



Annual Report

2020

TRANSFORMING
EDUCATION TO UNLOCK
LIFELONG OPPORTUNITY
AND SUCCESS FOR EACH
AND EVERY CHILD

ExcelinEd.org

  @ExcelinEd

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A MESSAGE FROM Our Chairman



Our nation has shown for more than two centuries that we can overcome challenges through our innovation, our representative form of government, our fierce and compassionate hearts...and just plain American grit. Time and again, we call on these strengths to transform the present and create a better future.

2020 began a time when we must do so yet again. Restoring stability to our economy, the public's health, our communities and our children's schools will take focus, clear goals, hard work and determination—not to mention collaboration and partnership toward a shared vision.

I am grateful that ExcelinEd brings deep policy expertise and experience to the urgent challenges facing America's education system. Our organization is well positioned with strategic solutions to transform education in states, not only in one single year but well into the future.

To innovate for the future and improve equity, while also protecting foundational and proven principles that support high-quality education, *ExcelinEd is committing to 5 goals over 5 years to impact 5 million students.*

Our work is laser-focused to bridge the digital divide; close learning gaps; empower families with opportunity; strengthen pathways to college and career; and reimagine learning. The pages of this report capture the policy solutions and progress toward that vision.

We know that achieving these 5 goals can transform education—and that our impact is greatest with committed partners. On behalf of all students and a better future for our nation, I invite you to join us.

Onward,


Jeb Bush
Chairman, ExcelinEd

A MESSAGE FROM Our CEO



I can't think of a year when education took center stage like it did in 2020. For millions of families, the pandemic's devastating impacts began in our children's schools. As classroom doors shuttered, teachers, administrators and parents took heroic steps to keep their students learning.

ExcelinEd was deeply engaged in supporting students, schools and states throughout the challenging year and beyond. Our suite of [COVID-19 resources](#) included "solution spotlights" highlighting education innovations from around the country; policy recommendations to address funding impacts on students, with an equity [assessment tool](#); multi-level strategies to mitigate [early literacy learning loss](#); and a series of conversations with accomplished leaders, [Class in Session with Jeb Bush](#), to enrich virtual classrooms.

In 2020, ExcelinEd also expanded our [Credentials Matter](#) research to help states align credentials students earn with real-world employer demand, and we launched a [college acceleration playbook](#) series to improve opportunities and outcomes for students.

I'm excited about ExcelinEd's commitment to 5 goals for the next 5 years to make a lasting difference in the lives of 5 million students—or more. Those goals hold the key to impactful and far-reaching changes in education, with the power to transform schools, students' lives, communities and America's future.

I encourage all who believe in a quality education for each and every child to help us in this important work.

Sincerely,


Patricia Levesque
CEO, ExcelinEd

ExcelinEd Board Of Directors



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31st Governor of New Mexico



BRUCE RAUNER
42nd Governor of Illinois

About ExcelinEd

CHANGING POLICY, CHANGING LIVES

OUR CHALLENGE

Organized around the needs of adults more than a century ago, America's outdated education system is failing too many of today's students, leaving them unable to access a learning environment that best meets their needs and underprepared for college and the workforce.

<p>36th Where U.S. students rank internationally in math.¹</p>	<p>65% The percentage of fourth graders that are not proficient in reading.²</p>	<p>1.7M The number of first-year college students needing remedial help.³</p>	<p>50% The percentage of U.S. Millennials unable to effectively apply literacy or math skills in the workplace.⁴</p>
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OUR SOLUTION

To address this education and economic crisis, former Florida Governor Jeb Bush launched the Foundation for Excellence in Education (ExcelinEd) and ExcelinEd in Action to support state leaders in transforming education so that all children are equipped for success.

For more than a decade, ExcelinEd has been advancing student-centered policy solutions that are:

- ▶ Improving student learning
- ▶ Increasing opportunity
- ▶ Expanding equity
- ▶ Ready graduates for college and high-quality jobs

OUR FIVE GOALS

Massive challenges created by 2020's global pandemic underscored the need to act with urgency on behalf of students and their future. For the first time in perhaps a century, every aspect of education can and must be reexamined. To create a 21st-century learning environment, ExcelinEd has established five goals—each with student-centered policy solutions—that have the power to change lives:

- Bridge the Digital Divide
- Close Learning Gaps
- Empower Families with Opportunity
- Strengthen Pathways to College + Careers
- Reimagine Learning

OUR APPROACH

The Power of Convening
We host the National Summit on Education to annually convene the brightest minds in education policy, and we facilitate networks of states and partner collaboratives to inform policy and practice.

