



INDIANA COMMISSION for
HIGHER EDUCATION

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Lowery Delivers His First State of Higher Education Address

Outlining the HOPE – Hoosier Opportunities and Possibilities through Education – Agenda

(INDIANAPOLIS) – Indiana Commissioner for Higher Education Chris Lowery delivered his first State of Higher Education address today. This year’s address focused on the Commission’s long-term goals and strategic priorities in its HOPE – Hoosier Opportunities and Possibilities through Education – Agenda.

During his address, Lowery discussed the challenges and opportunities facing higher education in Indiana which include enrollment, completion and graduate retention. In addition, Lowery shared the proven policies, programs and partnerships that address these challenges head-on and will guide the Commission’s work throughout the coming years.

“By staying focused on the key pillars of the Commission’s HOPE Agenda – enrollment, completion and graduate retention – all Hoosiers will have the opportunity to access the hope higher education provides, employers will have access to a better-prepared workforce and our communities will be stronger,” said Lowery.

Enrollment

Just over half – or 53 percent – of Indiana high school graduates in the graduating class of 2020 pursued education beyond high school. While the pandemic exacerbated the decline, this trend was happening for some time. In the previous five years, the total decline was 12 percentage points, and 15 points over the previous decade.

Hoosier adults are also lagging in educational attainment with nearly two million adults with only a high school diploma. Like the college-going rate for high school graduates, there has been a similar decline in adults seeking postsecondary training and education – 13 percentage points in five years.

State lawmakers are committed to addressing college costs through sustained and generous financial aid benefits – nearly \$400 million annually. Last fall, the State Budget Committee endorsed restoring cuts made in 2009 to the Frank O’Bannon Grant and provided a 35 percent increase to the award to account for inflation. Additionally, the Commission’s efforts to set in motion automatic enrollment for 21st Century Scholarship-eligible students have seen successes in both chambers of the General Assembly.

“I cannot think of a better example of a program that is a beacon of hope for Indiana’s college-going rate than the 21st Century Scholarship,” said Lowery. “Since its creation over 32 years ago, the scholarship has been an extremely successful, nationally recognized promise program. Enrolling all students who are eligible will clear a barrier for Hoosiers and would enable everyone to shift resources toward ensuring students are succeeding in high school, in college and beyond.”

Completion

Indiana public institutions have moved the needle on student completion. Over the past five years, on-time college completion has improved by 11 percentage points. And nearly two out of three students complete college within six years.

Progress has also been made in overall statewide educational attainment. Indiana set a goal over a decade ago to have at least 60 percent of Hoosiers with a quality credential beyond high school by 2025. Today, with recently updated data, Indiana is at 54 percent with most of the growth – about two-thirds – due to an increase in awarding certificates, technical certificates and industry certifications, which were not originally counted in 2009.

But, when the 54 percent is broken out, about 41 percent is comprised of 2-year, 4-year and higher degree holders. Indiana has lost ground comparatively in attainment when only accounting for associate degrees and higher. In 2009, the state was ranked 39th in the nation. Today, Indiana is 43rd.

“Now is the time to intentionally move to improve the attainment of associate degrees, bachelor’s degrees and above to move Hoosiers through the talent pipeline for a growth-oriented career,” said Lowery.

Graduate Retention

Indiana is the 14th best in the nation in attracting people to come to the state’s colleges and universities, but 40th best in retaining college graduates. The Commission revised its Outcomes-Based Performance Funding formula to incentivize public institutions to prioritize graduate retention.

“Our colleges and universities are a good value, are bringing people into our state, and the market is speaking,” said Lowery. “But we have to be more intentional about getting students in front of Hoosier employers and getting them to stay here.”

Indiana as a Top 10 State

In addition to highlighting the challenges and opportunities confronting higher education in Indiana, Lowery shared his goal of Indiana becoming a top 10 state in terms of:

- **post-high school training and education going rates for youth and adults** across all demographics by leveraging tools such as the Frank O’Bannon Grant, 21st Century Scholars program, the Indiana College Core, FAFSA completions, the Workforce Ready Grant, and promoting Indiana institutions’ low tuition and fees, and continuous focus on high quality;
- **postsecondary attainment for veterans, individuals with disabilities, and the justice-involved;**
- **utilization of credit for prior learning** to honor the work, training and education already achieved by adult learners;
- **the rate at which Hoosiers successfully complete their chosen areas of study;**
- **retaining talent once someone has graduated** from a postsecondary program;
- **measurable distinction in economic and social mobility and prosperity outcomes,** and;
- **as the recognized state for growing or starting a business,** based upon the strength of human capital.

“It is going to take a robust and intentional statewide effort to reverse the present trends facing education beyond high school, but I do not fear for the sake of our state,” said Lowery. “I am hopeful because the evidence tells me to be so.”

To read the full 2023 State of Higher Education Address, [click here](#).

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About the Indiana Commission for Higher Education

Created in 1971, the Indiana Commission for Higher Education plans, coordinates and defines Indiana’s postsecondary education system to align higher learning with the needs of students and the state. The Commission also administers Indiana’s financial aid programs, including the [21st Century Scholars](#) early college promise scholarship, which celebrated 30 years in 2020. Learn more about the Commission’s [Reaching Higher in a State of Change](#) strategic plan at www.in.gov/che.