

2026

Annual Report

Prepared by the Pennsylvania State
Board of Higher Education



Pennsylvania
State Board of Higher Education



The Pennsylvania State Board of Higher Education: *A Coordinated, Cross-Sector Approach to Strengthening Postsecondary Education*

Act 69, bipartisan legislation enacted in 2024, established Pennsylvania's State Board of Higher Education (SBHE) to fulfill a bold and unprecedented mission: providing our higher education sector with strategic direction, coordination, and support to serve as a world-class engine of economic prosperity in the Commonwealth.

Less than two years after its inception, the Board is making substantial strides towards fulfilling this vision. In this report, you'll read the Board's progress and accomplishments, including:

- ✓ **The creation of an effective governance and policy foundation and the Board's strong commitment to its work**
- ✓ **The historic adoption of *Driving a Prosperous Pennsylvania*, which stands as the state's first higher education strategic plan in several decades**
- ✓ **The development and launch of the SBHE's Data Dashboards, which for the first time make a wide range of information about higher education easily available to the public**
- ✓ **Strong statewide connections that break down silos as we work with partners to build higher education's connection to economic and workforce development efforts**
- ✓ **Securing state and national support and resources to expand our capacity to meet critical goals**
- ✓ **Broad stakeholder consensus on our priorities for the first year of implementation of the strategic plan.**

All Pennsylvanians have a vested interest in a robust and effective higher education sector, and engagement with the Board's work has been both broad and deep. We thank our colleagues for their willingness to join us as we build on the excellence of our postsecondary institutions to chart a new path for higher education in Pennsylvania.

Mission Statement

The purpose of the Pennsylvania State Board of Higher Education is to provide direction, coordination, and support to ensure that institutions of higher education fully meet the workforce and economic development needs of this Commonwealth, and that all residents of this Commonwealth have access to affordable, world-class postsecondary education.