Policy Development & Implementation
We bring deep policy expertise and implementation experience to develop and support state leaders with customized, education policy solutions.

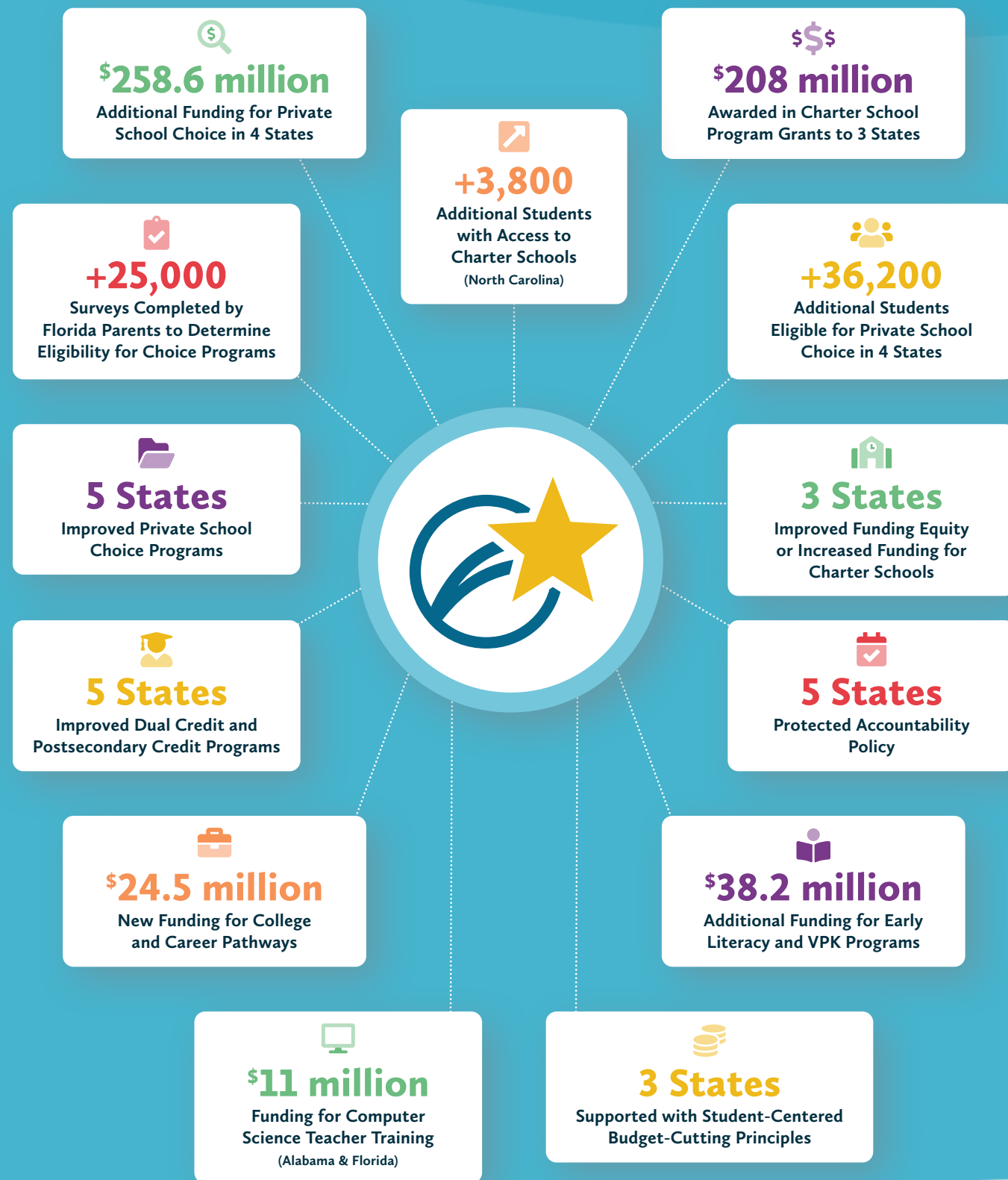
State-Specific Research
We conduct and leverage research to understand how policy solutions translate to real-world student success.

