy.
- Evaluate assessment strategies for purpose, including assessing a student for real-world application and capstone projects as representative of experience.
- Increase paid real-world experiences (such as internships, externships, work-study opportunities) as a part of new curricula.
- Evaluate the quality of remote education.
- Leverage RHECs to offer relevant and accessible academic programs to address education deserts in Maryland, reducing costs associated with student relocation, and meeting local workforce needs.

Priority 6: Improve systems that prevent timely completion of an academic program.

The pandemic has magnified the inequities assumed by adopting the traditional model of higher education in which students complete their academic program “on-time.” Generally speaking, the expectation is that a student completes 15 credits per semester to earn a 60-credit associate’s degree in two years or a 120-credit bachelor’s degree in four years. This model does not work for all students. The reality, though, is that some students need to take alternative paths to finish their program of study, which may mean longer time and, as discussed earlier, may prove more expensive. Relatedly, eligibility for federal financial aid as a full-time student requires only 12-credits per semester. At that rate of pursuit (only 12 credits per semester), either a student takes summer and/or winter courses to stay “on track” for two-year and four-year degree completion times, or takes longer to complete those degrees. While this is a systemic and national challenge, it directly impacts our Maryland students. Campuses should ensure that these students do not remain continuously enrolled for several years with little progress towards degree completion. And students should be encouraged to take “mini-mester,” summer, or fall classes to meet degree requirements.

Moreover, as with innovations in ways to pay for college, it is time to rethink our focus on a traditional model of a 60-credit associate’s degree or 120-credit bachelor’s degree. Instead, “stackable credentials” can allow students to build a unique portfolio of skills and knowledge in less time and potentially at a lower cost than a traditional degree path. For example, a student that combines a business certificate with a graphic design certificate would have concrete marketable skills that would make them attractive to employers or enable them to build their own business, specializing in marketing or managerial expertise for production artists. [“Credential as you go”](#) is another term that encapsulates the same idea.

Similarly, stackable credentials can allow students the time flexibility to complete a full program of study at their own pace while earning credentials on the way.

For example, [Mississippi](#) has adopted a model whereby a student can earn a general education certificate and three to four specialized certificates that collectively make an associate's degree. A similar initiative in [Idaho](#) was recently adopted called SkillStack®, which focuses on industry specific “badges” that are validated by specific colleges in Idaho.

These opportunities may include options in non-credit programs that allow students to earn industry credentials. Creating or expanding “on-ramps” and “off-ramps” between credit bearing and non-credit bearing programs can often support meaningful and unique credential and degree obtainment opportunities.

While these initiatives create systems for students to earn a meaningful credential and enter the workforce as quickly as possible, there are students that leave postsecondary education without a credential – often known as “near completers.” A [recent analysis](#) conducted by the Maryland Longitudinal Data System Center evaluated five-year outcomes for a specific cohort of Maryland high school graduates. That analysis found that “high school graduates with some college but no degree and those still in college had the lowest median quarterly wages, \$5,122 and \$4,823 respectively, which puts them both more than \$4,000 below the Maryland living wage (p. vii).” Students with “some college” – or “near completers” – are almost worse off than if they never attended college. As student debt increases for non-completers, lifelong earning potential is compounded. The same report notes that earning a credential can have a meaningful impact on wage earnings.

We must work to identify near completers and identify ways to support them in completing a meaningful credential. The Commission and many of the colleges and universities in Maryland have “near completer” initiatives. In fact, the Commission offers a [Near Completer Grant](#) for students who were previously enrolled in a degree program that they did not complete and now plan to re-enroll to earn their degree. Colleges and universities offer similar programs to help support students who have almost completed their degree.

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Transfer continues to be a challenge in Maryland. Of the 34,357 students that [transferred to a University System of Maryland](#) institution in fiscal year 2021, 31.5% of those students came from a Maryland community college. Maryland State law requires that students with an associate's degree be accepted to a four-year public institution. Challenges can arise, however, when individual courses or credits are eliminated upon transfer. Often, transfer students are not advised properly as to what credits are most valuable to assure efficient completion of a bachelor's degree upon transfer, or their degree plans do not adequately address the needs of transfer students. Clear articulation agreements between institutions and clear advising of transfer students can help ensure that they are just as successful as non-transfer students.

Recent legislation and regulations from 2021 and 2022 have made some significant changes to statewide transfer. The Transfer with Success Act from 2021 ([HB460/SB886](#)) created a communication loop for the denial of credit, meaning a sending institution will now know what credits or courses are being denied for transfer by a receiving institution. Subsequent regulations (proposed at the time of this publication) to implement the 2021 legislation further created a standard for course equivalencies: when 70% of the learning outcomes are the same between two courses, the courses are equivalent, and the sending course cannot be denied for transfer. [ARTSYS](#) is a transfer platform overseen by the University System of Maryland that houses important detailed information and course and programmatic transfer between institutions.

