



# PRESIDENTS FORUM

## 2025 Policy Agenda



## OUR COMMITMENTS



**Students First** - We prioritize students above all else, measuring every policy by its ability to improve access, affordability, and outcomes. Education systems exist to serve students, not institutions, faculty or staff.

**Access for All** - True access means open pathways for every student, regardless of race, income, or background. We believe in policies that remove barriers and create real opportunity.

**Accountable Innovation** - We champion technology and practices that demonstrably improve outcomes. Innovation must be results-driven and centered on student success.

**Empowering Working Learners** - Higher education must adapt to the needs of working learners by offering flexible, affordable, and tailored pathways to upskill and reskill throughout life.

**Value-Driven Education** - We support policies that lower costs and improve outcomes, focusing on workforce alignment, skills, and competencies to maximize education's return on investment.

**Accountability** - All institutions, regardless of governance or funding models, must be held to high standards and deliver meaningful outcomes for students. Accountability must reflect the context of the students served, valuing schools that create the greatest lift.

**Parity Across Modalities** - We advocate for equal value and regulatory parity for online and in-person education, ensuring all students succeed regardless of how they learn.



## OUR APPROACH

The Supreme Court's ruling on the Chevron doctrine marks an important shift in higher education policy. By placing greater responsibility on Congress and state governments to interpret and address critical issues through clear and deliberate legislation, this decision creates an opportunity to craft more transparent, democratically accountable policies. The Presidents Forum is committed to working alongside policymakers to rise to this challenge, embracing the opportunity to solve complex problems and advance innovative, student-centered solutions that shape the future of higher education.



## FEDERAL LEGISLATION

## FEDERAL INVESTMENT PRIORITIES

These priorities focus on advancing policies that directly impact federal spending and revenue, ensuring investments align with student outcomes and workforce needs.

**Workforce Pell** - Expand Pell Grant eligibility to include shorter-term workforce training programs that lead to high-demand careers. Promote both improved efficiency and increased investment in the Pell program.

**Military Assistance** - Increase the per-hour tuition credit for servicemembers to reflect rising education costs and advocate for impactful legislation which increases military tuition assistance. Remove the variable housing allowance penalty for online students.

**Skill Savings Accounts (Section 529)** - Expand 529 accounts to cover skill-based training and non-degree programs, empowering individuals to pursue diverse educational pathways.

**Federal Work Study Programs** - Expand funding for Federal Work Study programs, focusing on opportunities that align with skill development and career preparation.

**Access to Federal Financial Aid ("Ability to Benefit")** - Update the "ability to benefit" definition to expand federal financial aid eligibility for nontraditional and working learners, ensuring access for those with demonstrated potential.

**Bolster Dual Enrollment** - Advocate for comprehensive legislation that provides sustainable funding mechanisms and clear pathways for dual enrollment programs across state lines. Support federal programs that expand opportunities for high school students to earn college credits.

## INNOVATION PRIORITIES

The Presidents Forum is committed to advancing policies that foster innovation, ensure fairness, and prioritize outcomes for students in all types of educational institutions. These regulatory reforms are essential for aligning higher education with the needs of modern learners and the evolving workforce.

**Competency-Based Education (CBE)** - Advocate for federal recognition of CBE, emphasizing student mastery through demonstrated skills and real-world performance instead of traditional seat-time requirements. Provide a regulatory framework to expand Title IV eligibility for flexible and innovative learning models.

**Data Reform** - Consolidate and modernize education data systems to improve transparency and decision-making. Establish national standards for Learning and Employment Records (LERs) and risk-adjusted outcome data, ensuring accurate measurements of institutional performance and student outcomes. Develop comprehensive longitudinal data systems linking education and workforce outcomes.

**Parity in Mode and Method Regulation** - Advocate for consistent regulatory standards across all learning modalities (online, in-person) and methods (credit-hour, CBE), ensuring fairness and innovation are not stifled. Prevent inconsistent application of attendance, enrollment, and credentialing regulations that disproportionately affect nontraditional learning environments.

**Credit for Prior Learning (CPL)** - Expand Title IV eligibility to cover CPL fees, making prior learning assessments more accessible to students. Establish fair and consistent guidelines for institutions to structure CPL fees and ensure transparency.

**Clarifying Regular and Substantive Interaction** - Redefine “regular and substantive interaction” requirements for competency-based and online education to support flexibility and innovative teaching methods while maintaining quality standards.

**Gainful Employment Regulations** - Advocate for transparency in program outcomes while ensuring fair and consistent criteria for assessing the value of all credentialing programs.