State Advocacy
We collaborate and advocate for change where states are ready to transform education.

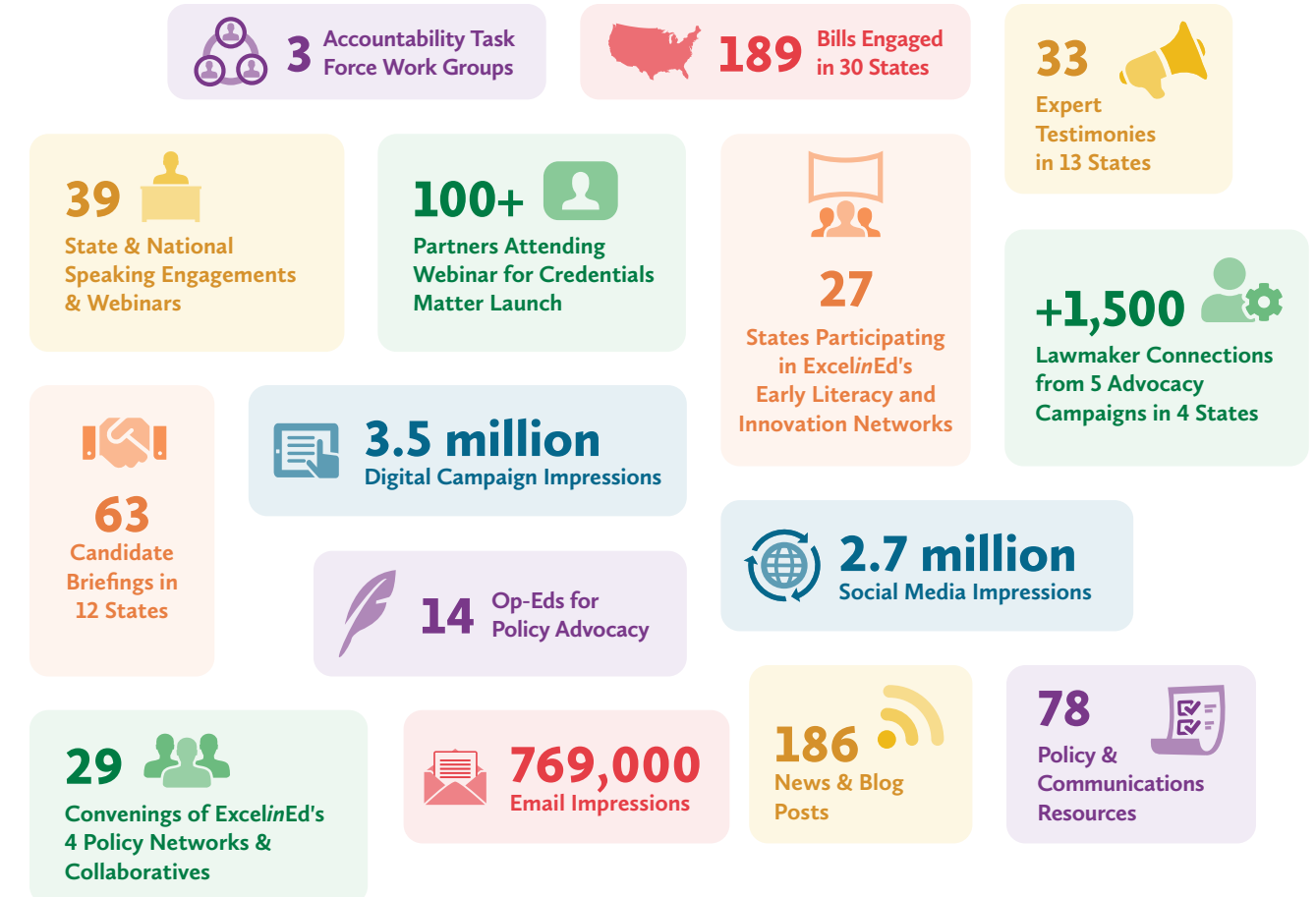
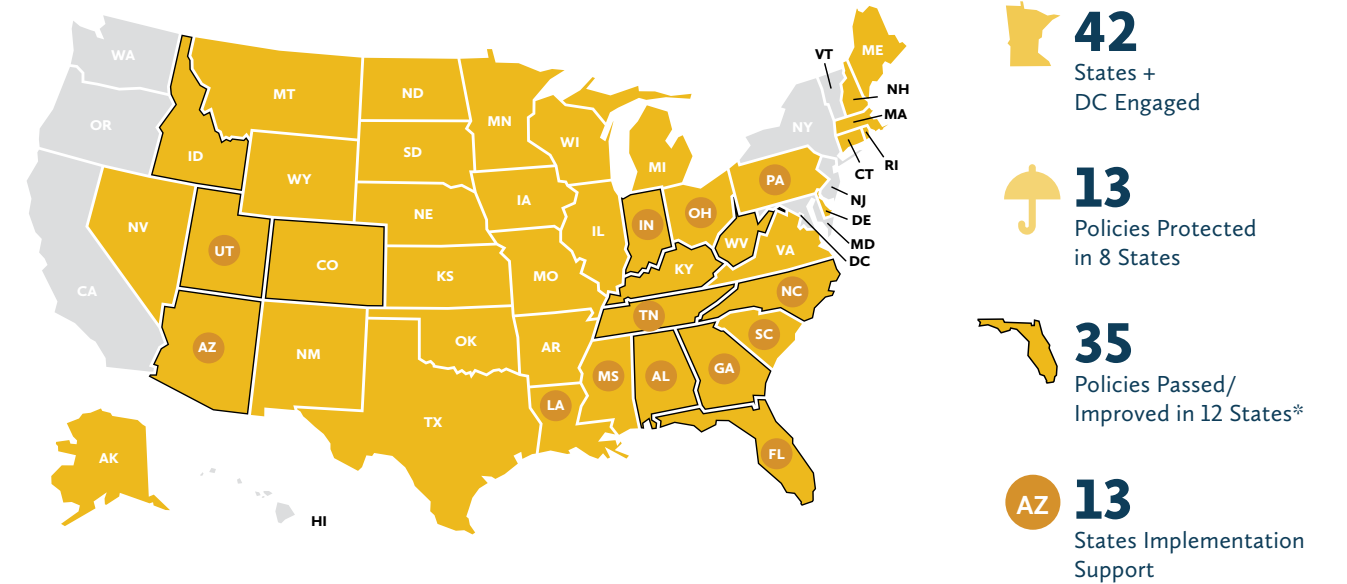
OUR VALUES
COLLABORATION | INTEGRITY | SERVICE | EXPERTISE | MAKING A DIFFERENCE

