

MEMORANDUM

TO: Maryland Higher Education Commission
FROM: Elena Quiroz-Livanis, Interim Secretary
DATE: June 18, 2026
Subject: June Maryland Higher Education Commission Meeting

This memo serves as an overview of the upcoming virtual meeting on June 24, 2026, at 10:00 a.m. Meeting materials can be found here:

<https://mhec.maryland.gov/About/Pages/agendadetails.aspx?aid=574>

During the June meeting, we will focus on the following key action items and updates:

- **Update on Federal Higher Education Landscape:** We will be joined by Dr. Tom Harnisch, Vice President for Government Relations at SHEEO, who will brief the Commission on federal budget appropriations, pending legislation, and new regulations impacting higher education.
- **Updates on Financial Aid Prioritization:** Staff will review our statewide sequencing framework, which is being established as a necessary measure in light of recent federal changes affecting student aid eligibility and institutional cost calculations.
- **Adoption of the 2026-2030 Maryland State Plan for Higher Education:** The Commission will consider a motion to officially adopt the final State Plan, which emphasizes equitable opportunities and flexible credentialing pathways. Please review the accompanying memo provided in your materials detailing its core implementation goals.
- **Updates on Financial Aid Awarding and Communications Strategy:** Staff will provide a comprehensive review of financial aid allocations disbursed in Fiscal Year 2026, alongside an analysis of the awarding for Fiscal Year 2027. Furthermore, the presentation will outline our strategic communications framework, detailing how the agency is articulating changes to federal and state financial aid to key stakeholders and enhancing our broader public outreach initiatives.
- **Updates on Legislative Reports:** Staff will provide a progress report on our pending post-session requirements, focusing on the specific mandates connected to the release of agency operating funds

Thank you again for your unwavering commitment and continued partnership in supporting Maryland's postsecondary learners and institutions. If you have any questions or require further clarification on these agenda items prior to Wednesday's session, please feel free to contact me directly.



MARYLAND HIGHER EDUCATION COMMISSION MEETING

June 24, 2026

10:00 a.m.

Virtual Meeting

I. CALL TO ORDER

II. ACCEPTANCE OF MINUTES

- A. May Commission Workshop
- B. May 2026 Commission Meeting

III. REMARKS

- A. Commission Chair
- B. Secretary

IV. UPDATE ON FEDERAL HIGHER EDUCATION LANDSCAPE

V. UPDATES ON FINANCIAL AID PRIORITIZATION

VI. ADOPTION OF THE 2026-2030 MARYLAND STATE PLAN FOR HIGHER EDUCATION

VII. UPDATES ON FINANCIAL AID AWARDING AND COMMUNICATIONS STRATEGY

VIII. UPDATES ON LEGISLATIVE REPORTS

IX. OTHER BUSINESS

X. PUBLIC COMMENT ¹

XI. ADJOURNMENT

¹ The Commission may reserve time during the agenda of its regular meetings for public participation. The Chairperson may exercise discretion to waive the notice requirement set forth above and invite an individual(s) present at the meeting to address the Commission. Any person wishing to testify before the Commission must submit a written request to do so. The request must be addressed to the Secretary of Higher Education or to the Chair, and it must be sent to the attention of Alexandra Nguyen, alexandra.nguyen@maryland.gov. Written requests to testify will be accepted only until 72 hours prior to the meeting date. A request to testify will be acted upon by the Chair, who may, at his or her discretion, deny it, grant it, or grant it subject to time limitations, as described in Section II. Unless the Chair specifies otherwise, the maximum speaking time afforded to each individual making public comments will be three minutes.

Wes Moore
Governor

Aruna Miller
Lt. Governor



Catherine J. "Cassie" Motz
Commission Chair

Elena Quiroz-Livanis
Interim Secretary

MARYLAND HIGHER EDUCATION COMMISSION

Workshop Minutes May 21, 2026

Start Time: 10:00 AM

Location: CollegeBound Foundation

Attendance List

- Cassie Motz, Chair
- Sheila Thompson
- Cheun-Chin (Bianca) Chang
- Janet Wormack
- Narcisa Polonio
- Mickey Burnim
- Richard Huffman
- Chike Aguh

MHEC Staff in Attendance

- Elena Quiroz-Livanis, Interim Secretary
- Alex Nguyen, Executive Assistant for the Secretary
- Chip Brown, Communications Director
- Ann Kellogg, Director of Reporting Services
- Barbara Schmertz, Director of Research & Policy Analysis
- Emily Dow, Assistant Secretary for Academic Affairs
- Elisabeth Layton, Principal Counsel to MHEC
- Al Dorsett, Executive Director of the Office of Student Financial Assistance
- Meghan Music, Executive Director of External and Legislative Affairs

Meeting Proceedings

Welcome

Chair Cassie Motz opened the meeting. Commissioners and staff provided introductions highlighting their background in public policy, education, and healthcare.

Operational and Strategic Priorities

Interim Secretary Elena Quiroz-Livanis led a presentation detailing MHEC's operational priorities, internal structures, and audit remediation status.

- **Audit Remediation:** The agency reviewed the seven findings from the March 2026 Office of Legislative Audits (OLA) report. It was reported that four repeat findings dating back to the late 1980s remained under active remediation. One outstanding compliance finding from 2001 was successfully resolved. Mr. Aguh inquired whether the institutional review parameters included an active HBCU liaison and philanthropic partnership framework, which staff confirmed.
- **Tiger Teams:** The agency established cross-disciplinary "Tiger Teams" approximately one month prior to address core operational bottlenecks. Mr. Huffman asked regarding the longevity of these structures and whether the leads would present directly to the Commission. Staff stated that each of the four designated teams has three core objectives and confirmed that respective senior leads will present operational products directly to the Commission.
- **Dashboard and Performance Tracking:** Mr. Aguh requested a tracking dashboard to allow commissioners to monitor timeline milestones and offer targeted support. Ms. Chang questioned whether this tracking interface would be accessible to commissioners or restricted internally. Mr. Huffman emphasized that the incorporation of key performance indicators (KPIs) is essential to evaluate operational success.

2026–2030 Maryland State Plan for Higher Education

Interim Secretary Elena Quiroz-Livanis, Assistant Secretary Emily Dow, Director Ann Kellogg, and Director Barbara Schmertz presented the strategic framework for the upcoming State Plan.

- **Attainment Goals:** The draft plan establishes a statewide target that 75% of Maryland's working-age population will hold a postsecondary credential by 2040. Mr. Aguh inquired if short-term and industry-recognized credentials would be integrated into the milestone tracking parameters, which staff confirmed.
- **Student Success Arm:** Dr. Thompson expressed appreciation for the strategic alignment but questioned what structural mechanisms could be deployed to bridge current completion gaps. Staff noted that MHEC does not currently maintain a dedicated student success unit within its operational footprint. Dr. Polonio noted a significant structural gap given the absence of a localized student success unit within the agency.

- **Performance Indicators & External Systems:** Ms. Wormack requested clarification on the definition of "lighthouse sectors," the methodology behind enrollment tracking within performance metrics, and the baseline composition of structural composite scores.
- **Timeline and Feedback Loop:** Interim Secretary Quiroz-Livanis summarized that the deadline for direct commissioner feedback is May 27, 2026, with a second iteration expected to be circulated in the second week of June. Staff noted that the formal presentation of the plan to the Governor's policy staff is scheduled.

Break

Alex Nguyen noted that a follow-up coordination email would be distributed regarding the upcoming Commission outing to the Orioles game.

Academic Program Approval

Assistant Secretary Emily Dow and Principal Counsel Elisabeth Layton presented a historical and statutory overview of the program review ecosystem, emphasizing the legal legacy of the landmark *Coalition* case.

- **Statutory Revisions:** The presentation reviewed the implementation of **HB 1244 (2024)**, and staff provided updates on the Program Review Process Advisory Council's efforts to develop regulations on unnecessary and unreasonable duplication.
- **Institutional Consensus:** Mr. Huffman asked if the state's public and private senior institutions were generally satisfied with the compromised statutory language. Staff explained that while individual institutions maintain varying positions, the current framework reflects a balanced compromise formulated by the segment workgroup.

Lunch

The Group recessed for a scheduled midday meal break.

Financial Aid Updates

Executive Director Al Dorsett presented an operational analysis of the Office of Student Financial Assistance (OSFA).

- **Program Architecture:** OSFA currently manages over 29 statewide financial aid programs across a \$221.8 million portfolio ecosystem.
- **Need-Based Core:** Dr. Thompson noted that she was unfamiliar with some specific adjustments to the financial aid programmatic definitions. Staff reviewed the structural differences between the Educational Assistance (EA) Grant and the Guaranteed Access (GA) Grant, noting that the GA Grant maximum was capped at \$18,000 beginning in FY 2025.
- **Policy Dial:** Dr. Polonio requested clarification regarding the strategic balance between providing financial "depth" (comprehensive individual awards) versus "access" (broadly

distributed, lower-value funding). Staff illustrated this operational constraint using a case study of the Teaching Fellows program, noting that mandatory statutory requirements to cover 100% of room, board, and tuition mathematically restrict the total volume of students funded under flat baseline budgets.

- **Teaching Fellows:** Dr. Burnim questioned the operational age and historical success of the Teaching Fellows program. Staff stated that the program experienced significant applicant surges recently, though long-term sustainability is pressured by statutory funding formulas.

Legislative Updates

Executive Director Meghan Music presented a strategic assessment of the enacted legislation from the 2026 legislative session.

- **Analysis Formulation:** Dr. Burnim asked who handles the operational tracking and cross-agency coordination of the state legislative ledger, and Ms. Music confirmed her office manages it.
- **Unfunded Mandates:** The Commission examined the implementation ledger of the 2026 legislative cycle, noting several complex bills were passed without designated staff positions (PINs) or dedicated IT implementation funds. These include **SB 324 (Direct Admissions)**, **SB 509 (Workforce Pell)**, **HB 6 (Parenting Student Data)**, and **SB 709 (Purple Star Designation)**.
- **Artificial Intelligence and Scholarships:** Mr. Aguh inquired about the legislative appetite for holistic scholarship consolidation and requested a brief on AI bills impacting MHEC. Staff reported that **SB 597 (Senator Hester's bill)** establishes an AI Partnership Hub under the primary custody of the University System of Maryland (USM), requiring MHEC to oversee a workforce/scholarship data overlay without new administrative funding.
- **Advocacy & External Affairs:** Mr. Huffman asked whether the agency expects commissioners to leverage localized stakeholder relationships on behalf of MHEC and inquired whether the agency employs dedicated lobbyists. Staff confirmed that MHEC requires active commissioner partnership and clarified that as a public regulatory institution, MHEC is legally restricted from hiring lobbyists.
- **Demographic Analytics:** Dr. Polonio asked if MHEC maintains a comprehensive database tracking exactly where the children of all state residents reside and which postsecondary institutions they attend. Staff explained that while MHEC does not maintain localized familial tracking of that nature, the agency is integrating enhanced geospatial data collections in partnership with the Maryland Longitudinal Data System Center (MLDSC) to track longitudinal mobility shifts.

Closing Remarks

Chair Cassie Motz provided closing reflections and formally adjourned the workshop session.

Wes Moore
Governor

Aruna Miller
Lt. Governor



Catherine J. "Cassie" Motz
Commission Chair

Elena Quiroz-Livanis
Interim Secretary

Approved by the Commission:

Catherine J. "Cassie" Motz, Chair

Wes Moore
Governor

Aruna Miller
Lt. Governor



Catherine J. "Cassie" Motz
Commission Chair

Elena Quiroz-Livanis
Interim Secretary

MARYLAND HIGHER EDUCATION COMMISSION

MINUTES OF THE COMMISSION MEETING

May 27, 2026 | 10:00 a.m. Virtual Meeting via Google Meet

ATTENDANCE

Commission Members Present:

- Catherine J. "Cassie" Motz, Chair
- Chike Aguh, Vice Chair
- Kathleen Bands, Commissioner
- Mickey Burnim, Commissioner
- Charlene Dukes, Commissioner
- Barbara Kerr Howe, Commissioner
- Narcisa Polonio, Commissioner
- Sheila Thompson, Commissioner
- Craig Williams, Commissioner
- Janet Wormack, Commissioner (*arrived 45 minutes late*)
- Sarah Otwey, Student Commissioner

Commission Members Absent:

- Rebecca Taber Staehelin, Commissioner

Maryland Higher Education Commission (MHEC) Staff Present:

- Elena Quiroz-Livanis, Interim Secretary
- Dom Ionta, Assistant Secretary for Finance and Administration
- Meghan Music, Executive Director of External and Legislative Relations
- Al Dorsett, Executive Director of Office of Student Financial Assistance
- Shawnice King, Unique and Special Populations Program Manager
- Daniel Schuster, Finance Policy Analyst
- Alexandra Nguyen, Executive Assistant

Guest Presenters:

- **Justin Nalley**, Manager of Policy & Strategic Initiatives, Governor's Workforce Development Board (GWDB)

I. CALL TO ORDER

Catherine J. "Cassie" Motz, Commission Chair, called the virtual meeting of the Maryland Higher Education Commission to order at 10:00 a.m.

II. ACCEPTANCE OF MINUTES

Chair Motz entertained a motion to approve the minutes from the previous Commission meeting.

- **Motion:** Commissioner Craig Williams.
- **Second:** Commissioner Sheila Thompson.
- **Action:** The minutes were unanimously approved as circulated.

III. REMARKS

- **Commission Chair Remarks:** Chair Motz expressed appreciation for the in-person workshop conducted the prior week at the CollegeBound Foundation offices in Baltimore. She thanked the senior staff for their extensive preparation and noted the workshop provided valuable and insightful guidance to the commissioners.
- **Interim Secretary Remarks:** Interim Secretary Elena Quiroz-Livanis addressed the Commission virtually from New Orleans, where she was attending the National Governors Association (NGA) roundtable on degree apprenticeships. She highlighted Governor Wes Moore's incoming role as NGA Chair and emphasized that the *2026–2030 Maryland State Plan for Higher Education* focuses heavily on equitable opportunities and flexible credentialing pathways, including registered apprenticeships and degree programs. She thanked Vice Chair Chike Aguh and the Steering Committee for their partnership and noted that the final State Plan will be brought before the Commission for adoption in June.

IV. UPDATE ON WORKFORCE PELL POLICY

Justin Nalley, Manager of Policy & Strategic Initiatives from the Governor's Workforce Development Board (GWDB), provided an operational update on the implementation of the workforce Pell determination policy.

- **Policy Progress:** The draft policy was released for public comment at the end of April. MHEC and GWDB are incorporating feedback to add clarity around registered apprenticeships (per Senate Bill 509), incarcerated learners, and regional occupational code flexibility.
- **Federal Regulation Alignment:** Final federal rules issued May 18 retain the 70% job placement threshold but offer a 49% instruction exception for registered apprenticeships and modified

metrics for continuing education students. Full alignment is targeted for a July 1, 2026 implementation date.