**Federal Work Study Modernization** - Update the Federal Work Study program to align with workforce needs, ensuring students gain relevant skills while earning financial support.

**Troops to Teachers Program** - Reauthorize and strengthen the Troops to Teachers Program to address teacher shortages and support veterans transitioning into education careers.

**Embrace Artificial Intelligence in Higher Education** - Leverage AI to enhance learning, streamline operations, and improve student outcomes. Advocate for ethical and transparent AI use while supporting its integration into personalized learning and career alignment.







## FEDERAL RULEMAKING POLICY PRIORITIES

While the Presidents Forum prioritizes a legislative approach to higher education reform at the state and federal levels, we recognize key opportunities to collaborate with departments and agencies on initiatives that align with our mission. These efforts focus on addressing the immediate needs of students, fostering innovation, and ensuring equitable access to education. Through proactive engagement in the rulemaking process, we aim to advance critical initiatives such as inclusive access programs, streamlined data systems, and enhanced support for working learners.



**Establishing a Voice for Adult and Working Learners** - Position the Presidents Forum as a central advocate in the negotiated rulemaking process, ensuring that the unique needs of adult and working learners are represented in federal regulations.

**Inclusive Access** - Protect inclusive access programs that reduce costs, integrate seamlessly with financial aid, and guarantee students access to essential materials.

**Annual Loan Counseling** - Require students to participate in annual loan counseling through the Annual Student Loan Acknowledgment (ASLA) program to improve financial literacy and reduce over-borrowing.

**Honoring State Reciprocity Agreements** - Uphold state reciprocity agreements like NC-SARA, ensuring consistent standards for distance education and protecting access for students nationwide.

**Streamlining Mergers and Acquisitions** - Simplify and expedite the mergers and acquisitions process for higher education institutions. Current approval pathways through federal agencies, state education boards, and accreditation bodies often create unnecessary delays that hinder efficiency-gaining consolidations. Proposed reforms include establishing clear and consistent timelines for approval, reducing redundant oversight, and creating transparent guidelines that prioritize institutional performance and student success.

**Safeguard Federal Student Aid** - Support thoughtful, system-wide, and institutional measures that protect the integrity of federal financial aid programs and ensure resources are used effectively and responsibly.



## STATE POLICY PRIORITIES

These priorities focus on influencing decisions at the state-level that advance student outcomes, and accountable innovation, and increase workforce development.

**Outcome Driven Funding and Accountability** - Advocate for policies that link increased funding to measurable student outcomes. Support shifting higher education funding and accountability authority to states, as detailed in NCSL's 2024 Higher Education Task Force Report.

**Credit Transferability** - Advocate for increased credit transferability through measures such as the Interstate Passport Network, articulation agreements, and common course numbering.

**Flexible and Workforce-Driven Education Opportunities** - Advocate for increased incentives to create flexible, workforce-driven education opportunities such as microcredentials, apprenticeships, and online learning.

**Targeted Incentives for High Social Value Education and Careers** - Increase incentives for education in high-social-value careers such as nursing, teaching, and engineering.

**Implement Comprehensive Education, Workforce, and Student Outcome Data Systems** - Instruct states to direct institutions to evaluate program offerings and the value provided through student outcome data. Advocate for increased state participation and power in higher education outcome analysis.

**Engage with Working Learners to More Effectively Upskill and Reskill** - Utilize creative solutions such as aptitude testing, flexible learning options, and provide incentives for employer paid upskilling and reskilling opportunities.

**Increase Dual Enrollment and Early College Opportunities** - Allow high school students to earn college credit by demonstrating subject mastery. Enable early college credits to be more easily transferable between states.

**NC-SARA and State Reciprocity** - Support continued use of State Authorization Reciprocity Agreements (SARA) while enhancing stakeholder education and engagement. Present data demonstrating SARA's benefits, including streamlined consumer protections, well-managed institutional closures, and expanded access to quality education.

**Strengthen Professional Licensure** - Expand state licensure compacts to streamline the application process and increase accessibility of professionally licensed occupations.