¹ Programme for International Student Assessment ² National Assessment of Educational Progress ³ National Center for Education Statistics ⁴ ETS

By the Numbers | 2020 Impact



ExcelinEd in the States | 2020





IDAHO

- Protected \$350,000** for mastery-based pilot program
- Increased** early literacy funding by **\$3.2 million**
- Improved** Idaho **529** College Savings Program
- Protected** standards and school accountability



INDIANA

- Expanded** flexibility to innovate for **+1,900** schools
- Created** funding equity for **+90** charter schools serving **40,000** students
- Improved** career and technical education with **+\$22 million**

WEST VIRGINIA

- Created** State Advisory Council on Postsecondary Attainment Goals to improve workforce preparedness

NORTH CAROLINA

- Expanded** school choice with **+\$6.5 million** for special education grants to serve **+2,500** families
- Raised** the income threshold for Opportunity Scholarships to serve more families
- Allocated \$22 million** to enroll **+3,800** students in virtual charter schools

UTAH

- Defeated** anti-accountability bill
- Passed** special needs tax-credit scholarship to serve up to **1,700** students
- Protected** standards and school accountability

COLORADO

- Created** a pathway to award academic credit for postsecondary education based on work-related experiences
- Protected** standards and school accountability

KENTUCKY

- Set** attainment goal to increase participation in computer science by underrepresented groups

GEORGIA

- Improved** existing charter school enrollment policy
- Created** financial transparency for local charter schools
- Streamlined** dual credit program and reduced state funds lost to local districts and colleges
- Adopted** fewer, better tests by eliminating unnecessary assessments and moving tests closer to the end of the school year

TENNESSEE

- +\$37 million** for ESAs serving **5,000** students in Memphis and Nashville*
- *Program struck down following a constitutional challenge



ARIZONA

- Improved** Empowerment Scholarships to include Native American students who attend school on the Navajo Nation but across the state line

MISSISSIPPI

- Protected** special needs ESAs by extending program by **+4** years
- Protected** standards and school accountability