- **Commission Discussion:** Vice Chair Aguh asked about expansion strategies for program eligibility. Mr. Nalley and Interim Secretary Quiroz-Livanis detailed plans for robust data sharing, technical assistance for institutions nearing eligibility criteria, and enhanced employer placement partnerships.

V. ADOPTION OF CONROY AND CRYOR GUIDELINES

Executive Director Al Dorsett and Program Manager Shawnice King presented a recommendation to adopt revised segment-based award allocation guidelines for the *Edward T. and Mary A. Conroy Memorial Scholarship* and *Jean B. Cryor Memorial Scholarship Programs*.

- **Program Overhaul:** Due to consecutive years of expanding demand and financial sustainability challenges, the agency recommended migrating from a retroactive post-award approach to a sustainable segment-based allocation methodology to maximize student impact within statutory limits.
- **Action:** Chair Motz entertained a motion to adopt the Conroy and Cryor Guidelines as presented.
 - **Motion:** Commissioner Craig Williams.
 - **Second:** Vice Chair Chike Aguh.
 - **Action:** The guidelines were adopted unanimously.

VI. ENROLLMENT PROJECTIONS

Assistant Secretary Dom Ionta and Finance Policy Analyst Daniel Schuster presented the statewide higher education enrollment projections used to guide institutional capital improvement planning.

- **Projections Overview:** Staff presented broken-down headcount data across community colleges, four-year public institutions, and graduate programs. Discussion ensued led by Chair Motz, Dr. Barbara Schmertz, and Commissioner Barbara Howe regarding national demographic declines ("enrollment cliff") and regional regression model constraints.
- **Action:** Chair Motz entertained a motion to approve the enrollment projections as presented.
 - **Motion:** Commissioner Mickey Burnim.
 - **Second:** Vice Chair Chike Aguh.
 - **Action:** Approved unanimously.

VII. UPDATES ON LEGISLATIVE REPORTS

Meghan Music, Executive Director of External and Legislative Relations, provided an overview of the agency's legislative reporting requirements following the 2026 legislative session.

- **Reporting Volume:** MHEC faces a total of 62 legislative reporting obligations, including 15 brand-new mandates and 10 Joint Chairmen's Reports (JCRs). Notably, multiple JCR mandates tie compliance directly to the release of restricted agency operating funds.
- **Report Status:** Meghan Music outlined the rigorous cross-divisional workflow and backward-mapping timeline currently being deployed to meet all deadlines. The critical JCR regarding financial aid processing errors and agency corrective actions remains in progress and is tracking toward its August 15, 2026 deadline.

VIII. OTHER BUSINESS

- **Commissioner Farewell:** Commissioner Craig Williams announced that this would be his final meeting as a member of the Commission. Chair Motz, Vice Chair Aguh, and Interim Secretary Quiroz-Livanis expressed profound gratitude for his years of exceptional service, probing guidance, and commitment to Maryland's students.

IX. PUBLIC COMMENT

Chair Motz noted that no public comments or requests for public participation were submitted for the day's session.

X. ADJOURNMENT

Hearing no further business, Chair Motz called for a motion to adjourn the meeting.

- **Motion:** Commissioner Barbara Howe.
- **Second:** Vice Chair Chike Aguh.
- **Action:** The motion carried unanimously, and the meeting officially adjourned at 11:24 a.m.

Approved by the Commission:

Catherine J. "Cassie" Motz, Chair

Date: June 5, 2026

RE: Operational Guidelines on State Financial Aid Sequencing and Priority of Funds

Academic Year 2026–2027

Purpose

The Maryland Higher Education Commission (MHEC) is issuing this operational guidance to establish standardized statewide procedures governing the sequencing, certification, and reduction of financial aid awards for Maryland students during the 2026–2027 academic year.

Recent federal changes affecting federal student aid eligibility and institutional cost of attendance calculations, combined with statewide reviews of financial aid packaging practices, have highlighted the need for a consistent approach to awarding and managing financial aid. This guidance is intended to ensure equitable treatment of students across Maryland institutions, maximize the utilization of federal financial aid resources, preserve State financial aid funding for students with unmet need, and support the effective administration of State financial aid programs.

In carrying out its responsibility to administer Maryland State financial aid programs and ensure limited State resources are directed toward students with unmet educational need, MHEC has established the following statewide framework for financial aid sequencing and award adjustments effective for the 2026–2027 academic year.

Section I. Statewide Financial Aid Sequencing Framework

Federal Need-Based Aid First

Effective for the 2026–2027 academic year, institutions shall utilize a "Federal Need-Based Aid First" methodology when certifying and packaging Maryland State financial aid awards.

Under this framework, institutions must first determine and apply all available federal need-based grant assistance before certifying Maryland State financial aid awards. State aid is intended to supplement remaining unmet educational need after federal need-based aid eligibility has been fully considered.

This guidance applies to all federal need-based grant programs, including but not limited to:

- Federal Pell Grant
- Federal Supplemental Educational Opportunity Grant (FSEOG)
- Workforce Pell Grants
- Federal grants established through future federal legislation or appropriations
- Other federal need-based grant assistance available to the student

Exception – Federal Direct Stafford Loans

Federal Direct Subsidized and Unsubsidized Stafford Loans are excluded from the Federal Need-Based Aid First framework.

Institutions are not required to certify or package State financial aid based on a student's acceptance, rejection, or utilization of Federal Direct Stafford Loan eligibility. Students shall not be required to borrow federal student loans as a condition of receiving Maryland State financial aid.

Section II. Priority of Funds for Award Certification

Institutions shall certify financial aid using the following order:

<i>Order</i>	<i>Funding Source</i>	<i>Required Action</i>
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1	Federal Need-Based Grants and Scholarships	Determine and apply all available federal need-based grant assistance.
2	Maryland Need-Based Financial Aid Programs	Certify State need-based awards using remaining unmet need after federal need-based aid is applied.
3	Maryland Career-Based, Service Obligation, Legislative, and Unique Population Programs	Certify in accordance with individual program requirements and available funding.

Maryland Need-Based Financial Aid Programs

For purposes of certification, Maryland need-based financial aid programs include, but are not limited to:

- Guaranteed Access Grant
- Educational Assistance Grant
- Near Completer Grant
- Part-Time Grant
- Graduate and Professional Scholarship Program
- Other State-funded need-based programs administered by MHEC

Institutions shall consider all available federal need-based grant assistance before certifying these awards.

Institutional Responsibilities

Institutions must:

1. Utilize current federal eligibility information when certifying State awards.
 2. Recalculate aid packages when federal grant eligibility changes.
 3. Ensure federal need-based grant assistance is fully considered before State financial aid is certified.
 4. Maintain documentation supporting all certification decisions.
 5. Implement system controls necessary to support this sequencing methodology.
-

Section III. Priority of Funds for Award

Adjustments and Reductions

To promote consistency in the administration of Maryland State financial aid programs and maximize the effective use of limited State resources, institutions shall apply the following hierarchy when adjustments to Maryland State financial aid awards are required.

This section applies to:

1. Situations where a student receives multiple Maryland State financial aid awards that exceed a maximum State award limitation established by statute, regulation, program guidelines, or institutional cost limitations; and
2. Situations where a student's total financial assistance exceeds the institutionally established Cost of Attendance (COA).

A. State Award Overages

When a student receives multiple Maryland State financial aid awards that exceed an allowable State aid limitation, institutions shall reduce awards using the following hierarchy:

<i>Reduction Priority</i>	<i>Award Category</i>	<i>Required Action</i>
<i>First</i>	Career-Based and Service-Obligation Scholarship Programs	Reduce or cancel awards as necessary.
<i>Second</i>	Legislative Scholarships and Other Non-Need-Based State Financial Aid Programs	Reduce or cancel awards as necessary.
<i>Third</i>	Maryland Need-Based Financial Aid Programs	Reduce only after all other applicable Maryland State awards have been exhausted.

Protection of Need-Based State Financial Aid

Maryland need-based financial aid programs are intended to support students with demonstrated financial need and shall be preserved to the greatest extent possible.

Accordingly, institutions shall reduce Maryland need-based financial aid only after all other applicable Maryland State awards have been exhausted.

Examples of Maryland need-based financial aid programs include, but are not limited to:

- Guaranteed Access Grant
- Educational Assistance Grant
- Part-Time Grant
- Graduate and Professional Scholarship Program
- Other MHEC-administered need-based aid programs

B. Cost of Attendance Overawards

When a student's total financial assistance exceeds the institutionally established Cost of Attendance (COA), institutions shall first evaluate whether adjustments can be made to non-State aid resources consistent with applicable federal regulations, institutional policies, and program requirements.

If Maryland State financial aid reductions are necessary to resolve a COA overaward, institutions shall apply the following hierarchy:

<i>Reduction Priority</i>	<i>Award Category</i>	<i>Required Action</i>
<i>First</i>	Career-Based and Service-Obligation Scholarship Programs	Reduce or cancel awards as necessary.
<i>Second</i>	Legislative Scholarships and Other Non-Need-Based State Financial Aid Programs	Reduce or cancel awards as necessary.

<i>Third</i>	Maryland Need-Based Financial Aid Programs	Reduce only after all other applicable Maryland State awards have been exhausted.
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Nothing in this guidance shall be construed as requiring a student to accept Federal Direct Subsidized or Unsubsidized Stafford Loans as a condition of receiving Maryland State financial aid.

C. Reallocation and Return of Funds

Decentralized State Financial Aid Programs

For decentralized Maryland State financial aid programs administered by institutions, funds recovered through award reductions should be re-awarded, whenever feasible, to otherwise eligible students with unmet financial need and in accordance with applicable program statutes, regulations, and administrative guidelines.

Examples include, but are not limited to:

- Maryland Promise Scholarship
- Workforce Development Sequence Scholarship
- Edward T. Conroy Memorial Scholarship Program
- Jean B. Cryor Memorial Scholarship Program
- Other institution-administered Maryland State financial aid programs

Institutions shall follow all applicable reporting, reconciliation, and reallocation requirements established by MHEC.

Centrally Administered State Financial Aid Programs

For Maryland State financial aid programs administered directly by MHEC, institutions shall promptly report award adjustments through established MHEC reporting processes.

Any resulting unused funds shall be returned in accordance with applicable program requirements, reconciliation procedures, and fiscal year closeout guidance.

Section IV. Student Protection Requirements

Institutions shall ensure implementation of these guidelines:

1. Maximizes available federal need-based grant assistance before Maryland State need-based financial aid is certified.
2. Preserves Maryland need-based financial aid to the greatest extent possible.
3. Does not require students to accept Federal Direct Subsidized or Unsubsidized Stafford Loans as a condition of receiving Maryland State financial aid.
4. Does not unnecessarily increase a student's out-of-pocket educational expenses.
5. Is applied consistently and equitably to all students.
6. Includes clear communication to students regarding award adjustments resulting from changes in eligibility, cost of attendance, or the receipt of additional financial assistance.

Institutions are encouraged to provide proactive counseling and outreach whenever award adjustments occur.

Section V. Systems, Compliance, and Implementation

Institutions should review and update financial aid packaging rules, automation logic, and compliance controls to ensure implementation of these guidelines for the 2026–2027 academic year.

Financial aid, compliance, enrollment management, business office, and information technology personnel should work collaboratively to validate packaging calculations, award sequencing methodologies, and reduction hierarchies before certifying Maryland State financial aid.

Institutions are expected to maintain sufficient documentation to demonstrate compliance with these requirements and to support any award adjustments made pursuant to this guidance.

MHEC will provide additional technical assistance, implementation guidance, scenario-based examples, and training opportunities to support institutional implementation and promote consistent statewide administration.

Effective Date

This guidance is effective beginning with the 2026–2027 academic year and applies to all Maryland institutions participating in Maryland State financial aid programs administered by the Maryland Higher Education Commission.

Questions regarding this guidance should be directed to the Office of Student Financial Assistance at the Maryland Higher Education Commission

MEMORANDUM

TO: Maryland Higher Education Commission
FROM: Elena Quiroz-Livanis, Interim Secretary of Higher Education
DATE: June 17, 2026
SUBJECT: 2026-2030 Maryland State Plan for Higher Education

Maryland law charges the Maryland Higher Education Commission to develop and periodically update an overall plan, known as the State Plan for Higher Education, to identify the present and future needs, capabilities, and objectives for postsecondary education throughout the State. I want to acknowledge and thank everyone who participated in the highly collaborative process required to develop this new framework. Over the past months, our Steering Committee, Working Groups, and diverse stakeholders from across the state's postsecondary, workforce, and civic landscape have dedicated significant time and candid feedback to map a vision that serves every learner and advances our public impact.

I am formally sharing the 2026-2030 Maryland State Plan for Higher Education and presenting it before the Commission for final adoption at our upcoming meeting on June 24. This document, titled *Maryland's Moment: Lighting the Way Forward*, outlines three driving goals for the future: increasing postsecondary attainment for lifelong success, advancing social and economic mobility, and mobilizing research and innovation as a state asset. The Plan asks Maryland to make bold choices, setting an ambitious target that 75 percent of Maryland adults in the labor force will hold a postsecondary credential or degree by 2040. Furthermore, it introduces Lighthouse Credentials and Degrees to clearly align our educational pathways with the priority sectors that drive both our economic competitiveness and the broader public good.

While finalizing this document is a monumental milestone, the State Plan will serve as a living framework whose ultimate success relies entirely on what we do next. Following the June 24 meeting, our focus will shift to the public rollout and the essential cross-sector partnerships required for implementation. Achieving these goals demands a coordinated, adaptive approach where institutions, state government, employers, and community partners share ownership of our statewide targets.

I look forward to working closely with all of you in this next phase to translate these strategies into the catalytic actions that will ensure postsecondary education remains a powerful engine for opportunity and equity in Maryland.

RECOMMENDATION: The Maryland Higher Education Commission accept and approve the 2026-2030 Maryland State Plan for Higher Education.