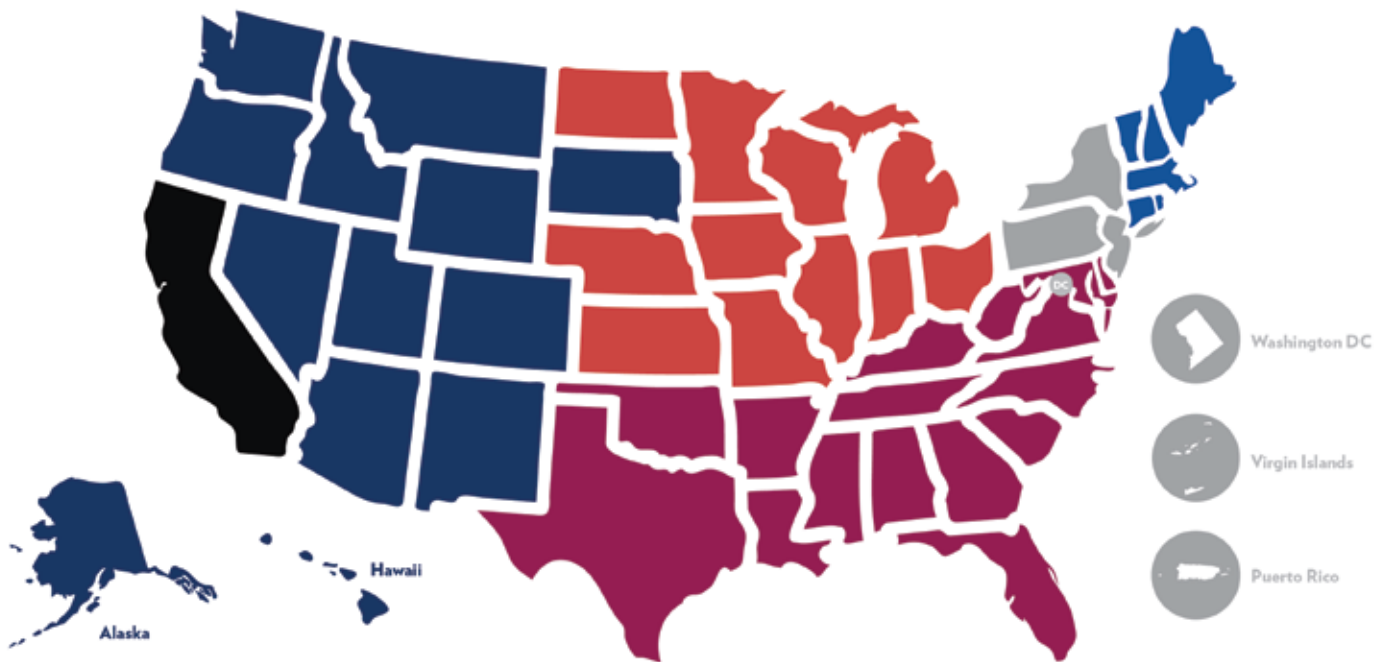
**SARA  
Member  
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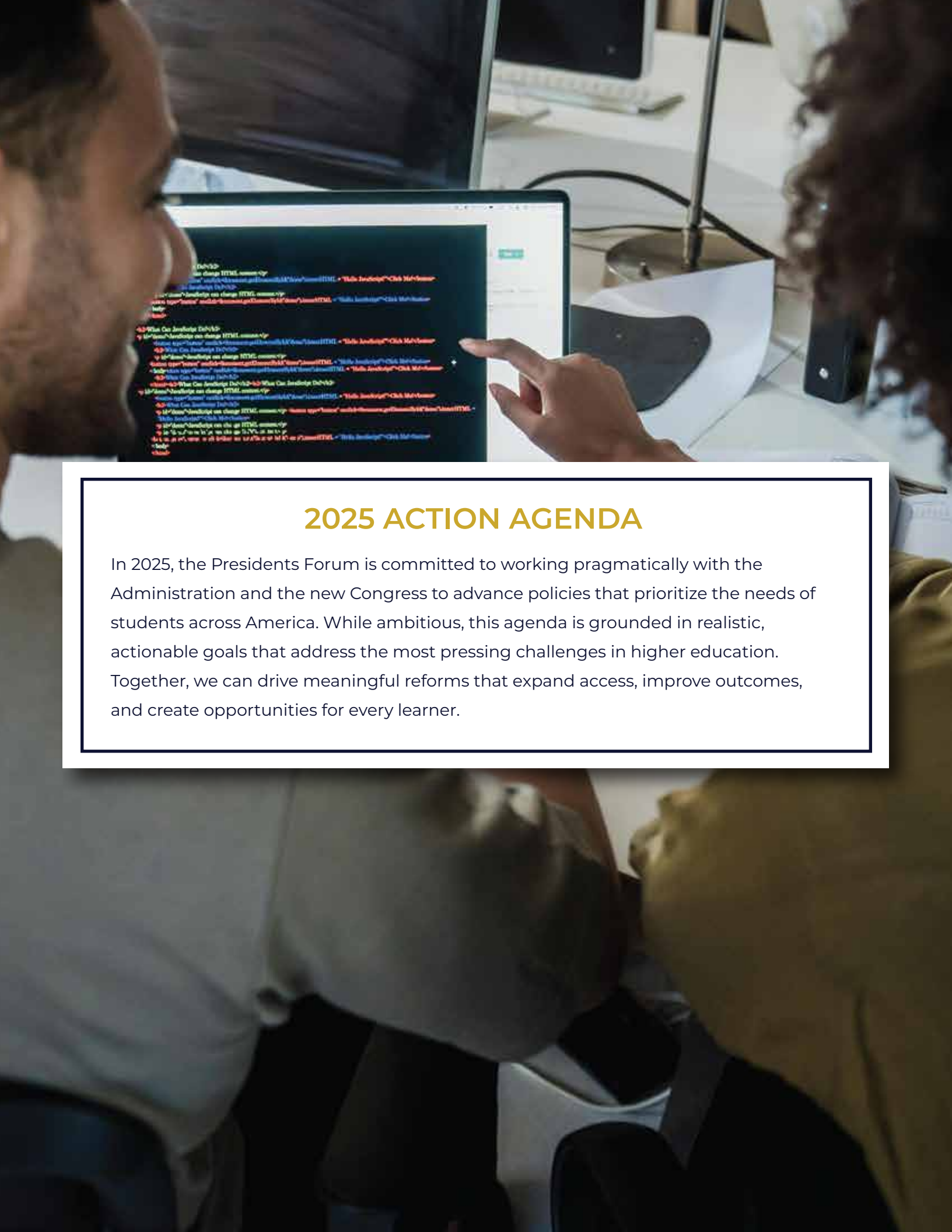
**LEGEND**