ALABAMA

- Doubled** funding for computer science teacher training to **\$2 million**
- Expanded** college acceleration with **+\$2.5 million** for dual enrollment
- Strengthened** early literacy with **+\$26.9 million**
- Protected \$7.4 million** in AP exam fees for low-income students

FLORIDA

- Expanded** Family Empowerment Scholarships to serve **+28,000** students
- Increased** ESA funding by **\$42 million** to serve **+4,000** special needs students
- Secured \$170 million** for charter school facilities serving **+300,000** students
- Protected \$173 million** for Schools of Hope
- Supported +\$500 million** to increase teacher pay
- Strengthened** college acceleration with incentive funding for school districts
- Secured \$10 million** for computer science teacher training
- Secured** reading scholarship accounts for **+15,000** struggling readers
- Increased** VPK funding by **\$8.1 million** to serve **+178,000** students
- Enhanced** public school choice and CTE for military families

STATE SESSION ENGAGEMENT

- Engaged** in **30** state sessions on **189** bills
- Provided** legislative testimony on **27** occasions across **10** states
- COVID-19** closed **24** state sessions, impacting **83** bills for ExcelinEd in Action

Thought Leadership Highlights

RESEARCH & RESOURCES

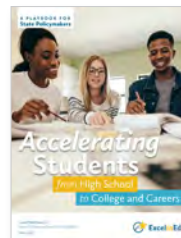
WORK-BASED LEARNING PLAYBOOK

Published [Developing High-Quality State Work-Based Learning: A Playbook for State Policymakers](#) to help states design and implement effective work-based learning programs that benefit students and their states.



COLLEGE ACCELERATION PLAYBOOK

Released [Accelerating Students from High School to College and Careers](#), which identifies the benefits of college acceleration programs and commonsense solutions necessary to improve quality, access, equity and sustainable funding.

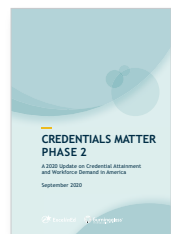


ED TO WORKFORCE POLICIES

Developed College & Career Pathways model policies, including [CTE Incentive Grant](#), [Accelerated College Credit Portfolio](#), [College & Career Pathways Innovation](#), [Work-Based Learning](#) and [Last-Dollar Scholarship](#).

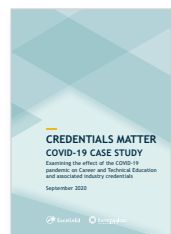
CREDENTIALS MATTER: 2020 UPDATE

Built on our first-of-its-kind research released in partnership with Burning Glass Technologies. [Key findings](#): Just over half of all states collect K-12 quantitative data on credential attainment. No state is highly aligned in terms of supply for credentials earned by students and demand for those credentials in the job market.



CREDENTIALS MATTER: COVID-19 CASE STUDY

Examined short-term changes in credential demand based on the economic ramifications of COVID-19. [Key findings](#): For the March through May time period, overall weekly job postings in the U.S. declined 41% in 2020, compared to a 29% increase in 2019.



FLEXIBILITY GUIDES TO ADVANCE INNOVATION

Conducted inventories of existing flexibilities in Illinois, Indiana and Utah and developed state-specific guides for supporting personalized learning and continued innovation.

ED TO WORKFORCE CONTINUUM

Initiated research to develop a comprehensive roadmap and analysis of the policies that comprise a strong education to workforce continuum, beginning in K-12 and extending to and through postsecondary and on to employment.

CHARTER SCHOOL POLICY BRIEF

Published [Building for Success: How States can Address Charter School Facility Needs](#) to help states determine how well charter school facility needs are being met with existing state policies.



CHOICES IN EDUCATION

Launched [MyChoicesinEdFL.org](#), a one-of-its-kind parent portal and tool providing information on scholarship options and eligibility for students in Florida. Through December 31, 80,994 unique users visited the website, with 25,496 eligibility survey completions.



NEW POLICY TOOLKITS

Published new policy toolkits: [Private School Choice: Impact on Public School Students in Florida](#) and [School Accountability: 4 State Policy Levers for School Turnaround](#).

TEACHER SUPPORT

Released [Transforming Professional Learning: Actions for States to Help Teachers Continuously Improve Their Instructional Practices](#).