2026–2030

**MARYLAND STATE PLAN
FOR HIGHER EDUCATION**

Maryland's Moment: Lighting the Way Forward



**MARYLAND HIGHER
EDUCATION COMMISSION**



TABLE OF CONTENTS

A LETTER TO MARYLAND	4
STEERING COMMITTEE MEMBERS	6
WORKING GROUP MEMBERS	7
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY	8
INTRODUCTION	9
Mapping the Vision: A Collaborative Process	10
Guiding Principles	11
Leave No One Behind	11
Advancing an Aligned Vision and Principles: Lighthouse Credentials and Degrees	12
HONORING THE PAST, REIMAGINING THE FUTURE: THE EVOLUTION OF STATE PLANNING	13
STATE OF THE STATE: MARYLAND'S POSTSECONDARY LANDSCAPE	14
Access: Opening Doors to Opportunity	15
Affordability: Investing in Marylanders' Futures	15
Completion and Post-Completion Success: Translating Learning into Mobility	16
Research and Innovation: Building a Competitive and Inclusive Future	16
MARYLAND'S MOMENT: LIGHTING THE WAY FORWARD	17
Goals	17
Goal 1: Increase Postsecondary Attainment for Lifelong Success	18
Figure 1: 2024 Population Age 25-64 in Labor Force with Post-High School Credential and Earning Above 15% Benchmark	19
Goal 2: Advance Social and Economic Mobility through Postsecondary Education	20
Figure 2: Earnings of Maryland High School Graduates Six Years After Graduation as Percent of Living Wage	21
Goal 3: Mobilize Postsecondary Innovation and Research as a State Asset for Competitiveness and Public Good	22
Figure 3: Externally Funded Academic Research and Development (R&D) as Percent of State GDP	23
Looking Forward: Performance Indicators and Progress Monitoring	24



FROM GOALS TO ACTION: CHARTING THE COURSE AHEAD	25
Strategies	25
Looking Forward: Strategies and Catalytic Actions	32
THE PATH AHEAD: CONSIDERATIONS FOR IMPLEMENTATION	33
Strategic Stewardship	33
Alignment	33
Collaboration and Shared Ownership	35
Continuous Improvement	35
CALL TO ACTION	36
APPENDIX: ENDNOTES	37

A LETTER TO MARYLAND

Dear Fellow Marylanders,

State Plans are, by their nature, documents of aspiration. They catalog where we are, describe where we want to go, and outline the strategies we believe will carry us forward. The 2026–2030 Maryland State Plan for Higher Education, *Maryland's Moment: Lighting the Way Forward*, does all of that and more. The Plan asks Maryland to make a series of bold choices to lead our state to prosperity.

The Plan deliberately embraces the full spectrum of learning beyond high school, from apprenticeships and industry certificates to associate and advanced degrees, as equally worthy of state investment and recognition. It is built on the fundamental recognition that while talent is universal, opportunity is not. It names equity not as a lofty aspiration or afterthought, but as a guiding principle and design requirement, acknowledging plainly that Maryland's graduation rates, earnings outcomes, and attainment levels are not equitably distributed across race, income, or geography. Maryland is home to unparalleled educational, research, and workforce assets, and it is our responsibility to ensure that every Marylander has clear access to these opportunities.

The Plan also introduces *Lighthouse Credentials and Degrees* as a new concept to identify programs that exemplify economic, social, and civic opportunity, aligning postsecondary education with the Lighthouse sectors that drive Maryland's economy: biotechnology, quantum technology, cybersecurity, and aerospace. *Lighthouse Credentials and Degrees* also recognizes other priority sectors by valuing the career pathways that contribute to the public good, have intrinsic societal value, and without which our society cannot properly function, like early childhood education and caregiving. Finally, it sets an ambitious target: **that 75 percent of Maryland adults in the labor force will hold a postsecondary credential or degree by 2040 that leads to economic and social mobility.**

At a time of rapid federal policy shifts, declining public trust in the value of higher education, and technological disruption that is reshaping every sector of the economy, Maryland has a choice about whether to wait or to lead. This Plan makes clear which direction the state has chosen. It recognizes that when 69 percent of Maryland jobs will require some form of education or training beyond high school by 2031, the cost of inaction is not an option. And it recognizes that when Maryland leads the nation in academic research and innovation, we also have the obligation to translate that excellence into broadly shared opportunity.

The State Plan that follows is not a mandate for any single office, nor is it the sole responsibility of any one government agency. It was deliberately shaped by postsecondary leaders, learners, employers, community organizations, workforce partners, and civic leaders across Maryland who understand that the promise of education as a path to economic and social mobility is only as strong as the collective will to uphold it. What this Plan calls for, at its core, is a renewed social contract: Maryland will invest in opportunity, and Marylanders will invest in each other. Institutions, government, employers, and citizens each have a role in making that contract real.

A lighthouse does not illuminate everything at once. It sweeps steadily across the water, returning repeatedly to the same horizon, and guides vessels through conditions that would otherwise make passage dangerous. That is the spirit of the Plan. Maryland's postsecondary ecosystem will not be transformed in a single budget cycle, a single legislative session, or a single year. But with clear goals, honest measures, bold strategies, and shared ownership across every sector of the state, it can be transformed and truly change the lives of the Marylanders it serves for the better.

With commitment to Maryland's learners and our shared future,



Elena Quiroz-Livanis

Interim Secretary of Higher Education,
Maryland Higher Education Commission
(MHEC)



Chike Aguh

Steering Committee Chair,
Maryland Higher Education Commission
(MHEC)



**MARYLAND HIGHER
EDUCATION COMMISSION**

STEERING COMMITTEE MEMBERS

The Maryland Higher Education Commission (MHEC) convened the Steering Committee for the 2026–2030 Maryland State Plan for Higher Education to guide and steward the development of the next statewide vision for postsecondary education. The Committee’s work reflects the broad participation of Maryland’s colleges, universities, community colleges, workforce partners, and civic leaders. It represents a shared belief that postsecondary education is central to the state’s future prosperity and civic well-being.

MEMBERS:

Chike Aguh – Steering Committee Co-Chair and Vice Chair, Maryland Higher Education Commission

Haleemat Adekoya – Alum, University of Maryland, Baltimore County

Dr. Rondall Allen – Chief Administrative Officer, University of Maryland, Eastern Shore

Dr. Alexis Battle – Interim Co-Director, Data Science and AI Institute, Johns Hopkins University

Dr. Gregory Fowler – President, University of Maryland, Global Campus

Dr. Anupam Joshi – Vice Provost and Chief AI Officer, University of Maryland, Baltimore County

Mary Kane – President, Maryland Chamber of Commerce

Dr. Anne Khademian – Executive Director of Student Affairs, Universities at Shady Grove

Dr. Prabhudev Konnan – Dean, University of Maryland

Dr. Sandra Kurtinitis – President, Community College of Baltimore County

Dr. Carolyn Ringer Lepre – President, Salisbury University

Dr. Dawn Lindsay – President, Anne Arundel Community College

Carmel Martin – Special Secretary, Governor’s Office of Children

Sarah Otwey – Student Commissioner, Maryland Higher Education Commission

Rachael Parker – Executive Director, Governor’s Workforce Development Board

Jason Perkins-Cohen – Deputy Secretary, Department of Labor

Dr. Elena Marie Saenz – Associate Senior Vice President, Academic Affairs, Montgomery College

Terrence Sawyer – President, Loyola University

Sharon Markley Schreiber – Executive Director, Maryland Business Roundtable for Education

Kelly Schulz – Chief Executive Officer, Maryland Tech Council

Aaron Shenck – Executive Director, Mid-Atlantic Association of Career Schools

Judy Smith – Chief Strategist Officer, Department of Commerce

Dr. Tenette Smith – Chief Academic Officer, Maryland State Department of Education

Tonia Wellons – President, Greater Washington Community Foundation

Dr. David Wilson – President, Morgan State University

Dr. Alison Wrynn – Senior Vice Chancellor, University System of Maryland

FORMER MEMBERS:

Dr. Sanjay Rai – Steering Committee Co-Chair and Secretary, Maryland Higher Education Commission

Dr. Eric Benjamin – Chief Administrative Officer, Baltimore City Community College

Jonny Dorsey – Deputy Chief of Staff, Governor’s Office

STAFFED BY:

Dr. Emily Dow – Assistant Secretary for Academic Affairs

Dr. Ann Kellogg – Director of Reporting Services

Alexandra Nguyen – Executive Assistant

Elena Quiroz-Livanis – Interim Secretary of Higher Education; Steering Committee Statewide Coordinator

Dr. Barbara Schmertz – Director of Research and Policy Analysis

WORKING GROUP MEMBERS

The Steering Committee also benefited from three Working Groups to provide in-depth feedback on plan progress and workshop the principles, vision, and goals that make up the plan. Working Group members included Steering Committee members as well as additional leaders who helped shape this plan.

WORKING GROUP 1:

Dr. Diane Forbes Berthoud – Chief Inclusive Excellence and Institutional Effectiveness Officer and Vice President, University of Maryland Baltimore

Dr. Michelle Kloss – Carroll Community College

Dr. Renee Latchman – Academic Affairs Coordinator/Specialist, Morgan State University

Dr. Zakiya Lee – Associate Vice Chancellor for Student Affairs, University System of Maryland

Dr. Dawn Lindsay – President, Anne Arundel Community College

Dr. Jacqueline Peng – Senior Executive Director, Maryland State Department of Education

Sharon Markley Schreiber – Executive Director, Maryland Business Roundtable for Education

Kelly Schulz – Chief Executive Officer, Maryland Tech Council

WORKING GROUP 2:

Dr. Rondall Allen – Chief Administrative Officer, University of Maryland, Eastern Shore

Patrick Bourke – Senior Policy Fellow, Governor's Office for Children

Dr. Gregory Fowler – President, University of Maryland, Global Campus

Richard Kincaid – Assistant Superintendent for the Division of College and Career Pathways, Maryland State Department of Education

Dr. Sandra Kurtinitis – President, Community College of Baltimore County

Dr. Carolyn Ringer Lepre – President, Salisbury University

Dr. Phyllis Keys – Professor, Morgan State University

Dr. Jennifer Lynch – Associate Vice Chancellor for Education & Engagement, University System of Maryland

Rachael Parker – Executive Director, Governor's Workforce Development Board

Carmel Martin – Special Secretary, Governor's Office of Children

Terrence Sawyer – President, Loyola University

WORKING GROUP 3:

Molly Abend – Data Management Coordinator and Maryland State Department Liaison, Maryland Longitudinal Data System Center

Dr. Candace Caraco – Associate Vice Chancellor for Academic Affairs, University System of Maryland

Dr. Anupam Joshi – Vice Provost and Chief AI Officer, University of Maryland, Baltimore County

Mary Kane – President, Maryland Chamber of Commerce

Dr. Prabhudev Konana – Dean, University of Maryland

Dr. Michele Masucci – Vice Chancellor for Research and Economic Development, University System of Maryland

Dr. Brad Phillips – Executive Director, Maryland Association of Community Colleges

Judy Smith – Chief Strategist Officer, Department of Commerce

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Maryland stands at a moment of opportunity. The global economy is shifting rapidly, technology is transforming the nature of work, and demographic changes are reshaping who our learners are and what they need. Postsecondary education is key to meeting those evolving needs, with 69 percent of Maryland jobs requiring some form of education or training beyond high school by 2031.¹ Maryland has the opportunity to design a postsecondary education system that serves every learner, drives public impact, and champions collaboration and innovation.

To realize that opportunity, the 2026–2030 Maryland State Plan for Higher Education renews the state’s commitment to education as both a right and a responsibility. It reaffirms postsecondary education as Maryland’s most powerful tool for prosperity, equity, and societal well-being. It also reflects the Moore-Miller Administration dedication to helping learners access affordable, high-quality postsecondary education and succeed across all types of institutions.

Developed through an extensive process of collaboration and reflection, the State Plan outlines a framework to strengthen the connection between education, the economy, and democracy with three driving goals:

1. **Increase Postsecondary Attainment for Lifelong Success**
2. **Advance Social and Economic Mobility through Postsecondary Education**
3. **Mobilize Postsecondary Innovation and Research as a State Asset for Competitiveness and Public Good**

Maryland’s success in these goals will depend on how well it prepares learners for a rapidly evolving economy. That means focusing not just on credentials and degrees, but on credentials and degrees that lead to opportunity. In service of that shifting focus, this Plan introduces **Lighthouse Credentials and Degrees** that align with the state’s **Lighthouse Sectors** for economic competitiveness and innovation—biotechnology, quantum technology, cybersecurity, and aerospace.² Lighthouse Credentials and Degrees will also include other priority areas beyond Lighthouse Sectors that demonstrate high demand, strong earnings outcomes, and/or significant societal value (e.g., early childhood education providers, home health aides, etc.). These pathways, from apprenticeships to certificates to degrees, will offer opportunities for Maryland learners and contribute to the public good.

Further, this state plan elevates key strategies to advance the three goals. These interconnected strategies address holistic student supports, seamless and nimble paths to and through postsecondary education, affordability, and the skills, knowledge and partnerships needed for long-term success.

This State Plan does not dictate every strategy, metric, or action. Instead, it sets direction and near-term priorities for achieving long-term goals. At its core is a commitment to flexibility, continuous improvement, and sustained partnership to ensure postsecondary education is a cornerstone of Maryland’s long-term economic and civic health and prepares every learner for a rapidly changing world.

INTRODUCTION

WHY THIS PLAN MATTERS

Maryland stands at a crossroads of opportunity. The 2026–2030 Maryland State Plan for Higher Education, **Maryland’s Moment: Lighting the Way Forward**, envisions a postsecondary education ecosystem that is inclusive, forward-looking, and essential to the state’s shared prosperity. The State Plan (“Plan” and “State Plan”) is a call to make Maryland more competitive by investing in people, innovation, and opportunity. The Maryland Higher Education Commission (“Commission”) presents this State Plan as both a reflection of that intent and a roadmap to deliver it.

Postsecondary education in Maryland is one of the state’s greatest public assets. It empowers individuals, drives innovation, and strengthens communities. Yet, the world Maryland’s learners now enter is far more complex than the one their predecessors faced. The COVID-19 pandemic and proliferation of Artificial Intelligence accelerated shifts in technology, work, and learning, revealing both the adaptability of Maryland’s postsecondary institutions and the human inequities that persist in access and outcomes. In a moment of rapid changes to investments, accountability frameworks, and program prioritization at the federal level, the downstream impact on state policy is significant, and the need for Maryland to respond strategically becomes even more urgent.

For generations, Maryland’s postsecondary institutions have been among the nation’s most diverse and dynamic. Today, the State renews that commitment by recognizing that **education is not confined to the boundaries of a campus or a degree**. It is not by chance that the State Plan often refers to “postsecondary” education. Though used interchangeably with higher education in this document, its use is intentionally broader to recognize the full scope of learning, from apprenticeships and certificates to undergraduate and advanced degrees, each contributing to the state’s capacity to innovate and compete. Every form of learning after high school that leads to meaningful work, economic mobility, and civic contribution deserves recognition.

As industries evolve and new technologies reshape work, the state’s competitiveness depends on its ability to educate and retain talent. Employers now seek skills that extend beyond technical mastery to include creativity, civic understanding, and adaptability. This State Plan positions Maryland’s institutions of higher education as an essential component of the state’s talent strategy, preparing learners for the known demands of today and the unknown opportunities of tomorrow.

Finally, as economic and social divides widen nationally, postsecondary education must again serve as a unifying force. At a time when the value of higher education is being challenged across the country, Maryland has a responsibility to demonstrate the power of postsecondary education to close generational wealth gaps, foster resilient communities, and equip Marylanders not just for employment, but also for participation in a pluralistic democratic republic. The work in this Plan intends to strengthen and elevate the enduring public value of education beyond high school.

Meeting this moment is about more than degrees or job training. It is about renewing trust in the promise of education as the path to personal dignity, community vitality, and state prosperity. The Plan invites all Marylanders to participate in a new era of shared responsibility for learning and opportunity.