Credit for prior learning is a growing opportunity that benefits students that may have had on-the-job training or established skills and knowledge through experience. Institutions regularly award credit when a student can demonstrate prior learning. Maryland regulations require institutions to have policies regarding the assessment of prior learning and the awarding of specified credit. These opportunities can greatly benefit students who have gained skills or knowledge through non-academic methods and prevent students from enrolling in redundant coursework. Maryland could benefit greatly from a more consistent approach to prior learning assessments and the award of credits.

Again, as previously noted, regional higher education centers (RHECs) are an innovative resource to bring academic programming to the student (as opposed to the student going to the academic program). Campuses should engage with Maryland’s RHECs to identify creative efforts for removing barriers to educational opportunities and increasing the timely completion of academic programs.

ACTION ITEMS

Priority 6: Improve systems that prevent timely completion of an academic program.

- ≡** Examine how specific scheduling structures may prevent students from accessing postsecondary education.
- ◆** Consider alternatives to the traditional academic credentials, such as stackable credentials.
- Identify and support “Near Completer” students.
- Improve academic coordination among institutions to address challenges faced by transfer students.
- ◆** Develop and publicize “credit for prior learning” policies.
- ◆** Engage with Maryland’s RHECs to remove barriers related to timely completion.

◆ **Priority 7: Enhance the ways postsecondary education is a platform for ongoing lifelong learning.**

Postsecondary education in Maryland provides more than certificates and degrees. While law establishes these duties for public institutions, all postsecondary education in Maryland should be seen as an opportunity for personal development. Public institutions are expected to provide a general education to all undergraduate degree-seeking students. Part of the purpose of the general education program is to create a space for individuals to strengthen non-academic skills, such as leadership skills, analytical skills, and communication skills. In light of this general education, students can emerge as critical thinkers and future leaders. To further Maryland’s goals, institutions should look for opportunities to expand general education requirements for a 21st century education.

According to Maryland law, the duties of public institutions of higher education include not only teaching and training students for careers and advanced study but also the duty to promote civic responsibility and provide public services for citizens of the State. Ensuring that Maryland’s postsecondary institutions embrace a lifelong learning model will be essential to developing the whole person as a contributing, engaged member of the local, state, national, and world community.

Postsecondary education is also an opportunity for ongoing professional development, such as credentialed professional development or continuing education for the purposes of maintaining a professional license.

ACTION ITEMS

Priority 7: Enhance the ways postsecondary education is a platform for ongoing lifelong learning.

- ◆** Evaluate general education requirements for undergraduate degrees to meet a 21st century education.
- ◆** **≡** Incorporate civic learning and civic engagement into all academic programs.
- ◆** Expand lifelong learning opportunities to the general public, including re-skilling and up-skilling educational programs.
- ◆** Revise general education requirements to include civic learning and civic engagement, information technology and computer literacy skills.

INNOVATION:
**FOSTER INNOVATION IN
ALL ASPECTS OF MARYLAND HIGHER
EDUCATION TO IMPROVE ACCESS AND
STUDENT SUCCESS.**

Priority 8: Promote culture of risk-taking.

The realities of the student marketplace are changing. Maryland cannot afford to continue being grounded in a traditional higher education paradigm. Student and learner demographics have changed dramatically; employers are critical stakeholders in defining the necessary knowledge, skills, abilities, and dispositions that are essential in today’s and future workforce needs; and a college degree is not the sacred cow or credential it once was. In order to remain one of the leading states in higher education, Maryland will need to be innovative and agile to serve the changing student and changing workforce.

Innovative ideas – new methods or processes to support student access and success – are presented throughout this 2022 Maryland State Plan for Higher Education. A summary of innovative action items is provided below:

ACTION ITEMS

Priority 8: Promote culture of risk-taking.

- ◆ Define “affordable” in the context of postsecondary education, focusing on affordability within specific subpopulations.
- ◆ Consider innovative and alternative ways to keep postsecondary education affordable (without compromising high-quality education).
- ◆ Engage students and recent alumni in the development and dissemination of financial literacy tools to prospective students.