THOUGHT LEADERSHIP

NETWORK OF STATE INNOVATION PARTNERS

Hosted quarterly meetings, providing support to 19 states on next generation learning initiatives. Discussions focused on leveraging data to inform decision making; supporting special education and English Language Learners; and strategies to support and communicate with families. A Future of Learning workshop explored how the pandemic has accelerated the call for innovative ways to meet learners' needs.



VIRTUAL CONVENINGS OF THE EARLY LITERACY NETWORK

Hosted virtual convenings of ExcelinEd's Early Literacy Network for more than 20 early literacy leaders from 14 states. Participants addressed high-quality instructional materials and teacher training in the Science of Reading.

SCHOOL CHOICE COLLABORATIVE

Hosted School Choice Collaborative calls with as many as 80 participants to share research and discuss policy developments and topical issues, including CARES Act and GEER Funding.

CHARTER SCHOOL PROGRAM GRANTS

Advised three states in successful applications for federal Charter School Program grants: Florida (awarded \$78M), Pennsylvania (\$30M) and Texas (\$100M).



NATIONAL SCHOOL CHOICE WEEK

Participated in National School Choice Week rallies in 10 states: AZ, CO, FL, IN, KS, KY, MS, PA, SC, TN.

EDUCOMMENTARY IN FLORIDA

Published opinion editorials and guest columns, including [The Path from Classroom to Career](#) authored by Patricia Levesque, and [More than just school choice; high-quality education matters](#), by Board Member Gary Chartrand.



ESA ADMINISTRATOR NETWORK

Launched a new network of education scholarship account administrators to capture key policy challenges. Participants from five states convened virtually to share best practices for program implementation and discuss COVID-19 impacts.

AMICUS BRIEFS

Filed amicus briefs to support or protect policies: Florida (school reopening), South Carolina (SAFE grants to help eligible students attend participating private, parochial or independent schools) and Tennessee (ESA program for lower income students). Signed on to an amicus brief supporting the U.S. Department of Education in a CARES Act lawsuit opposing distribution of funding to private schools for equitable services.

PARTNER COLLABORATIVES AND COALITIONS

Participated in regularly scheduled convenings of three national and 12 state education coalitions and work groups, including Computer Science for Georgia, Indiana Education Coalition, Michigan School Choice coalition, North Carolina Coalition for Education Opportunity, Tennessee Team Kid and bimonthly calls of the U.S. Department of Education. Provided accountability expertise as an invited member of the Arizona Technical Advisory Committee, Mississippi Accountability Taskforce and Tennessee SCORE's Accountability Working Group.

PANELISTS AND PRESENTERS

Served as panelists or presenters at the following forums: State Policy Network's Education Issue Campaign Training Summit (education scholarship accounts); International School Choice and Reform Conference; Commonwealth Foundation's *Miss Virginia* screening; Philanthropy Roundtable webinar (*Credentials Matter*); U.S. Chamber Business Leads Fellow event (industry credentials); National Association of State Boards of Education Annual Conference, Military Child Education Coalition, College in High School Alliance (dual enrollment); and International Literacy Association.

COVID-19 Support

RESOURCES

Produced [COVID-19 resources](#) and tools to support education leaders across the nation with state-level decisions. Tools included a 50-State Snapshot of state actions with accompanying map and database as well as news and blogs spotlighting [state and school district](#) solutions and education innovations. ExcelinEd also promoted [Home-Based Learning](#), [State Leader](#) and [Social and Emotional Learning](#) resources amid COVID-19 and Eblasted State Solution Spotlights featuring innovations in 20 states to share lessons learned from around the country.

Shared these resources directly with 434 partners in 35 states, including 250 elected officials and 184 partner organizations.



Developed [The CARES Act: How to Target GEER Funding: A Playbook for Governors](#) to help governors strategically allocate GEER funds to ensure the greatest return on investment for education from relief dollars. ExcelinEd assisted Arizona, Florida, Idaho, Oklahoma and Texas with GEER funding decisions.



Produced reports on the importance of states administering comprehensive end-of year assessments to all public-school students to ensure every child is counted and to help schools offer extra support for the students who need it the most.

Released [Education Stabilization Funds: Rethinking K-12 Education Models](#), an overview of the U.S. Department of Education's Rethink K-12 Education Discretionary Grant Program, including grant purpose, priorities and considerations for states as they develop programs, activities, protocols and services around infrastructure, access and innovation.