Mapping the Vision: A Collaborative Process

The State Plan process involved significant thought leadership from a Steering Committee that was charged with mapping the vision and identifying the guiding principles that define Maryland's promise for postsecondary education, in order to explain how the state can accomplish each of its three goals. A distinct Working Group was established for each goal, in order to collaboratively decide what metrics would help monitor progress. Together, this process represents a shared promise to Maryland's people: education will remain accessible, valuable, and transformative for generations to come. Members drew on their diverse experiences to examine data, identify barriers to access and completion, and explore opportunities for innovation and collaboration. Their work laid the foundation for a new social contract that positions postsecondary education to expand individual opportunity, drive economic competitiveness, and strengthen society as a whole.

The Vision

Maryland will design an affordable, contemporary postsecondary education system that equips every Marylander to thrive in a dynamic economy and a pluralistic democratic republic, ensures the completion of meaningful credentials and degrees for all learners, and drives innovation that strengthens the state's long-term competitiveness and civic well-being.

This vision recognizes the shared responsibility between the state, institutions, and citizens: Maryland will invest in opportunity, and learners will engage in the pursuit of knowledge, skills, and service that sustain a thriving and equitable society. In this way, postsecondary education will accomplish its dual mission of spurring long-term economic growth, providing economic mobility for the state's residents and contributing to public good.



Guiding Principles

While the vision explains where Maryland wants to go, the following Guiding Principles explain decision rules that the Steering Committee and Working Group members used when shaping every goal, strategy and catalytic action that follows. They reflect the Steering Committee's conviction that postsecondary education in Maryland must serve both the individual learner seeking economic mobility and the broader public good that depends on an educated, civically engaged citizenry.

1

Serve Every Learner.

We believe in a student-ready system that adapts to learners' goals and circumstances. We will ensure flexibility, affordability, and transparency to expand access, foster belonging, and support completion across all pathways. We will provide pathways that respond to diverse needs and life circumstances, ensuring every learner at every stage has the opportunity to succeed.

2

Advance Public Impact and Value.

We believe every postsecondary credential and degree should be an upward catalyst for learners and the state. We will strengthen civic participation, cultural life, and economic vitality while preparing Marylanders for meaningful work and contribution to the common good.

3

Champion Collaboration and Innovation.

We believe Maryland's progress depends on partnership. We will foster collaboration across education, workforce, government, and community partners to drive innovation, align resources, and address emerging challenges. We will build an adaptive and cohesive postsecondary education system that serves Marylanders now and in the future.

Leave No One Behind

Maryland recognizes that talent is universal but opportunity is not. Each goal and strategy in this plan is designed to expand fair access to learning, reduce structural barriers, and ensure that all Marylanders can benefit from high-quality postsecondary pathways that lead to economic mobility and civic well-being. Progress will be monitored through disaggregated data to ensure that every community sees improvement in access, persistence, completion, and long-term outcomes.

Lighthouse Credentials and Degrees

This State Plan relies on intentional collaboration across agencies to ensure postsecondary education strengthens the state talent pipeline and provides clear paths to opportunity. To align with the state's vision for growth, this Plan introduces the concept of *Lighthouse Credentials and Degrees* to identify programs that exemplify economic, social, and civic opportunity.

As explained by the Maryland Department of Commerce's [Roadmap to an Equitable, Robust and Competitive Economy](#), Maryland's economy is powered by Lighthouse Sectors that combine scientific leadership with public purpose, and represent the state's core innovation strengths and future growth engines:

- ▶ **Biotechnology**, advancing human health and life sciences.
- ▶ **Quantum Technology**, transforming computation, security, and materials science.
- ▶ **Cybersecurity**, protecting critical infrastructure and data in a digital society.
- ▶ **Aerospace**, driving innovation in defense, communications, and space exploration.

Together, these sectors form the backbone of Maryland's *talent strategy*—the shared commitment of education, government, and industry to build the skilled workforce that will power the state's next decade of growth.

Lighthouse Credentials and Degrees will offer a new anchor for the state's postsecondary landscape, aligned to the state's talent strategy and responsive to other critical state needs for education and training. These credentials and degrees will be defined by:

- 1. Alignment with Lighthouse Sectors:** Programs that clearly support Maryland's lighthouse sectors.
- 2. Other Priority Sectors:** Programs that clearly support other in-demand areas based on MHEC's Workforce Needs Analysis or offer other societal value to the state. These sectors may include:
 - a.** Public sector-related credentials and degrees, both to benefit the community by meeting the needs of state and local government employers and to maintain or grow Maryland's federal employment as a core economic development strategy
 - b.** Civic leadership career ladder credentials and degrees to recognize the importance of providing pathways to political and civic leadership for the generations of Marylanders who will, among other things, be responsible for future versions of this Plan
 - c.** Entrepreneurship-fostering credentials and degrees, recognizing that the goal of the postsecondary system is to graduate not only well-prepared employees but also innovative new employers
- 3. Additional indicators** such as debt-to-earnings ratios and affordability guardrails.

HONORING THE PAST, REIMAGINING THE FUTURE

THE EVOLUTION OF STATE PLANNING

Maryland's tradition of coordinated educational planning dates to 1978, when the Maryland Board of Higher Education released the first Maryland Statewide Plan for Postsecondary Education. That Plan introduced a foundational belief that still holds true: higher education is a public trust requiring statewide stewardship and institutional autonomy in balance.

In 1988, the Maryland Higher Education Commission (MHEC) was established to oversee and coordinate all aspects of postsecondary education in Maryland. Created by law (Education Article §11-105), MHEC is responsible for guiding the planning, approval of academic programs, distribution of financial aid, and ensuring accountability across the state's colleges and universities. This effort was a crucial step in aligning postsecondary education with the state's economic and civic goals, helping to ensure that higher education serves both the needs of learners and the broader community.

Over the following decades, Maryland's State Plans evolved alongside changing social and economic conditions. Early iterations emphasized access and capacity. Later iterations addressed affordability, workforce readiness, and research competitiveness. In recent years, equity, innovation, and social and economic mobility have become central themes.

The 2026–2030 State Plan honors this legacy while reimagining the ecosystem for contemporary learners. Progress in a rapidly changing world requires an approach that is inclusive, collaborative, and adaptable. That ecosystem for the future is anchored in:

- ▶ **Expansive Pathways:** The Plan believes in education beyond high school in all forms. Whether a student's next step is on-the-job training, entering the military, committing to public service, starting an apprenticeship, earning a professional certificate at a private career school, or pursuing a degree pathway at a community college and/or university, the ecosystem must validate and support their journey. Every pathway that leads to meaningful work and civic contribution is a vital part of Maryland's talent ecosystem.
- ▶ **Meaningful Dialogue and Partnership:** Advancing a long-term vision for postsecondary education requires being in continuous dialogue with a synchronized and multi-sector coalition that spans postsecondary education, workforce, community-based organizations, philanthropy and government agencies. This partnership requires input from local partners who provide on-the-ground trust and localized support, as well as active dialogue with national partners to share insights, benchmark our progress, and ensure Maryland remains at the forefront of postsecondary innovation. Shared ownership across all these levels is essential to realize sustained change for students and the state.
- ▶ **Continuous Improvement:** A transformative framework driving state progress must be highly iterative. Maryland's approach in this State Plan leaves room for continuous adaptation based on emerging data, labor shifts, and stakeholder feedback. To ensure the ecosystem remains accountable to both the learners it serves and the state it sustains, the Commission will provide an update on progress made towards the State Plan annually, monitoring progress and refining strategies to meet the moment.

With these foundations, the Plan responds to the challenges of a new era, where learning is ongoing, technology is transformative, and civic engagement is vital. It places Maryland at the forefront of states that view postsecondary education as essential to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. These foundations frame the approach for the Plan, and are essential for understanding its vision, goals, strategies, and implementation.

The Commission's coordinating role is vital to support ongoing collaboration in service of this Plan's vision. By aligning policy, funding, and accountability across segments, the Commission can ensure that institutional assets, research excellence, workforce preparation, and lifelong learning opportunities benefit every region and community in Maryland.

STATE OF THE STATE

MARYLAND'S POSTSECONDARY LANDSCAPE

Maryland's postsecondary education ecosystem remains one of the most capable and diverse in the nation. The state's public postsecondary landscape consists of 16 community colleges, 14 public four-year institutions, 13 Maryland Independent College and University Association (MICUA) member institutions, 6 private institutions, and nearly 150 private career schools. There are also nearly 90 apprenticeship sponsors offering training and career-building pathways for Maryland learners.³

Community colleges provide local and affordable access to workforce training and transfer pathways for students seeking a bachelor's degree. Their open access mission ensures that Maryland learners from all ages and backgrounds have a path to pursue education beyond high school. The University System of Maryland (USM) is the only public system in the state with its 12 institutions, including three Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) and the University of Maryland Global Campus, which together serve significant populations of adult learners and other underrepresented populations. In addition to providing essential expanded access to degrees for diverse Maryland learners, USM institutions also anchor the state's research enterprise and graduate education capacity. Morgan State University, Maryland's public urban research university and a Historically Black College and University (HBCU), unites access and innovation to strengthen communities and diversify the innovation economy. St. Mary's College of Maryland, the state's public honors college, demonstrates the enduring benefit of the liberal arts in cultivating leadership and civic engagement. Independent and private institutions expand academic variety and cultural depth, while private career schools deliver targeted, career-aligned programs that meet regional workforce needs. Lastly, employer-led training such as apprenticeships is playing an increasingly prominent role to ensure learners have access to experiential learning opportunities that connect to the industries and occupations in their communities.

Together, Maryland's postsecondary opportunities form a resilient and interdependent ecosystem that drive positive outcomes for Maryland learners. Yet, the benefits of that strength are not evenly shared. The state's prior progress and opportunities for the future can be understood across the continuum of access, affordability, completion and post-completion success, and research and innovation. These are the pillars of Maryland's higher education promise.

The Pillars of Maryland's Higher Education Promise

- ▶ Access
- ▶ Affordability
- ▶ Completion and Post-Completion Success
- ▶ Research and Innovation

Opportunities and Outcomes for Maryland Learners

Maryland's postsecondary education ecosystem remains one of the most capable and diverse in the nation, with postsecondary opportunities that drive positive outcomes for Maryland learners.

ACCESS: Opening Doors to Opportunity

Maryland's postsecondary ecosystem enrolls over 400,000 students and awards nearly 110,000 credentials and degrees each year, contributing to one of the most educated populations in the nation. According to the Census Bureau's American Community Survey (ACS), 53.2 percent of adults ages 25-64 have an associate degree or higher, and an additional 4.8 percent of adults have a short-term certificate or certification.

The composition of Maryland's population has shifted considerably over the past decade. Between 2013 and 2024, the share of residents identifying as White alone (non-Hispanic) declined from **53.8 percent** to **46.4 percent**, while those identifying as Black alone increased from **29.4 percent** to **31.6 percent**.⁴ The Hispanic population rose from **8.6 percent** to **13.3 percent**, and the Asian population from **6.5 percent** to **7.3 percent**. Populations identifying as American Indian/Alaska Native, Native Hawaiian/Other Pacific Islander, and Two or More Races each comprise smaller but steady proportions of the population. The state's postsecondary enrollment is also becoming increasingly diverse. Between 2021 and 2025, the share of White undergraduate students at Maryland institutions fell from **39 percent** to **32 percent**, while the share of Black and Hispanic students both increased by approximately **2 percentage points**.⁵ **These shifts reflect the state's growing diversity and underscores the urgency of ensuring equitable educational access and attainment.**

AFFORDABILITY: Investing in Marylanders' Futures

Maryland sustains one of the most progressive state financial aid systems in the nation. In FY2026, the state awarded more than \$220 million in grants, scholarships, and loan assistance repayment programs.

Still, affordability remains a concern. The average tuition and fees is roughly \$10,789 per year at four-year public institutions and \$5,280 per year at community colleges, which does not include living expenses that are significant cost drivers for students.⁶ These costs are slightly higher than the national for in-state attendance at \$9,022 and \$4,968 for four-year and two-year public institutions, respectively.⁷ In Maryland, over 63 percent of undergraduates rely on some form of financial aid, and half of community college students attend part-time to balance work and family responsibilities.⁸ **Addressing affordability barriers, prioritizing aid for high-need students, and expanding work-based and competency-aligned models will be key to improving affordability and persistence.**

COMPLETION AND POST-COMPLETION SUCCESS: Translating Learning into Mobility

On average, 66 percent of students at Maryland's public four-year institutions graduate within six years, slightly above the national average, while 26 percent of community college students graduate or transfer within three years. Yet, significant gaps by student groups remain. For instance, public four-year institutions graduate half of Black or African American students within six years and community colleges graduate or transfer just under 19 percent of Black or African American students within three years—gaps of 16 and 7 percentage points, respectively, when compared to overall rates.⁹ **All Maryland learners require enhanced student supports to graduate and unlock the many benefits of postsecondary education.**

Importantly, those benefits of postsecondary education are real and documented. According to the Maryland Longitudinal Data System (MLDS) Center, median annual earnings five years after graduation reach approximately \$56,000 for associate degree holders and \$66,000 for bachelor's degree holders.¹⁰ About half of graduates are employed in Maryland within one year of completion, underscoring the connection between local education and the state's workforce needs.¹¹ However, program-level outcomes vary considerably. Graduates in health, business, and engineering fields show the strongest return on investment, while others take longer to reach debt-to-earnings parity.

Comparatively, Maryland public high school graduates, five years after high school graduation, with no subsequent education have median annualized earnings \$33,805. According to the Massachusetts Institute of Technology the living wage for the State of Maryland for a single individual with no child is \$53,955.¹² **Increasing transparency around program-level outcomes will help learners make more informed decisions and guide future funding priorities.**

RESEARCH AND INNOVATION: Building a Competitive and Inclusive Future

Maryland's robust network of postsecondary institutions fuels the state's economy, civic vitality, and innovation capacity, positioning the state to lead in a rapidly changing economy. In 2024, Maryland ranked third nationally in externally sponsored academic research and development (R&D) spending—almost \$6 billion annually—and first in R&D as share of state GDP.¹³ Life sciences, engineering, and emerging disciplines such as cybersecurity and quantum technology dominate this landscape, reflecting the strength of the state's academic institutions and their partnerships with federal laboratories.

Maryland's next frontier lies in turning research and educational excellence into inclusive economic growth. While academic R&D thrives, business R&D ranks only 21st nationally, and roughly two-thirds of patents granted in Maryland are assigned to entities outside the state. Strengthening the connection between higher education, industry, and regional innovation hubs will be essential to translating discovery into opportunity for Marylanders. Maryland's competitive edge depends on leveraging the full breadth of its institutions and aligning them with the state's Lighthouse sectors—aerospace, biotechnology, cybersecurity, and quantum technology—as well as other priority sectors that contribute to the public good. **Expanding pathways into these fields, investing in applied research partnerships, and increasing transparency in program-level outcomes will ensure that every learner has access to credentials and degrees that lead to opportunity.**

LIGHTING THE WAY FORWARD

A lighthouse marks a clear destination on the horizon. This Plan includes three goals to establish that destination for Maryland's system of higher education. Together, the goals articulate what the state seeks to achieve for its learners, communities, and economy, translating vision into measurable outcomes and a common direction for action.