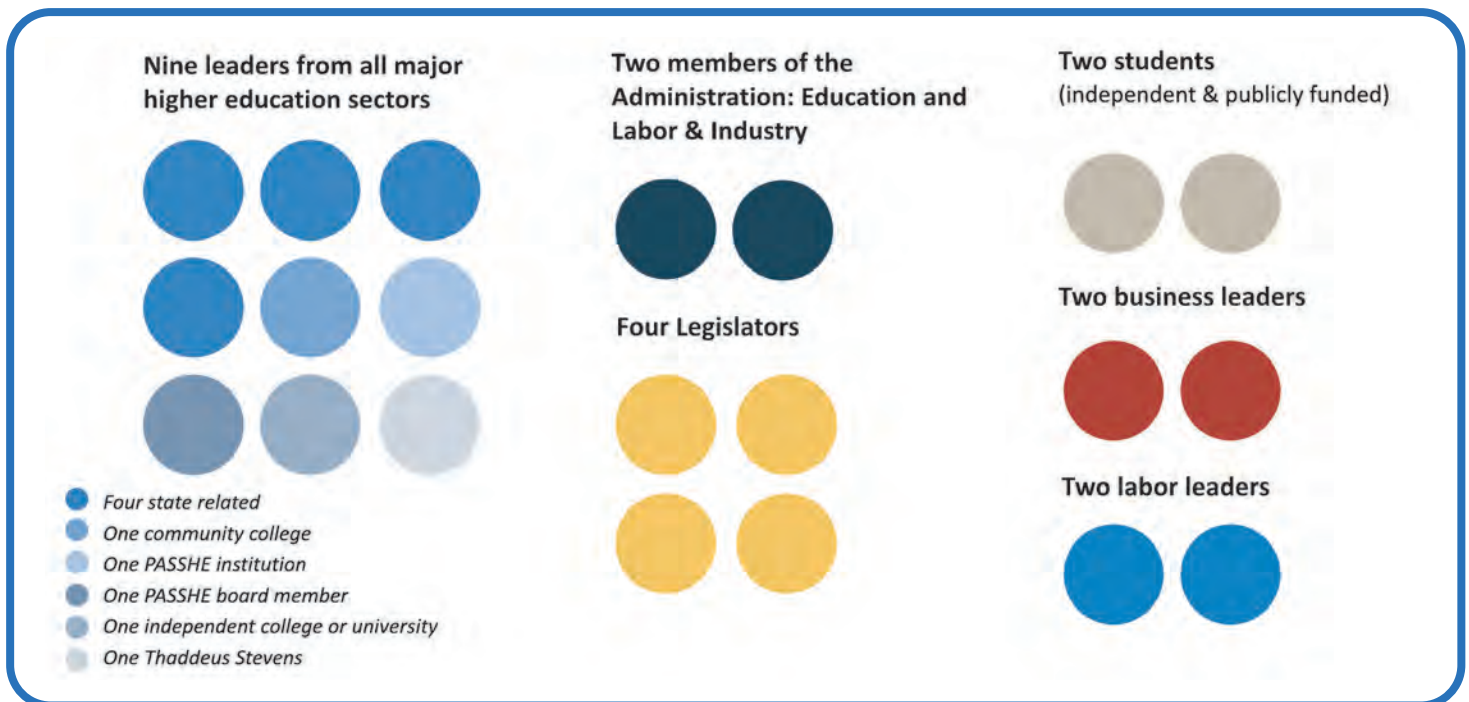
Progress & Accomplishments

1. Setting the Foundation for Success: Establishing strong administrative and leadership functions

The State Board of Higher Education includes the most diverse set of perspectives in the country for such an entity, with representation from all major types of higher education institutions as well as a range of stakeholders with a vested interest in the sector. Per legislation, the 21-member Board includes:

- Nine higher education leaders
- Two labor leaders from postsecondary sector unions
- Two postsecondary students
- Two members of the business/employment community
- Four legislators
- Two agency heads

Figure 1: Composition of the Board



A high-functioning Board requires an administrative and policy structure to undergird its work and enable it to function effectively. To that end, the Board quickly established bylaws, policies, and practices to ensure transparency and strong oversight. A robust committee structure aligned to its duties and missions has enabled the Board to move forward on critical priorities such as strategic planning, workforce and economic development, and data needs.

To ensure that it has access to insight and guidance from areas of particular focus, the Board also created two advisory groups:

- **The Technical Advisory Group** is comprised of data experts from each of the following sectors: community colleges, the state university system (PASSHE), the state related sector, and the independent non-profit sector. It provides input into the development of publicly available data tools.
- **A Community College Advisory Council** includes leadership from the Pennsylvania Commission of Community Colleges as well as several community college presidents. Given the Board’s oversight of critical community college functions, this Council provides additional insight and guidance to the Board.

A list of founding and current Board members can be found in *Appendix 1*. Members of the Technical Advisory Group and the Community College Advisory Council can be found in *Appendix 2*.

The Board is supported by a strong leadership team providing the experience, capacity, and expertise needed for the Board to function effectively. The Board also receives substantial administrative and technical support from the Pennsylvania Department of Education.

The SBHE leadership team:

Executive Director:

Dr. Kate Shaw

Chief of Staff:

Lubna Mian

Director of Economic and Workforce Development:

Carrie Amann

Director of Data and Strategic Analysis:

Dr. Gregory Kienzl

The SBHE is working hard. Since its first meeting in September of 2024, the Board has held 18 public meetings and 53 committee meetings to move its critical work forward. This strong pattern of Board engagement is evidence of deep commitment to the mission and work of the Board and has enabled us to move forward on multiple fronts.

2. Charting a New Course for Higher Education in Pennsylvania: Adopting a Comprehensive and Consensus-Driven Strategic Plan for Higher Education

Driving a Prosperous Pennsylvania, adopted unanimously by the Board in February of 2026, is the Commonwealth's first roadmap for higher education in more than two decades.

The plan is built on robust input from stakeholders across the Commonwealth. The Board held six public hearings, spoke with dozens of organizations, and received feedback via a statewide survey and email. In total, more than 1,300 people—including high school and college students, career counselors, faculty, college and university presidents, employers, chambers of commerce, workforce and economic development leaders, local and state elected officials—participated in the strategic planning process. The breadth and depth of engagement is a strong indicator of the importance of our higher education sector to the residents of Pennsylvania. *Driving a Prosperous Pennsylvania* reflects their input, as clear consensus about the goals and strategies that are most important to the people of Pennsylvania emerged.