MHEC    NEBHE    SREB    WICHE

MEMBERS  
of SARA; Not in a Compact

NON MEMBER





## 2025 ACTION AGENDA

In 2025, the Presidents Forum is committed to working pragmatically with the Administration and the new Congress to advance policies that prioritize the needs of students across America. While ambitious, this agenda is grounded in realistic, actionable goals that address the most pressing challenges in higher education. Together, we can drive meaningful reforms that expand access, improve outcomes, and create opportunities for every learner.

**Pursue Legislative Pathways** - Advocate for targeted legislative strategies to advance federal investment priorities, including Pell reforms such as expanding workforce pell and strengthening program integrity, military tuition assistance and housing allowance, employer-funded education benefits, and skill savings accounts.

**Enhance Student Loan Acknowledgment** - Expand the Annual Student Loan Acknowledgment (ASLA) program to improve borrower understanding of loan terms, repayment obligations, and total costs.

**Streamline Mergers and Acquisitions** - Advocate for regulatory simplifications to enable efficiency-gaining institutional mergers that preserve student access and improve outcomes.

**Prioritize Prior Learning and Student Records** - Expand Credits for Prior Learning (CPL) and Learning and Employment Records (LER) to increase recognition of prior experiences and support faster, more cost-effective credentialing.

**Improve Data Systems** - Push for comprehensive education and workforce data systems that tie credentials to earnings, enhance transparency, and guide data-driven policy decisions.

**Focus on Outcomes Over Process** - Advocate for eliminating process-heavy regulations that stifle innovation and instead prioritize institutional performance metrics such as student success, graduation rates, and career outcomes. Advocate for regulatory parity across all modalities, ensuring consistent standards for online, in-person, and hybrid learning models.

**Promote Outcome-Based Accreditation** - Support reforms that align accreditation with student success metrics like graduation rates and economic outcomes, while ensuring accreditors focus on academic and institutional quality rather than enforcing unrelated social or political mandates.

**Strengthen State Reciprocity** - Increase education and engagement of stakeholders. Provide data that supports SARA initiatives, such as: streamlined consumer protections, informed orderly closures, and equitable access to quality education.

**Strengthen Professional Licensure** - Expand state licensure compacts to streamline the application process and increase accessibility of professionally licensed occupations.

**Empower Lawmakers to Lead on Education Policy** - Support state and federal lawmakers in their role as primary architects of education policy by providing clear, actionable recommendations and data-driven insights. By equipping legislators with the tools and information needed to craft effective policies, we can ensure a more accountable, transparent, and democratically driven approach to higher education reform.





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