Goals



- 1. Increase Postsecondary Attainment for Lifelong Success:** Ensure that more Marylanders earn postsecondary credentials and degrees that open doors to economic mobility, civic participation, and opportunities for continuous learning throughout life.



- 2. Advance Social and Economic Mobility through Postsecondary Education:** Create the conditions for Maryland's colleges, universities, and career schools to actively drive post-completion success, ensuring that every postsecondary credential and degree serves as a direct catalyst for upward social and economic mobility.



- 3. Mobilize Postsecondary Research and Innovation as a State Asset for Competitiveness and Public Good:** Integrate Maryland's postsecondary ecosystem into a unified, whole-of-government strategy to drive discovery and talent development in the state's lighthouse and priority sectors, while generating cross-agency solutions that enhance civic vitality and solve public challenges.

The goals of this Plan represent Maryland's collective priorities for the next four years. They connect the moral purpose of postsecondary education to the pressing needs of a competitive economy and thriving democracy.

Each goal sets a long-term target and offers performance indicators that mark the path toward it. These performance indicators are not the only metrics the state will monitor but instead offer high-level progress markers.



Goal 1



Increase Postsecondary Attainment for Lifelong Success

Ensure that more Marylanders earn affordable credentials and degrees that open doors to economic mobility, civic participation, and opportunities for continuous learning throughout life.

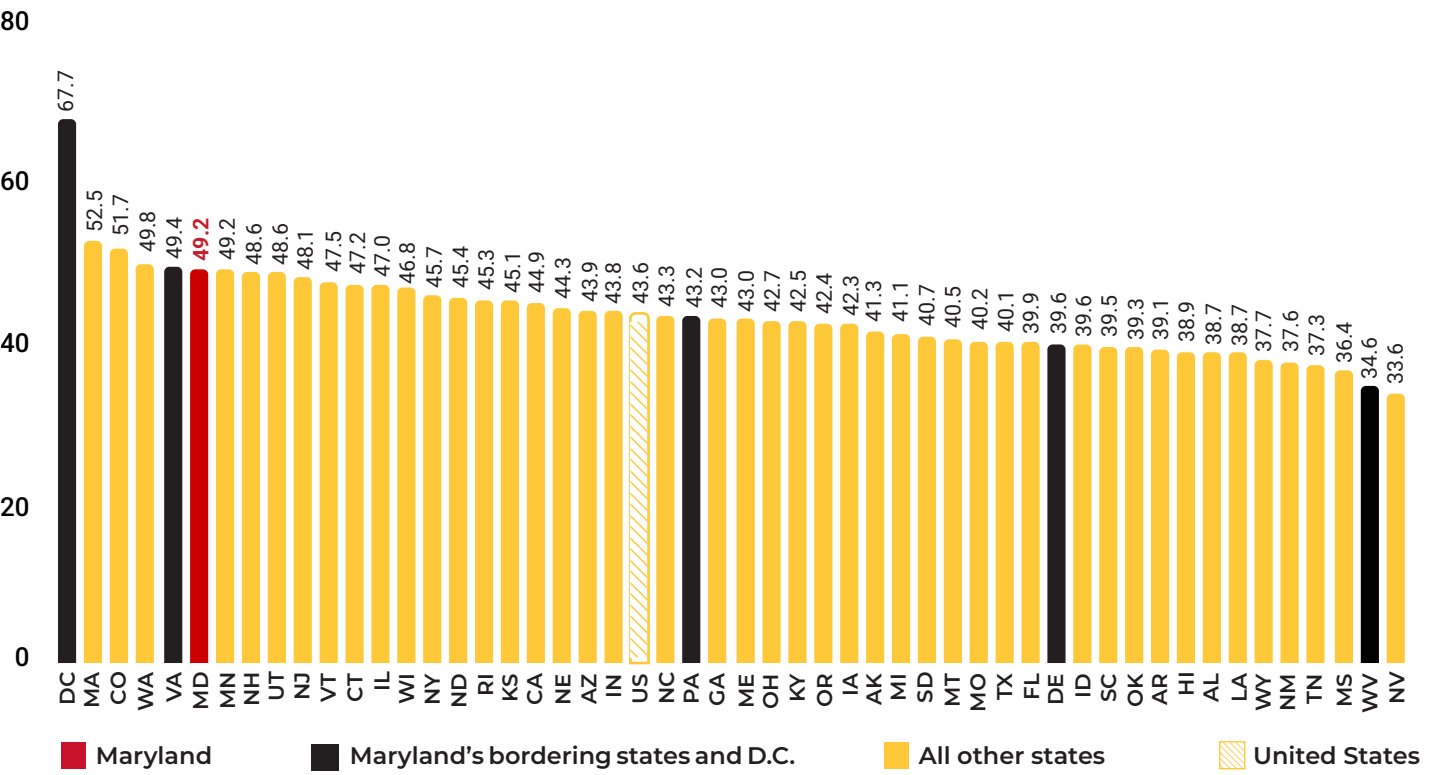
ARE MORE MARYLANDERS GETTING THE POSTSECONDARY EDUCATION THEY AND THE STATE NEED FOR SUCCESS?

The Target: By 2040, 75 percent of Maryland adults in the labor force will hold a postsecondary credential or degree and earn at least 15 percent more than the median wage for individuals with only a high school diploma. This vision for the future can provide a foundation for meaningful partnership and progress across all goals.

► Potential Performance Indicators:

- **Access:** Number of first-time postsecondary students per 1,000 individuals ages 18-34 with a high school diploma but no college enrollment
- **Momentum, Retention, and Progression:** Numbers and rates of students continuing year-to-year, meeting credit accumulation milestones (e.g., 30 in first year), re-enrolling after stopping out, and/or pursuing vertical stacking through successful transfer.
- **Completion:** The number and percentage of students completing postsecondary degrees in 100 percent, 150 percent, and 200 percent of expected time. Postsecondary credential and degree award volume and completion rates disaggregated by state focus populations.
- **Degrees Earned:** Annual number of degrees earned and awarded at a Maryland postsecondary institution, disaggregated by degree and credential type. The number of postsecondary degrees awarded to state focus populations.
- **Attainment:** The numbers and percentage of working age adults with postsecondary credential or degree, disaggregated by degree and credential type.
- **Attainment and Mobility Outcomes:** The percentage of adults (ages 25-64) in the labor force with any documented postsecondary credential or degree earning above at least 15 percent more than the median wage for individuals with only a high school diploma, disaggregated by degree and credential type.
- **In-State Graduate Attachment:** The number and percentage of postsecondary credential and degree earners participating in the Maryland labor market one, three, and five years after receiving their award.

Figure 1: 2024 Population Ages 25-64 in Labor Force with Post-High School Credential and Earning Above 15% Benchmark



Data Note: Measured as the share of the labor force with a post-high school degree, certification, or certificate and are making at least 15% more than the national median annual salary of a high school graduate.

Source: Lumina Foundation. Stronger Nation 2024 United States Report.

Maryland is a **Top Five State** for percent of adults in the labor force who hold a post-high school credential or degree **and earn at least 15% more** than the median wage for individuals with a high school diploma alone.



Goal 2



Advance Social and Economic Mobility through Postsecondary Education

Create the conditions for Maryland's colleges, universities, and career schools to actively drive post-completion success, ensuring that every postsecondary credential and degree serves as a direct catalyst for upward social and economic mobility.

ARE MARYLAND'S POSTSECONDARY CREDENTIALS AND DEGREES DRIVING SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC MOBILITY?

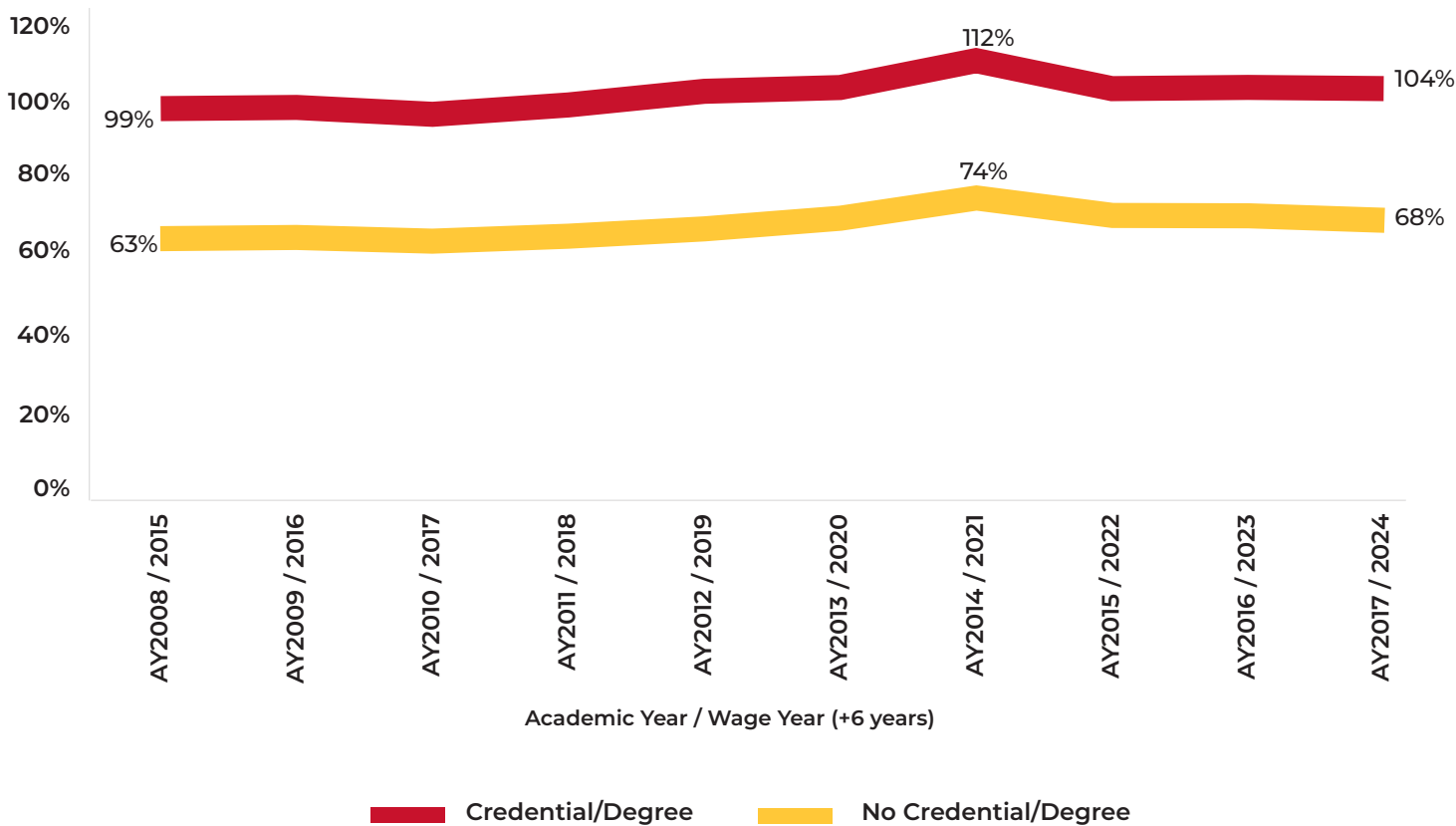
The Target: Maryland will lead the nation in providing affordable postsecondary credentials and degrees that offer economic and community benefit to students and the state.*

► Potential Performance Indicators:

- **Career-Connected Experiential Learning:** The number and percentage of students who have access to and are participating in career-connected learning.
- **Lighthouse Credential and Degree Awards:** The number of Lighthouse Credentials and Degrees awarded that align to state designed "lighthouse" sectors, other priority sectors, or sectors that provide community benefits.
- **Labor Market Participation:** The percentage of postsecondary credential and degree earners who are engaged in the state labor market, and the length of time completers participate in the Maryland labor market.
- **Labor Market Earnings:** The number and percent of individuals who start postsecondary programs and reach living wage and national lifetime earning benchmarks.
- **Return on Investment:** The number of years of labor market participation (e.g., wages, wage growth, labor market stability, time to labor market entry, etc.) required to pay costs of postsecondary education, disaggregated by program type and state focus populations.
- **Economic and Social Mobility:** The number of Marylanders from historically underserved backgrounds (e.g., low-income schools, under-performing schools, under-resourced neighborhoods, disadvantaged households, low-wage jobs, etc.) completing postsecondary credentials and degrees with expected lifetime earnings above the living wage. The number and percentage of adult Marylanders with wages below the living wage who attain wages above the living wage after completing a postsecondary credential or degree.

* A credential or degree with "community benefit" is one that either targets a specific area of Maryland's labor market or provides general support to the Maryland workforce. A credential or degree with community benefit may provide an individual with a private living wage, may offer an individual with an entry level opportunity with a career ladder for economic advancement or may provide essential services to communities or the general workforce or employed in nonprofits or public employers.

Figure 2: Earnings of Maryland High School Graduates Six Years After Graduation as Percent of Living Wage



Data Note: Credentials and degrees in this figure are defined as a postsecondary certificate, associate, bachelor’s or master’s degree or higher. The first year on the x-axis refers to the academic year of graduation. The second year on the x-axis refers to the year of wage observation—six years after graduation. The y-axis denotes wages as a percent of the Maryland living wage for the observation year.

Source: MLDS Center. (December 2025). Maryland Public High School Graduates: College and Workforce Outcomes, Median Quarterly Wage Trends. Baltimore, MD: Maryland Longitudinal Data System Center.

Maryland’s credential and degree holders consistently **earn at or above the living wage.**



Goal 3



Mobilize Postsecondary Research and Innovation as a State Asset for Competitiveness and Public Good

Integrate Maryland's postsecondary ecosystem into a unified, whole-of-government strategy to drive discovery and talent development in the state's lighthouse and priority sectors, while generating cross-agency solutions that enhance civic vitality and solve public challenges.

IS RESEARCH AT MARYLAND POSTSECONDARY INSTITUTIONS DRIVING ECONOMIC GROWTH AND SOLVING IMPORTANT PROBLEMS?

The Target: Maryland maintains its leading position nationally in externally funded academic research and development while growing its research profile in lighthouse and priority sectors and ensuring the diversity of its research workforce.