The plan is organized around six bold, foundational goals:

1. Increase Postsecondary Credential Attainment

2. Ensure Affordable Pathways to Postsecondary Credentials

3. Support the Economic Development Needs of the Commonwealth

4. Support the Workforce Development Needs of the Commonwealth

5. Ensure Accountability and Efficient, Effective Use of State Funds

6. Strengthen the Fiscal Health & Stability of the Higher Education Sector

These interrelated goals—clearly stated and flexible enough for the Board to adapt to changes in conditions and opportunities—will chart a course towards ensuring that Pennsylvania's higher education sector fully meets its potential to be the economic development engine we need to ensure long-term prosperity.

Reception to the plan has been overwhelmingly positive. Higher education leaders, unions, and economic and workforce development councils submitted letters of endorsement to express their enthusiasm for the plan as it went to press.



For too long, Pennsylvania’s higher education sector has operated without a shared, clearly articulated vision to guide how institutions collectively meet the needs of the Commonwealth... For the first time in recent memory, the plan clearly and intentionally affirms the essential role of higher education in meeting Pennsylvania’s workforce needs—both statewide and regionally.

- Lehigh Carbon Community College Board of Trustees

The Chester County Economic Development Council commends the State Board of Higher education for developing a strategic plan for higher education that appropriately centers the economic and workforce needs of the Commonwealth. Put simply, the prosperity of Pennsylvania depends in large part on our ability to provide the skills and talents we need to fuel our economy. Driving a Prosperous Pennsylvania charts a path to ensuring our colleges, technical schools, universities, and all forms of higher education have the resources, support, and coordination to meet these challenges.

- Chester County Economic Development Council

3. Providing the Transparency and Information Needed for Informed Decision-Making: the SBHE Data Dashboards

Evidence, transparency, and accountability are defining elements of SBHE’s charge. Pennsylvanians need to understand the enormous contributions that our colleges and universities make to our quality of life and our capacity to thrive. A deeper and more nuanced understanding of the health and status of our sector will help inform the recommendations and decisions needed to coordinate and support efforts to strengthen and better align it with the needs of the Commonwealth and its residents. Making this information broadly available increases transparency and provides a foundation for the public conversations needed to fully understand the importance of the sector and together chart a path forward.

Act 69 of 2024 specifically charges the State Board of Higher Education with providing the data and analysis needed for the Board to make evidence-based decisions and recommendations, to track its progress in implementing a strategic plan, and to make this information public. Wherever possible, the Board is urged to take advantage of already existing and/or publicly available data so as not to further burden our colleges and universities with additional data requirements.

With these duties in mind, SBHE’s Data Committee led an 18-month long effort to carefully review how existing data aligns with the Board’s mission and its need to inform and track the implementation of its strategic plan. After selecting the datasets that best align with the Board’s information needs, SBHE staff developed a set of interactive Data Dashboards that allow users to explore a broad range of information and sort it using a variety of filters such as region and institutional type.

The SBHE has approved the public release of five interactive Data Dashboards—utilizing data that is already publicly available or reported:

Figure 2: Data Dashboard Categories




SBHE staff developed a comprehensive rollout strategy designed to ensure that the dashboards are understood, interpreted accurately, and utilized effectively. The strategy includes webinars, FAQs, and one-on-one technical assistance.

4. Establishing the Partnerships Needed for Success: Fostering Strong Relationships Across Pennsylvania

In both its mission and its culture, the SBHE seeks strong, productive relationships as we work across sectors to achieve our goals. These partnerships are key to ensuring the inclusion of the higher education sector in major initiatives and in moving Pennsylvania forward. They also allow the Board to fulfill its uniquely important coordination function.

SBHE has quickly established and strengthened collaborative alliances with higher education partners as we identify common cause and work together to strengthen coordination at the regional and state levels. We also collaborate with other sectors to break down existing silos as we move to address complex challenges and take full advantage of existing and emerging opportunities. Partners include:

- **Center for Rural Pennsylvania**
- **Pennsylvania Commission for Community Colleges**
- **Team PA**
- **Pennsylvania State System of Higher Education**
- **Pennsylvania Department of Community and Economic Development**
- **Pennsylvania Department of Labor & Industry**
- **Pennsylvania Department of Education**
- **Pennsylvania State Board of Education**
- **Pennsylvania Workforce Development Board**
- **Pennsylvania Workforce Development Association**
- **Governor's Office of Transformation and Opportunity**
- **Governor's Economic Development Strategy Group**



*Governor Shapiro created the **Economic Development Strategy Group** via Executive Order in 2023 to directly advise the Governor on economic development projects and processes to attract and retain employers, recruit innovation leaders, and create good-paying jobs in Pennsylvania, particularly in underserved communities.*

In recognition of the uniquely important role of higher education in ensuring the prosperity of Pennsylvania, the State Board of Higher Education was asked to join the group. Other members include the Chief Transformation and Opportunity Officer and the Secretaries of Labor & Industry, Community and Economic Development, Transportation, Agriculture, Education, and Environmental Protection.