- ◆ Support career exploration opportunities during high school, such as youth apprenticeships and programs that utilize federal funding.
- ◆ Leverage RHECs to offer relevant and accessible academic programs to address education deserts in Maryland, reducing costs associated with student relocation, and meeting local workforce needs.
- ◆ Examine how specific scheduling structures may prevent students from accessing postsecondary education.
- ◆ Identify innovative and emerging fields of study.
- ◆ Consider specializing as opposed to expanding academic programs.
- ◆ Increase paid real-world experiences (such as internships, externships, work-study opportunities) as a part of new curricula.
- ◆ Consider alternatives to the traditional academic credentials, such as stackable credentials.
- ◆ Develop and publicize “credit for prior learning” policies.
- ◆ Engage with Maryland’s RHECs to remove barriers related to timely completion.
- ◆ Evaluate general education requirements for undergraduate degrees to meet a 21st century education.
- ◆ Incorporate civic learning and civic engagement into all academic programs.
- ◆ Expand lifelong learning opportunities to the general public, including re-skilling and up-skilling educational programs.
- ◆ Revise general education requirements to include civic learning and civic engagement, and information technology and computer literacy skills.

As discussed in the 2017-2021 Maryland State Plan for Higher Education, innovation is centered on calculated and thoughtful risk taking. To dismantle barriers to education and respond to a fast-changing economy, we need to give ourselves permission to try new ideas. Maryland’s postsecondary education’s response to the COVID-19 pandemic has demonstrated the vast capacity for campuses to respond to various demands:

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- Campuses pivoted quickly to provide nearly universal remote instruction in Spring 2020, as social distancing became a primary tool to prevent the spread of COVID-19.
- Leadership worked closely with local, state, and federal officials on how to maintain safe campuses as students, faculty, and staff returned (such as implementing and coordinating regular COVID-19 testing).
- Campuses responded to workforce demands specific to the COVID-19 pandemic, such as implementing an early exit strategy for nursing students.

The COVID-19 pandemic has demonstrated that higher education, particularly in Maryland, can be strategic and innovative when dealing with novel challenges.

Innovations should be centered on solving problems and providing new opportunities. The challenge, of course, is to identify the problem. Additionally, it is essential that an equity framework or lens is adopted when implementing innovative solutions and opportunities. The use of metrics that establish the problem can help identify solutions and help schools, colleges, universities, and organizations more readily consider innovative solutions.

GLOSSARY

Cultural Diversity	The inclusion of those racial and ethnic groups and individuals that are or have been underrepresented in higher education. §10–211
Developmental Education	See “remedial education”
Equity	Equity is defined as “the state, quality or ideal of being just, impartial and fair.” The concept of equity is synonymous with fairness and justice. The Annie E. Casey Foundation
Inclusion	Inclusion is the action or state of including or of being included within a group or structure. More than simply diversity and numerical representation, inclusion involves authentic and empowered participation and a true sense of belonging. The Annie E. Casey Foundation
Income Share Agreements	An income share agreement is a contract in which a student receives money for their education. In return, the student promises to pay the ISA provider a fixed percentage of their income for a set amount of time after they finish school. Nerd Wallet
Institution of Higher Education	An institution of postsecondary education that generally limits enrollment to graduates of secondary schools, and awards degrees at either the associate, baccalaureate, or graduate level. “Institution of higher education” includes public, private nonprofit, and for-profit institutions of higher education. §10–101

Institution of Postsecondary Education	A school or other institution that offers an educational program in the State for individuals who are at least 16 years old and who have graduated from or left elementary or secondary school. “Institution of postsecondary education” does not include: (i) Any adult education, evening high school, or high school equivalence program conducted by a public school system of the State; or (ii) Any apprenticeship or on-the-job training program subject to approval by the Apprenticeship and Training Council. §10–101
Loan Assistance Repayment Program (LARP)	Financial aid in the form of a forgivable loan in return for work or service in a particular field.
Open Educational Resources (OER)	Teaching, learning, and research materials that are either (a) in the public domain or (b) licensed in a manner that provides everyone with free and perpetual permission to engage in the 5R activities. Creative Commons
Private Career School	A privately owned and privately operated institution of postsecondary education other than an institution of higher education that furnishes or offers to furnish programs, whether or not requiring a payment of tuition or fee, for the purpose of training, retraining, or upgrading individuals for gainful employment as skilled or semiskilled workers or technicians in recognized occupations or in new and emerging occupations. (§10–101)

Racial Justice	Racial justice is the systematic fair treatment of people of all races that results in equitable opportunities and outcomes for everyone. All people are able to achieve their full potential in life, regardless of race, ethnicity or the community in which they live. The Annie E. Casey Foundation
Regional Higher Education Center (RHEC)	(1) Is operated by a public institution of higher education in the State or a private nonprofit institution of higher education operating under a charter granted by the General Assembly and includes participation by two or more institutions of higher education in the State; (2) Consists of an array of program offerings from institutions of higher education approved to operate in the State by the Commission or by an act of the General Assembly that specifically satisfies the criteria set forth in § 10–212(b) of this title; (3) Offers multiple degree levels; and (4) Is either approved by the Commission to operate in the State or is established by statute. (§10–101)
Remedial Education	Coursework at colleges and universities that is intended to fill in knowledge and skills gaps for students deemed unready for college-level work. New America

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