► Potential Performance Indicators:

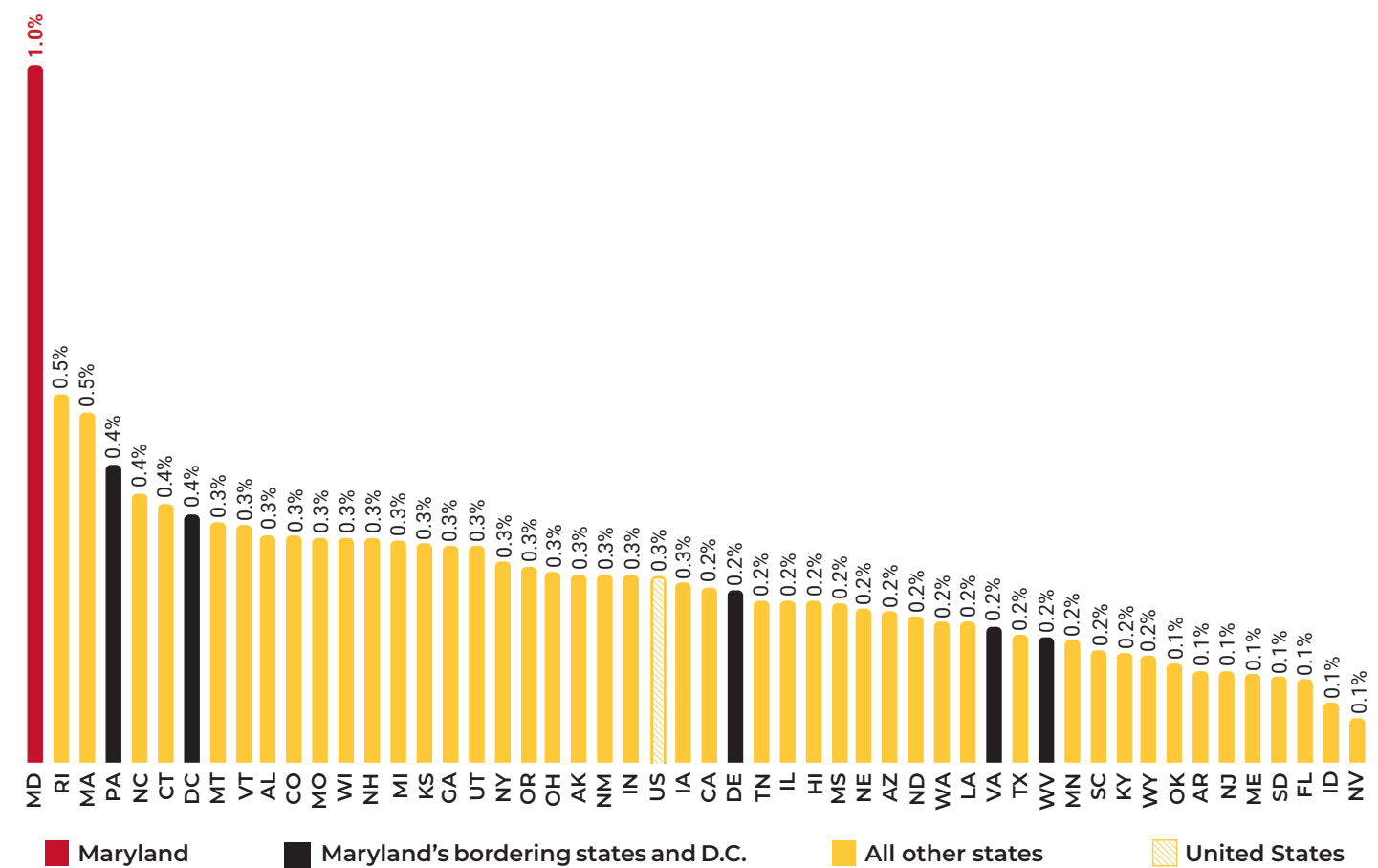
- **Statewide Coordination and Alignment:** Strategic alignment with the Moore-Miller State Plan and various related plans such as the forthcoming Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) currently under development for the state's Integrated Economic Competitiveness Plan.*

***The Governor's Economic Competitiveness Subcabinet is currently finalizing Maryland's Integrated Economic Competitiveness Plan.**

That statewide framework relies heavily on the postsecondary ecosystem, explicitly tasking institutions of higher education to serve as the state's primary research engine and to nurture its critical talent pipeline.



Figure 3: Externally Funded Academic Research and Development (R&D) as Percent of State GDP



Source: 2024 Externally-funded research from NSF Higher Education Research & Development Survey, 2025 GDP by State, Bureau of Economic Analysis.

Maryland leads the nation in academic research and development funding as a percent of GDP.



LOOKING FORWARD

PERFORMANCE INDICATORS AND PROGRESS MONITORING

This State Plan outlines various performance indicators to measure progress toward goals. In implementation, MHEC and partners will identify specific targets for performance indicators to benchmark progress. For example – how many credentials and degrees should Maryland students be earning annually, or how do we measure AI integration in curriculum? Some work to set strategy targets is ongoing, such as the targets associated with Maryland's participation in the Aspen Institute College Excellence Program's Transfer Intensive. This approach for flexible performance indicator targets accounts for labor market shifts, ensuring that targets adapt with the shifting needs of Maryland's economy and learners. Maryland and its institutions will monitor metrics beyond performance that capture student progress as well as progress in strategy implementation.

Additionally, this Plan elevates the importance of disaggregating data, but does not name specific student populations. Focus populations will vary by indicator, but could include adults, student parents, young men, low-income students, and transfer students—to name a few. As disaggregations elevate gaps that must be addressed, focus populations may shift or intensify to ensure every Maryland learner is served. New state priorities may also be introduced to ensure all students have access to the support they need to succeed. This Plan offers flexibility for those shifts, while remaining committed to disaggregation to understand differential impact on student populations and drive the closing of gaps.

It will also be critical to explore strategies to strengthen the performance indicators themselves. Two priorities stand out for strengthening indicators. First, exploring additional measures—both qualitative and quantitative—around civic learning and engagement. Second, assessing the feasibility of monitoring and embedding outcomes for Maryland graduates who live and work in neighboring states into the indicators. Effective July 2026, MHEC began sending data on graduates from Maryland's colleges and universities for inclusion in the Post-Secondary Employment Outcomes (PSEO) Explorer.[†] Participation in the PSEO Explorer will provide Maryland with a national picture of how our graduates impact the society and the economy nationally. Additionally, through the Maryland Longitudinal Data System Center, Maryland is participating in a grant funded project to develop a regional data center in collaboration with Virginia and Washington D.C.[‡] This initiative will provide insight into the regional labor market, and how education pathways lead to the workforce pipeline, and will specifically help Maryland understand the economic impact the state's graduates have on the DMV region. Collectively, this work will inform annual updates to the Plan's performance indicators.

[†] The Postsecondary Employment Outcomes (PSEO) Explorer is a tool that provides tabulations developed by researchers at the U.S. Census Bureau. PSEO data provide earnings and labor sector information for college and university graduates. These statistics are generated by matching student data with a national database of jobs, using state-of-the-art confidentiality protection mechanisms to protect the underlying data. This data is currently limited to degrees but there is discussion about expanding it to workforce credentials.

[‡] The MLDS Center and its counterparts in Washington D.C. and Virginia received a grant from the Coleridge Initiative's Democratizing Our Data Grant Challenge to establish a multistate data sharing partnership for the purpose of better understanding K-12, higher education, and workforce pathways in the Capital Region. The Coleridge Initiative is a nonprofit organization working with governments to ensure that data are more effectively used for public decision-making.

FROM GOALS TO ACTION

CHARTING THE COURSE AHEAD

A lighthouse does not merely mark the destination; it actively guides vessels and charts the course to reach it. This State Plan can serve as that guiding light for Maryland's postsecondary system, identifying strategies that move the state closer to its goals while remaining responsive to the changing conditions that may require recalibration along the way.

Strategies

This Plan outlines eight strategies that contribute to progress across multiple goals, reflecting the cohesive, interconnected nature of this State Plan and vision for postsecondary education. Each strategy is composed of **Catalytic Actions** (high-impact efforts that can be executed in the next one to three years), and a **Long-Term Vision** (a guiding target to provide steady direction to each overall strategy), which together are expected to drive progress for Maryland's learners, institutions, and communities. These actions cannot be accomplished by MHEC alone. Instead, they require leadership from various state agencies, institutions, and boards to ensure effective implementation and advance student outcomes. Further, catalytic actions are priorities for the next one to three years, representing high-priority work that can provide significant impact to students. The work is not limited to these actions, and the actions will evolve over the course of this State Plan.

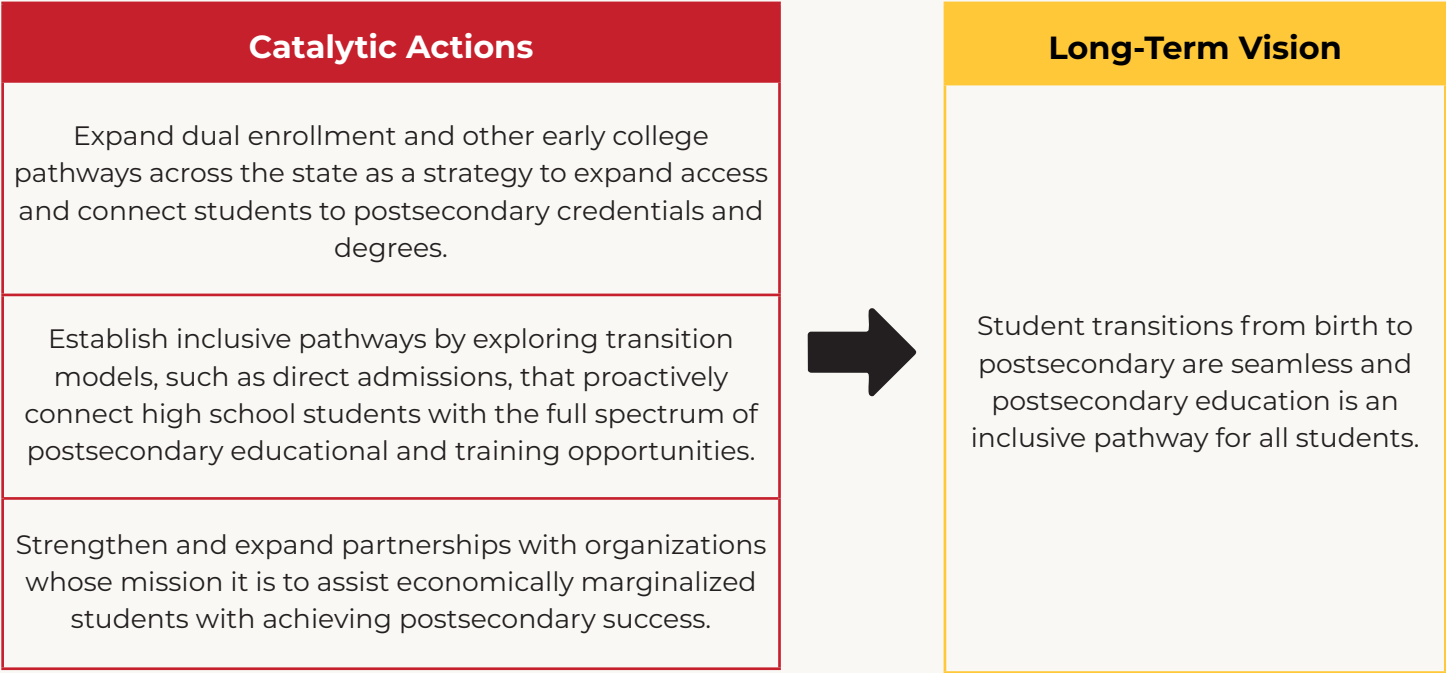
STRATEGY	GOAL 1: Attainment & Completion	GOAL 2: Social & Economic Mobility	GOAL 3: Research & Innovation
Streamline transitions across the secondary to postsecondary continuum	●	●	
Advance affordability	●	●	
Implement a collaborative approach to holistic student success	●	●	
Embed future-proof skills in learning	●	●	●
Enhance proactive advising for completion and post-completion success	●	●	
Design flexible pathways for lifelong learning	●	●	
Strengthen connections between postsecondary education and talent development	●	●	●
Fuel long-term economic competitiveness and public problem solving			●

STRATEGY: Streamline Transitions Across the Secondary to Postsecondary Continuum

Maryland will make transitions between secondary and postsecondary education seamless for students. Smooth transitions lack unnecessary administrative barriers and include ample opportunities for early exposure, experiences, and preparation. While the ultimate vision is to streamline transitions starting with critical milestones in early childhood, the immediate actions in this Plan focus on the transition between high school and postsecondary education.

Why Prioritize This Strategy? In Maryland, 50 percent of public high school graduates enroll in college (either in-state or out-of-state) in the fall following high school graduation.¹⁴ With each graduating class, there are approximately 15,000 Maryland public high school graduates who never enroll in college within five years of high school graduation and another 17,000 who attempt college but exit without a degree within that five year period.¹⁵ Of the approximately 30,000 public high school graduates who attend college immediately after high school each year, around 68 percent enroll in Maryland institutions.¹⁶ Yet, neighboring states will likely compete for Maryland’s high school students as potential college enrollees, particularly when contending with enrollment and demographic cliffs. Removing barriers to postsecondary transitions within Maryland contributes to a healthy pipeline of prospective students and an intentional message that postsecondary education is a viable pathway to economic mobility for all students.

Opportunities

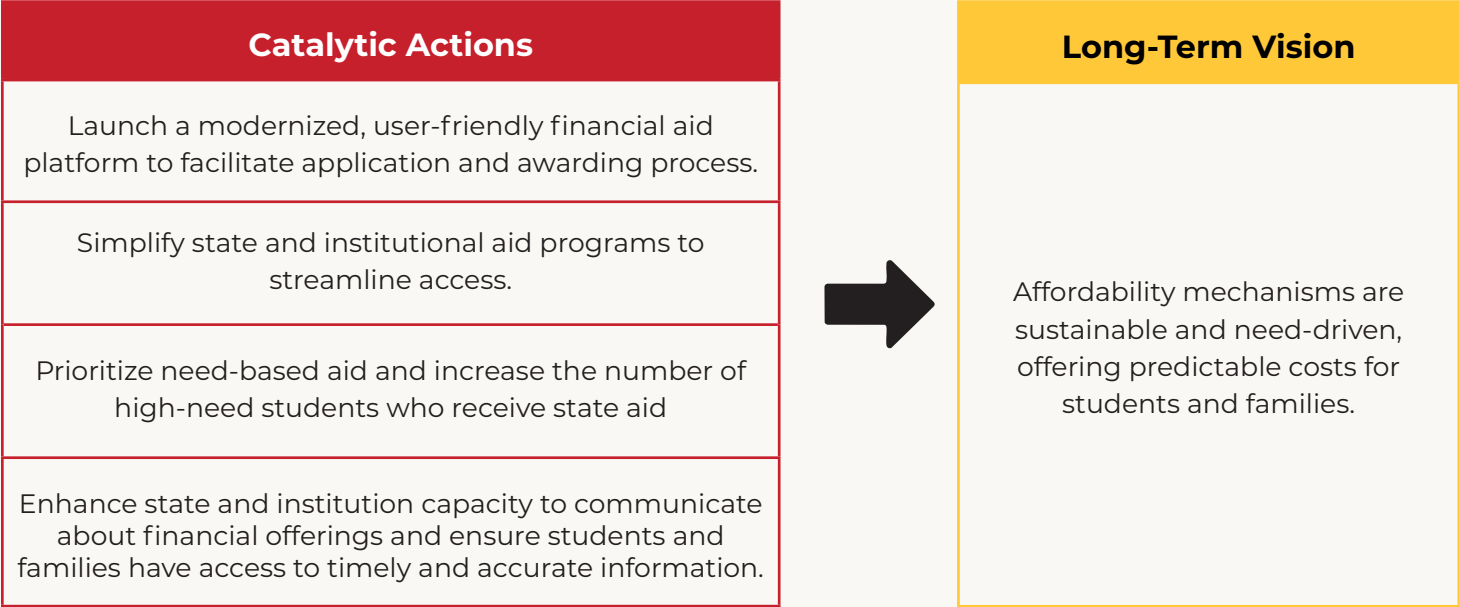


STRATEGY: Advance Affordability

Maryland will drive postsecondary access and success through a cohesive affordability strategy that prioritizes transparency and student need. This cohesive approach necessitates a simplified financial aid system that prioritizes transparency and targets aid based on student need.