5. Expanding Capacity and Acquiring Resources to Meet Critical Goals: Philanthropic Support

The work of the State Board of Higher Education is getting noticed. Our efforts have garnered attention across the Commonwealth and the nation, as offers to join several cross-state initiatives and obtain additional resources and top-notch technical assistance and expertise have emerged.

Our engagement and partnerships with state and national philanthropic efforts directly align with the Board's strategic plan goals, and include:

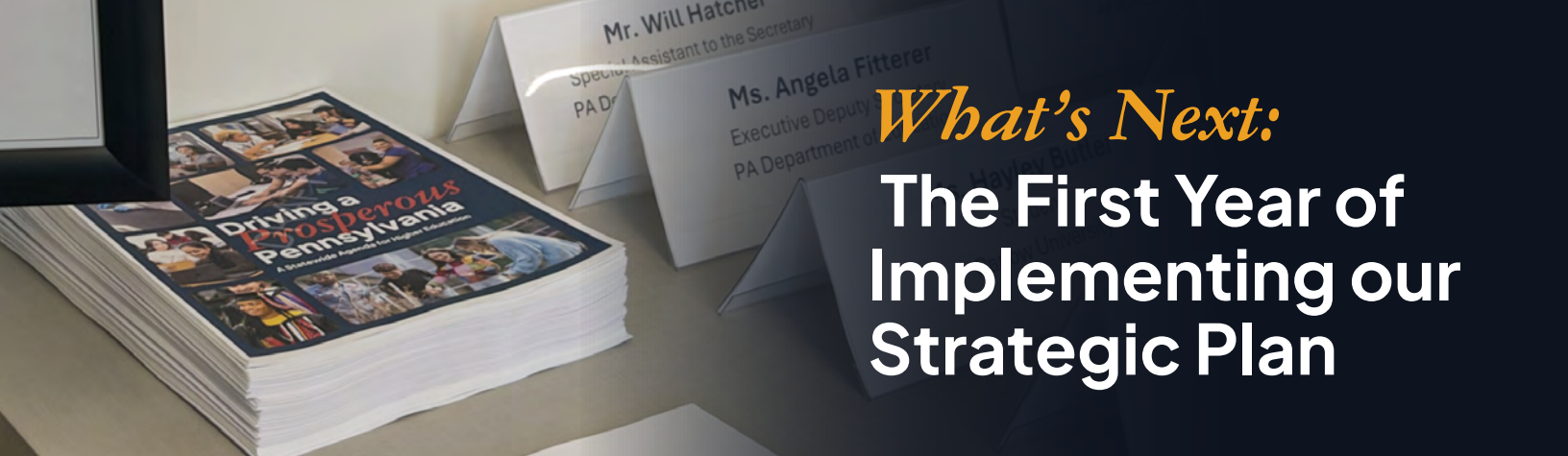
Rural Talent Lab Initiative: Ascendium Education Group. A five-state initiative designed to establish pathways to affordable, high quality postsecondary options aligned to good jobs in rural areas.

Statewide Attainment Collaborative: Lumina Foundation. A nine-state initiative to support state efforts to increase attainment of postsecondary credentials aligned to good jobs.

State Skills Validation Cohort: Competency-Based Education Network. A five-state initiative to explore the development of a statewide competency and credit strategy.

With other collaborators, the State Board of Higher Education is in the process of obtaining additional support from several Pennsylvania-based and national foundations to strengthen data systems and analysis capacity

These opportunities to obtain support and join forces with colleagues across the Commonwealth and the nation are invaluable to the work of this Board and our efforts to meet strategic plan goals. We are grateful for the support and assistance we have received from our philanthropic partners.



