



MEDIA CONTACT:

Emily Price at (463) 261-7397 or EPrice@che.in.gov

Allison Kuehr at (317) 232-1016 or AKuehr@che.in.gov

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Lowery Recounts Policy and Programmatic Successes at Annual Address

Address outlined early indicators of positive outcomes for Hoosier students

(INDIANAPOLIS) – [Indiana Commissioner for Higher Education](#) Chris Lowery reflected upon higher education policy and programmatic successes during his second State of Higher Education address. This year’s address focused on the Commission’s collaborative efforts to improve college enrollment, completion, graduate retention, and research outcomes over the past 12 to 18 months.

During his address, Lowery first outlined how the Commission is addressing the challenges and opportunities facing higher education in Indiana through the [HOPE Agenda](#) – Hoosier Opportunities and Possibilities through Education. Additionally, he revisited recent legislative victories from the 2023 and 2024 sessions and shared early indicators of those strategic initiatives.

“With the combined efforts of policy, partnerships, and programming, driven by clear strategy and goals, underpinned by a strong strategic management process, and with an understanding of and service to students at the heart, we are working to create a culture in Indiana around the importance of higher education and more broadly training and education beyond a high school diploma,” said Lowery.

Indiana’s HOPE Agenda

In 2023, the Commission announced its HOPE Agenda to position Indiana as a top 10 state by 2030 in the following areas:

1. Post-high school training and education going rates for youth and adults, across all demographics;
2. Postsecondary attainment for veterans, individuals with disabilities, and the justice-involved;
3. Utilization of credit for prior learning to honor the work, training, and education already achieved by adult learners;
4. The rate at which Hoosiers successfully complete their chosen areas of study;
5. Retaining talent once someone has graduated from a postsecondary training or education program;
6. Measurable distinction in economic and social mobility and prosperity outcomes, and;
7. As the recognized state for growing or starting a business, based upon the strength of human capital.

“When we gathered a year ago in this great hall, my commitment was to be very candid and transparent about the challenges, to illustrate ways we might address them, to set high expectations for all of us, and to begin laying the groundwork for a strategic plan of action.”

As the Commission worked on achieving those seven goals, it formed the Partnership Pentagon to better understand and propose solutions around Indiana’s challenges and opportunities related to higher education. The Partnership Pentagon is comprised of leaders from business, education, government, community- and faith-based organizations, and philanthropy.

2023 and 2024 Legislative Victories

Throughout the 2023 and 2024 legislative sessions, significant movement was made to increase educational attainment in Indiana through focus on improved access and affordability. Lowery provided updates on the many legislative victories impacting higher education, including:

- Frank O'Bannon grant expansion: Increased the maximum award amount by 35 percent, which restored cuts that were made in 2009 during the Great Recession.
- Automatic enrollment of eligible 21st Century Scholars: This legislation increased the number of Scholars in the high school graduating class of 2027 from about 20,000 to over 40,000 Scholars.
- FAFSA requirement: Indiana became the eighth state in the nation to require high school seniors to file the FAFSA prior to graduation.
- Revised Outcomes-Based Performance Funding formula: The formula expanded on the already existing area of completion, but also added focuses on enrollment, graduate retention, and research. This is the most comprehensive revamp of the formula in its history.
- Indiana Career and Technical Education (CTE) moved to the Commission: CTE provides college and career preparation, with the opportunity of earning credentials while in high school through stackable pathways.
- Senate Enrolled Act (SEA) 8-2024: Indiana College Core: Requires all high schools to either offer the Indiana College Core or provide implementation plans to the Commission, which should effectively more than double the schools offering it.
- SEA 8-2024: Policies impacting postsecondary institutions: Standardizes the reverse transfer process, requires Indiana four-year public institutions to offer or make plans to offer bachelor's degrees in three-year formats, and charges the Commission with examining the feasibility and advisability of four-year institutions offering associate degrees.

"[Senate Enrolled Act 8] helps individuals who ultimately would have stopped out after earning enough credit for an associate degree," said Lowery. "All of these elements in Senate Enrolled Act 8 are aimed squarely at making college attainment more likely through increased accessibility and affordability."

Early Indicators of Progress

While the full impact of many of these strategic policies and initiatives will not be seen for multiple years, early indicators are showing promising results. These include:

- For the first time in 13 years, higher education enrollment is up in Indiana.
- Indiana's college completion rate now places the state at 11th in the nation.
- Each public institution has a strategic plan to address graduate retention.
- A formal framework to fully implement credit for prior learning was officially adopted just last month, placing Indiana as one of only nine states to do so.
- Recommendations from the first of three strategic task forces focusing on adult populations, specifically for veterans and those in military service, are being implemented.

"Last year was the wake-up call, and this year the data tell us we are on the right path, but work remains," said Lowery.

To read the full 2024 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.