Why Prioritize This Strategy? Students across the nation consistently name cost as a primary reason for not attending postsecondary education.¹⁷ While over 63 percent of Maryland students at public institutions of higher education receive some form of financial aid, the state's numerous financial aid programs can be challenging to navigate, and the real costs of postsecondary education are opaque.¹⁸

Opportunities

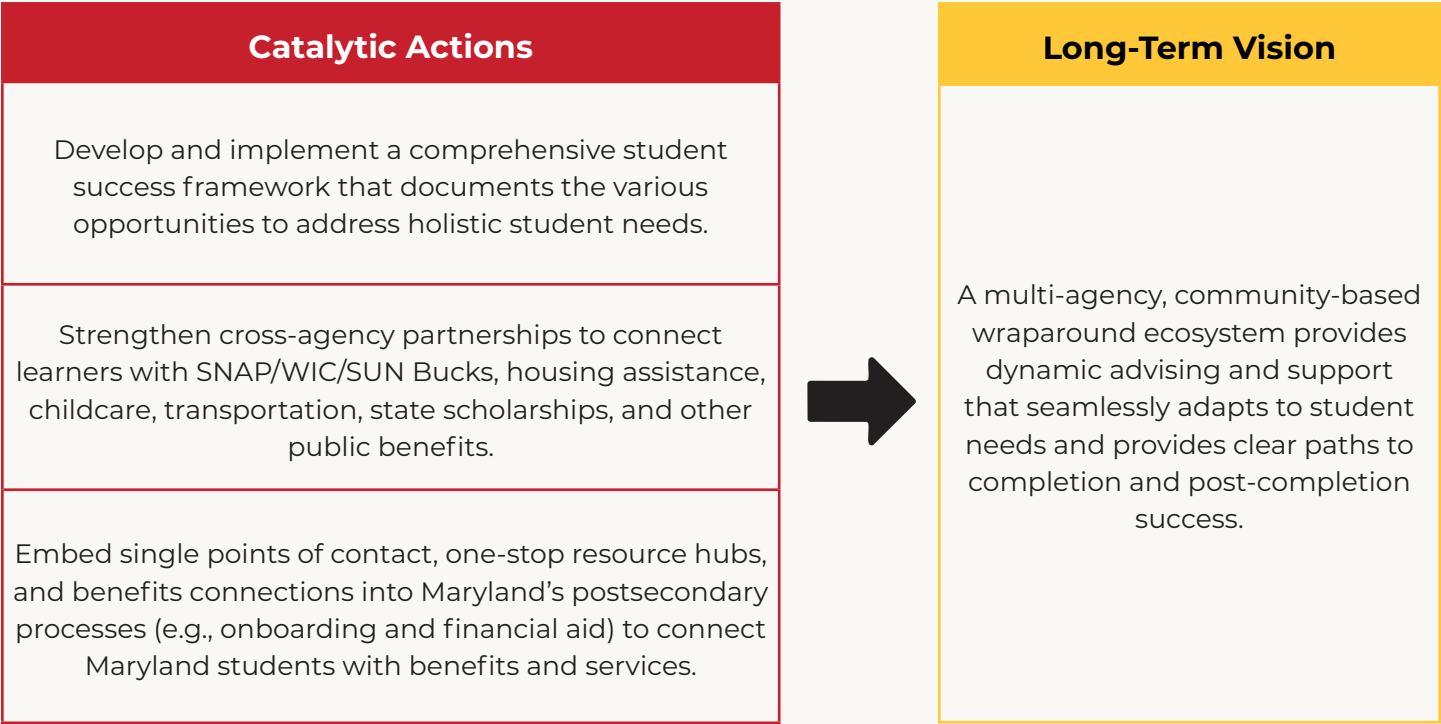


STRATEGY: Implement a Collaborative Approach to Holistic Student Success

Maryland will catalyze inclusive postsecondary attainment through holistic support that removes barriers to access and success in postsecondary education. Achieving holistic student success is characterized by a whole-of-government approach that integrates cross-agency services to drive student success in education and the workforce, and meaningful partnership with non-profits and community-based organizations who contribute to this work. This approach also recognizes that students require a broad range of supports to succeed—covering academic, physical, and mental well-being—and postsecondary is not equipped to meet all of those needs alone.

Why Prioritize This Strategy? National survey data estimates that 73 percent of students experience at least one form of basic needs challenge such as food or housing insecurity, mental health, and childcare.¹⁹ Unmet basic needs lead to increased likelihood of stopping out, taking a leave of absence, or being at risk for academic probation.²⁰ Maryland's existing efforts to address basic needs include one-stop benefit access resources— connecting people with the benefit programs that best meet their needs.²¹ The state can build upon this existing work in this Plan for postsecondary education. A coordinated approach to align government services and supports is necessary to amplify the positive impact of postsecondary education on the economy, support equitable attainment, and position Maryland for future economic growth and a strong knowledge economy.

Opportunities

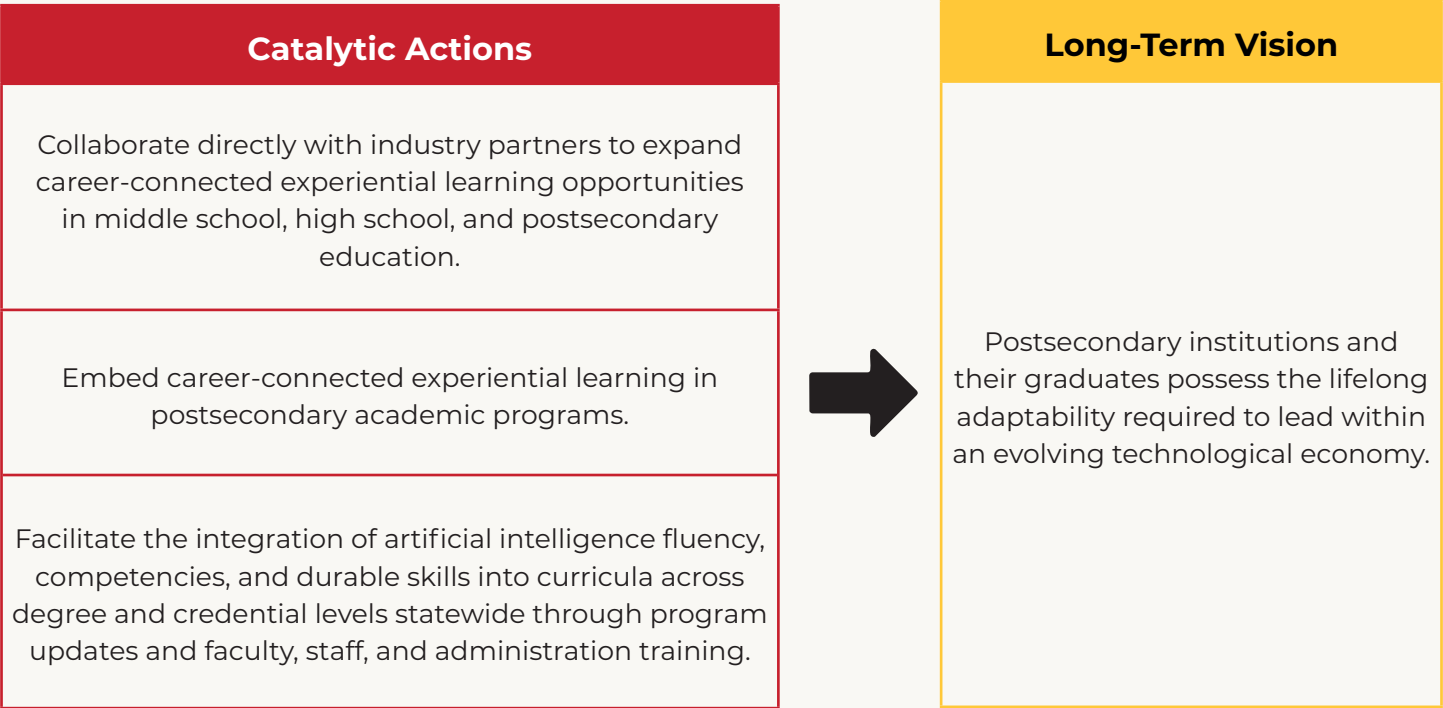


STRATEGY: Embed Future-Proof Skills in Learning

Maryland will embed real-time labor market alignment and future-proof skills into curricula. This responsive system of postsecondary education will provide career-connected learning experiences, durable skills, and flexible responses to evolutions in artificial intelligence, the job market, and the state economy.

Why Prioritize This Strategy? With rapid evolutions to the economy such as artificial intelligence, hiring managers are increasingly valuing durable skills like critical thinking and real-world experience.²² In fact, the World Economic Forum projects that 44 percent of workers' core skills will be disrupted by AI by 2028.²³ Redesigning the postsecondary experience to better meet those needs can prepare students for future careers in Maryland.

Opportunities

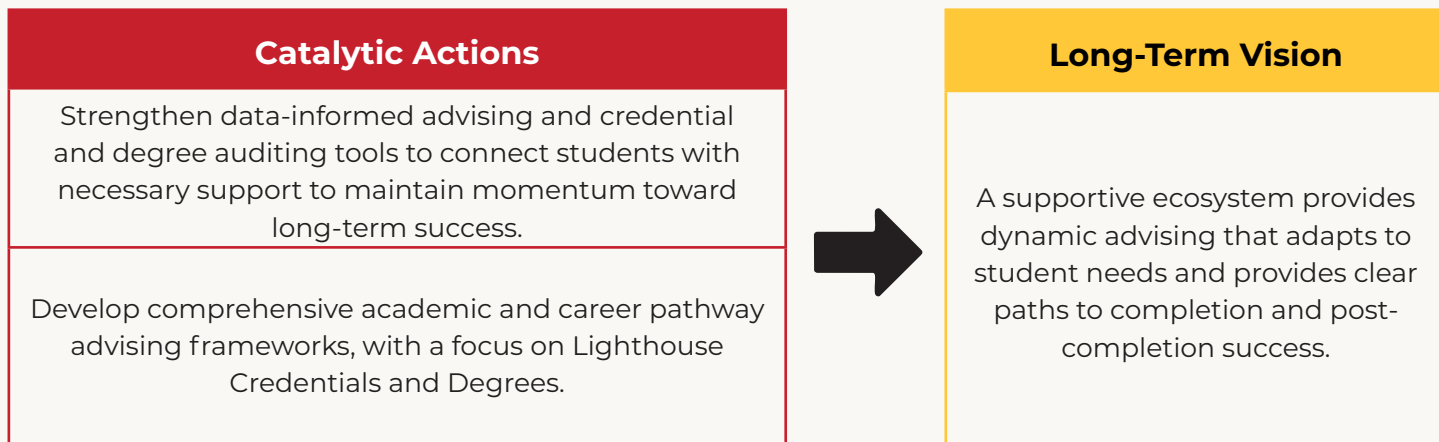


STRATEGY: Enhance Proactive Advising for Completion and Post-Completion Success

Maryland has made significant recent efforts to enhance proactive advising. Starting in K-12, the Blueprint for Maryland’s Future introduced a new career counseling program to offer every public middle and high school student with individualized career support.²⁴ In 2024, MHEC partnered with MDRC on the Expanding SUCCESS initiative to help institutions across the state integrate evidence-based proactive advising models into their delivery.²⁵ Maryland will build on this collaborative progress and develop data-informed advising frameworks to proactively guide students toward postsecondary and career success, and to intervene early with targeted supports to ensure they stay on track.

Why Prioritize This Strategy? Research shows that sustained, targeted advising improves retention and credit accumulation²⁶—two of the clearest levers for completion. In 2023, MHEC conducted a statewide survey of its colleges and universities on their intrusive advising systems and wraparound services and found meaningful variation in how proactive advising is implemented across institutions. Slightly more than half of all institutions noted that their models rely on technology, including early alert systems and automated features that push messages to students.²⁷ There is opportunity to strengthen Maryland’s existing advising and basic early warning infrastructure and embed those efforts into broader student success initiatives.

Opportunities

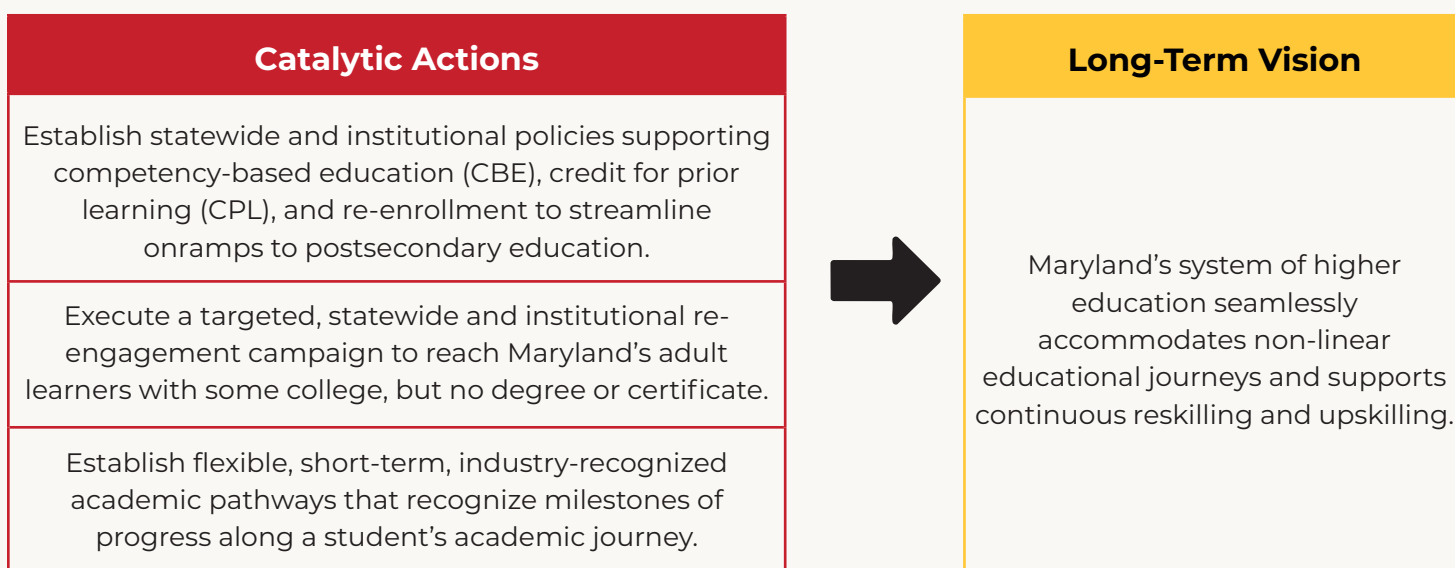


STRATEGY: Design Flexible Pathways for Lifelong Learning

Maryland will design a postsecondary ecosystem that enables lifelong learning. Refining non-linear pathways for lifelong learning will re-engage adult learners and validate their competencies from prior learning and work/life experiences to offer flexible learning opportunities that reward mastery of skills over seat time and prepare students to succeed in education and careers.