What's Next: The First Year of Implementing our Strategic Plan

Our work will intensify as the Board tackles a range of immediate priorities drawn from *Driving a Prosperous Pennsylvania*. These priorities, adopted in April 2026, will focus on achieve three primary goals:

- **Create the foundation for long-term success.**
- **Address time-sensitive, critical priorities.**
- **Establish a track record of concrete achievements.**

Utilizing data and analysis, drawing on expertise across Pennsylvania and the nation, and bringing together collaborative partners, the Board will focus on deepening its understanding of challenges and opportunities, tackling mission-critical priorities, and demonstrating its worth. Board committees will provide strategic direction in addressing these priorities as they develop common-sense, evidence-based policy and resource recommendations.

In Summary

The State Board of Higher Education is deeply proud of all that it has accomplished to date. Our commitment is clear and unwavering: we must lead, coordinate, and support efforts to ensure our higher education sector is functioning at peak capacity to meet the needs of Pennsylvania and its residents. Working together with partners from across the Commonwealth, the Board will do everything in its power to ensure that this most centrally important sector is fully positioned to serve as the economic engine that Pennsylvania needs to ensure prosperity in the years to come. We welcome your partnership in this endeavor.

Appendices

Appendix I. 2024–25 SBHE Members

- **Dr. Cynthia Shapira (Chair)**, Chair, Pennsylvania’s State System of Higher Education’s Board of Governors
- **Dr. Brenda Allen (Vice Chair)**, President, Lincoln University
- **Dr. Ann Bieber**, President, Lehigh Carbon Community College
- **Dr. Christa Heyward**, Student, Delaware County Community College
- **Ms. Marylouise Esten**, Vice President and Deputy Provost, Temple University
- **Dr. Kara Laskowski**, Professor in the Department of Communication Studies at Shippensburg University. Vice President, Association of Pennsylvania State College and University Faculties (APSCUF)
- **Mr. Kenneth Long**, President, East Stroudsburg University
- **Dr. Cheryl McConnell**, President, Saint Joseph’s University
- **Dr. Pedro Rivera**, President, Thaddeus Stevens College of Technology
- **Ms. Andrea Shirk**, President and CEO, Rock Lititz
- **Dr. Michael Wade Smith**, Senior Vice President and Chief of Staff, Pennsylvania State University
- **Mr. Michael Warfel**, Senior Vice President of Governmental Affairs, Highmark, Inc.
- **Mr. Kevin Washo**, Senior Vice Chancellor for External Relations, University of Pittsburgh
- **Ms. Hayley Butler**, Student, Carlow University
- **Ms. Bobbie Jo Zapor**, Collections Coordinator for Media, Equipment, and Reserve, and Evening Supervisor for the student workforce at Indiana University of Pennsylvania. President of the American Federation of State, County, and Municipal Employees (AFSCME) Local 763
- **The Honorable Jay Costa**, Pennsylvania Senate
- **The Honorable Wayne Langerholc**, Pennsylvania Senate
- **The Honorable Paul Takac**, Pennsylvania House of Representatives
- **The Honorable Jesse Topper**, Pennsylvania House of Representatives
- **The Honorable Dr. Carrie Rowe**, Secretary of Education
- **The Honorable Nancy Walker**, Secretary of Labor and Industry

Special thanks to the following inaugural Board members, all of whom made valuable contributions in the development of the strategic plan prior to their departure:

- **The Honorable Peter Schweyer**, Pennsylvania House of Representatives
- **Mr. Sean Eden**, student, Pennsylvania State University
- **Ms. Skyler Wrubleski**, student, Duquesne University

Appendix 2. Membership of SBHE Advisory Groups and Councils

Technical Advisory Group

- Dr. Amanda Brodish. Assistant Provost for Institutional Research and Analytics. University of Pittsburgh
- Ms. Natalie Cartwright. Director and Chief Data Officer, Office of Advanced Data Analytics. Pennsylvania State System of Higher Education.
- Ms. Lindsay Herrod. Dean of Planning, Assessment and Institutional Effectiveness. Westmoreland County Community College.
- Mr. Ron Uroda. Vice President of Research. Association of Independent Colleges and Universities of Pennsylvania.

SBHE Community College Advisory Council

- Dr. Tuesday Stanley. President, Pennsylvania Commission for Community Colleges.
- Dr. Nicholas Neupauer. Vice-President, Pennsylvania Commission for Community Colleges.
- Dr. Quintin Bullock. President, Allegheny County Community College.
- Dr. Susan Looney. President, Reading Area Community College.
- Dr. Ann Bieber. President, Lehigh Carbon Community College.