Why Prioritize This Strategy? There are over 600,000 adults in Maryland under the age of 65 with some college, but no degree or certificate.²⁸ These students have previous postsecondary experiences and likely also beneficial work experiences that contribute to learning, but are not always awarded credit for those experiences—presenting a notable barrier to re-enrollment. Further, as job markets evolve, many adult learners require reskilling or upskilling. Postsecondary learning experiences must offer flexible paths that meet the needs of modern learners for Maryland to achieve its goals.

Opportunities

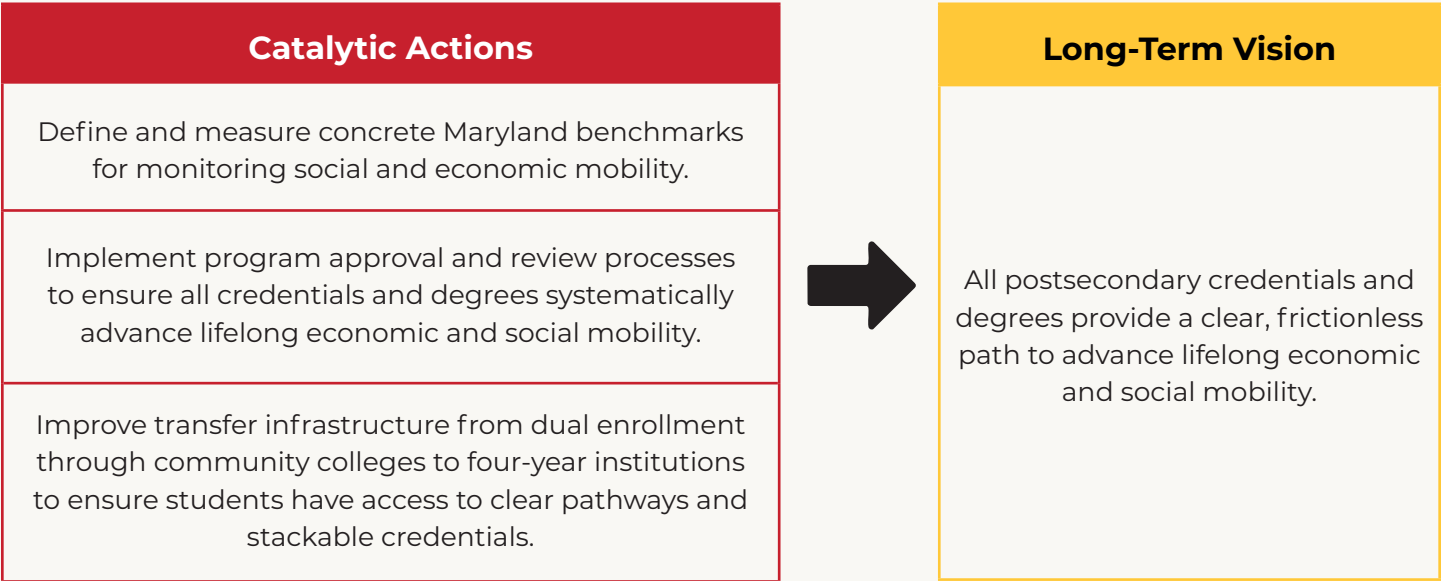


STRATEGY: Strengthen Connections Between Postsecondary Education and Talent Development

Maryland will ensure postsecondary credentials and degrees across the state are advancing social and economic mobility. Clear connections between postsecondary education and social and economic mobility requires transparent, measurable indicators to monitor progress and a shared prioritization of pathways that enable that mobility.

Why Prioritize This Strategy? Postsecondary education provides well-documented benefits to students. Five years after graduation, Maryland associate degree and bachelor's degree graduates earn approximately \$56,000 and \$66,000 each year, respectively. In comparison, five years after high school graduation, Maryland learners with no subsequent education have median annualized earnings \$33,805.²⁹ This difference is striking, but that positive impact is not realized uniformly across programs. Further, while Maryland has one of the highest vertical transfer rates in the nation, indicating student interest in pursuing further education, only 50 percent of transfer students in Maryland earn a Bachelor's degree within six years of community college enrollment.³⁰ Intentional strategies are required to ensure postsecondary education is a springboard for mobility for all learners.

Opportunities



STRATEGY: Fuel Long-Term Economic Competitiveness and Public Problem Solving

Maryland will position postsecondary education as an engine for economic growth and innovative research. Higher education fuels long-term economic competitiveness and problem solving through intentional integration and ongoing agency efforts and aligning research and talent capacity with key economic sectors.

Why Prioritize This Strategy? Postsecondary education is an engine for economic growth. For each additional postsecondary graduate, Maryland's annual GDP increases by approximately \$158,000.³¹ Maryland furthers its contribution to competitiveness and innovation through its more than \$6 billion total annual investment in academic and research development spending. Strategic alignment between these investments and economic needs, alongside better integration in existing government efforts, will bolster this positive impact and position Maryland for future growth and a strong knowledge economy.

Opportunities

Catalytic Actions

Help institutions develop foundational Lighthouse credentials and degrees.

Asset map institutional strengths in research and talent, and aligns those strengths with the operational needs of state agencies.

Provide targeted talent and research support to sustain key economic sectors and advance new ones.



Long-Term Vision

Maryland is a premier global hub for innovation and specialized talent production, with postsecondary education as a state asset and public service function.

LOOKING FORWARD

STRATEGIES AND CATALYTIC ACTIONS

This Plan presents a set of catalytic actions across eight strategies. To accomplish the actions, implementation will rely on ongoing partnership through working groups and other stakeholder input. For example, MHEC's ongoing collaboration with the Maryland State Department of Education (MSDE) and multi-sector higher education partners will yield a report to the General Assembly on July 1, 2027, studying how to best align high school achievement data with seamless postsecondary on-ramps, such as a Direct Admissions program.

The catalytic actions in this Plan also do not intend to limit potential policy and practice shifts, but rather aim to prioritize next steps for implementation. Additional strategies such as strengthening program approval and review processes will also be key to advancing the three goals outlined in the Plan. As Maryland's priorities evolve, so will the catalytic actions prioritized in this Plan.

A lighthouse does not merely mark the destination; it actively guides vessels and charts the course to reach it. This Plan can serve as that **guiding light for Maryland's postsecondary system.**



CONSIDERATIONS FOR IMPLEMENTATION

The 2026–2030 Maryland State Plan for Higher Education establishes a shared vision, statewide goals, and core strategies to advance social and economic mobility for all Marylanders. Realizing this vision will require more than implementation of discrete initiatives. It demands a coordinated and adaptive approach that aligns institutions, state government, employers, community organizations, and learners around statewide goals.

As Maryland navigates a period of rapid technological change, evolving workforce demands, demographic shifts, and increasing economic complexity, this Plan must function as a living framework rather than a static document. Its success will depend upon sustained partnership, evidence-informed decision-making, and a commitment to continuous improvement. While the goals of this Plan remain constant, the pathways to achieving them must remain flexible enough to respond to emerging opportunities and challenges.

The implementation framework outlined is designed to translate strategy into action through four interconnected priorities: **stewardship, alignment, collaboration, and continuous improvement**. Together, this approach establishes an operating model that enables Maryland's postsecondary ecosystem to remain responsive, innovative, and focused on delivering value for learners, employers, communities, and the state.

Strategic Stewardship

The Maryland Higher Education Commission serves as the state's coordinating entity for postsecondary education and is uniquely positioned to provide strategic stewardship across Maryland's higher education ecosystem. Through its statutory authority and independent governance structure, the Commission establishes statewide priorities, advances public accountability, safeguards academic quality, and promotes equitable access to opportunity.

The Commission's role extends beyond oversight. As the only entity with visibility across Maryland's full postsecondary landscape, it is responsible for identifying emerging challenges, anticipating future needs, convening stakeholders, and aligning higher education policy with the state's broader economic, workforce, and civic objectives. Through this stewardship function, the Commission helps ensure that Maryland's postsecondary ecosystem remains responsive to changing conditions while advancing long-term public priorities.

This leadership is operationalized through the work of the Agency and its staff. The Agency provides the capacity to translate policy into action by administering programs and financial aid, supporting institutions, conducting research and analysis, convening stakeholders, and managing statewide initiatives. Together, the Commission and Agency form a complementary governance model that connects strategic vision with effective implementation.

Alignment

The 2026–2030 Maryland State Plan for Higher Education is fundamentally a state plan. Its success depends upon the alignment of policies, investments, institutional priorities, and performance expectations across the postsecondary ecosystem.

Government Alignment

The 2026–2030 Maryland State Plan for Higher Education is designed to advance, and be fully integrated with, the Moore-Miller Administration's statewide vision for Maryland's future. Higher education is not a separate policy domain within this agenda; it is a foundational driver of the Administration's goals to expand economic opportunity, strengthen Maryland's competitiveness, and ensure that growth is broadly shared across all communities.

Achieving the goals of this Plan, therefore, requires deep and sustained coordination across state government. Postsecondary education outcomes are directly connected to the Administration's priorities in workforce development, economic growth, technological innovation, environmental sustainability, and poverty reduction. For this reason, the Commission will align its work with key interagency structures established under the Moore-Miller agenda, including the Governor's Economic Competitiveness Subcabinet and the Governor's Artificial Intelligence Subcabinet, as well as related statewide initiatives focused on workforce alignment, innovation, and long-term fiscal sustainability.

This alignment is not procedural. It is strategic. It ensures that higher education policy, workforce planning, and economic development investments are mutually reinforcing rather than operating in parallel. Through this approach, Maryland strengthens the connection between credential attainment, labor market demand, and upward economic mobility.

Within this framework, the Commission will work to ensure that postsecondary education contributes directly to the Administration's core objectives, including expanding pathways to family-sustaining careers, improving labor market alignment, supporting lighthouse and priority sectors, and reducing structural barriers to opportunity. In practice, this includes coordinated efforts to integrate emerging technologies such as artificial intelligence into learning and workforce systems, and to expand high-quality work-based learning opportunities that connect education more directly to employment.

Ultimately, this approach reflects the Moore-Miller Administration's broader commitment to a whole-of-government strategy for improving outcomes for Marylanders. The Agency's role is to ensure that postsecondary education is fully embedded in that strategy, both as a contributor to and a beneficiary of coordinated state action.

Ecosystem Alignment

Implementation also requires a shared commitment among public and private institutions, regional higher education centers, state agencies, employers, and community partners to advance common statewide goals while preserving institutional missions and distinct strengths. Alignment does not require uniformity. Rather, it requires coordinated action toward shared outcomes that improve educational attainment, economic mobility, and public impact.

The Commission will work with institutions to review strategic priorities, performance frameworks, budget requests, and other planning mechanisms to ensure meaningful alignment with the goals and strategies established in this Plan. At the same time, institutional innovation and mission differentiation will remain essential components of Maryland's higher education landscape. Effective implementation depends upon balancing statewide coordination with institutional autonomy.

The Agency will continue to serve as a bridge between higher education, state government, and external partners, ensuring that Maryland's educational, workforce, research, and economic development assets work together to address public needs and strengthen statewide competitiveness.

Collaboration and Shared Ownership

Effective implementation depends on sustained collaboration across sectors. Many of the most important challenges facing Maryland's postsecondary system cannot be addressed by any single institution or agency acting alone.

To support implementation, the Commission will facilitate coordinated, time-bound, and adaptive implementation structures that bring together relevant state agencies, institutions, employers, and community partners. These structures will be designed to translate statewide strategies into actionable approaches while allowing flexibility to respond to changing conditions over time.

Each strategy in this Plan will be supported by a corresponding implementation structure that ensures cross-sector coordination, shared problem-solving, and continuous refinement. These structures will not operate in isolation but will be integrated across the broader ecosystem of state initiatives and institutional planning processes.

Continuous Improvement

Implementation of this Plan will be ongoing, iterative, and responsive to changing conditions. While the Plan establishes a clear long-term vision and statewide goals, the strategies, priorities, and catalytic actions used to achieve them must evolve alongside Maryland's economic, technological, and demographic realities.

The Commission and Agency will regularly assess progress toward the goals and indicators outlined in this Plan, monitor emerging trends, and evaluate the effectiveness of implementation efforts. These reviews will help identify opportunities for refinement, strengthen alignment across the postsecondary ecosystem, and ensure that resources and attention remain focused on areas of greatest impact.

As new evidence emerges and statewide priorities evolve, the Commission may adjust implementation approaches, refine performance indicators, establish new targets, or elevate emerging areas of focus. This commitment to continuous learning and adaptation reflects the Commission's responsibility not only to monitor change, but to anticipate it.

Through ongoing engagement with institutions, state agencies, employers, students, and community partners, Maryland will maintain a planning and implementation process that remains relevant, forward-looking, and responsive to the needs of learners and the state.

Strategic Readiness

To fulfill the State Plan's goals, Maryland Higher Education Committee (MHEC) will also develop its own internal Strategic Plan. This Strategic Plan will strengthen the agency's operational capacity and modernize policies related to program approval, financial aid, accountability, and institutional grants. It will also ensure that MHEC's processes reflect the values of transparency, efficiency, and responsiveness.

CALL TO ACTION

DELIVERING MARYLAND'S MOMENT

The 2026–2030 Maryland State Plan for Higher Education represents more than a planning document. It is a renewed promise to Maryland's people, a commitment to ensure that postsecondary education remains the most powerful force for opportunity, equity, and civic renewal.

Maryland's postsecondary system is a public trust. It must continue to evolve, innovate, and lead with courage. This Plan calls upon policymakers, educators, employers, and citizens to embrace a shared responsibility for the future of learning. Together, Maryland can build a postsecondary system that reflects its values, harnesses its strengths, and secures its promise for generations to come.





APPENDIX

ENDNOTES

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FORTHCOMING ANALYSIS

State Workforce Needs

During the 2024 legislative session, the Maryland General Assembly passed HB 1244 (Chapter 963 of the Acts of 2024), requiring the Maryland State Plan for Higher Education (MHEC) to include an annual appendix addressing current and emerging State and regional workforce needs.

This analysis for 2026 is forthcoming.



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