Interviewed students with disabilities, parents, teachers, disability-rights advocates and national organizations to inform [Special Education and Distance Learning: Supporting Students Through the Pandemic](#), a resource guide offering solutions and best practices to education policy leaders to meet challenges faced by the special education community.

Outlined different types of funding available to address education needs arising from the pandemic, with guidance on how to access and maximize funds, in [The CARES Act: Summary and Recommendations for Private School Leaders](#).

Developed recommendations to private school leaders on how to access equitable funds under the CARES Act through [The CARES Act: Equitable Services Funding Guidance for Private Schools](#).

With the input of state chiefs and national thought leaders, published [Reopening Schools After COVID-19 Closures: Considerations for States](#), including results of a State Leader Survey on Reopening Schools.



Supported state partners with education funding models, including helping states prepare for potential K-12 funding cuts, identifying alternatives to seat time funding and student-centered budget cutting principles that ensure equity. Provided in-depth, customized support to partners in Minnesota, South Carolina and Utah.

Published [COVID-19 Early Literacy Loss: Strategies for States](#) to address the challenges of identifying and supporting struggling readers in the absence of statewide assessments and summer learning loss.



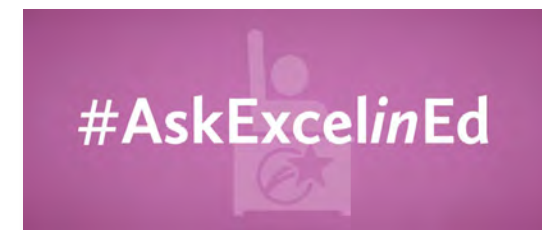
THOUGHT LEADERSHIP

CUSTOMIZED SUPPORT

Hosted calls with State Chiefs in 12 states to support resource/research needs, best use of federal funds and model policies for reopening of schools and continuity of learning.

NETWORK OF STATE INNOVATION PARTNERS

Hosted four COVID-19 meetings held jointly with CCSSO's Student-Centered Learning Collaborative and four special workshops on Delinking Traditional Seat Time from State Funding in the COVID-19 Era. As many as 47 participants representing 24 states and 6 partner organizations participated in one or more meetings. The convenings provide a forum for states to discuss COVID-19 issues, distance learning challenges, innovations arising amid school closings and preferred future of learning models.



SUPPORT FOR EARLY LITERACY

Moderated a roundtable discussion on Combating COVID-19 Learning Loss: Strategies for States, Districts and Communities to Support 4th Grade Reading Readiness; published entry in #AskExcelinEd blog series: [Amid COVID-19, how can states prepare exiting 3rd graders to 'read to learn' in 4th grade?](#)

COVID-19 SPEAKING ENGAGEMENTS

Served as panelists or presenters on issues related to the pandemic at the following forums: Campaign for Grade Level Reading; Digital Divide Roundtable sponsored by CZI; Regional Education Laboratory; The Southern Group; Hosted by Nelson Mullins -- First Amendment Rights in the Virtual Schoolhouse: Challenges for Higher Ed & K-12 Schools in the Rush to Go Online; Idaho webinar on distance learning; and Children's Education Alliance of Missouri.

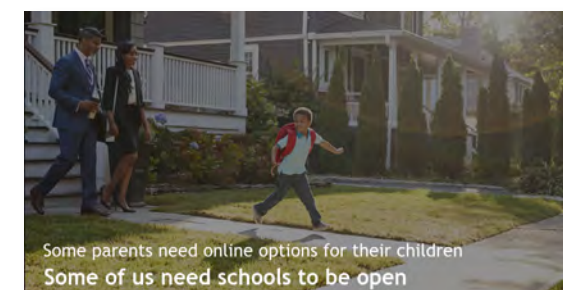


VIRTUAL CLASSROOM CONTENT

Supported distance learning/the virtual classroom for secondary school students with Governor Bush's [Class in Session](#), a series of conversations covering a range of topics, including civics, coding, faith, teamwork, leadership, entrepreneurship, governing, sports, the arts and media, with participants including former U.S. Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice, technology leader Hadi Partovi, Chicago Cubs Manager David Ross, former White House Press Secretary Dana Perino, owner of the Cleveland Browns Dee Bagwell Haslam, Snap Founder/CEO Evan Spiegel and *New York Times* bestselling author Brad Meltzer.

EDUCOMMENTARY

Governor Bush authored op-eds in the [Wall Street Journal](#), [Washington Post](#), [National Review](#) and [Slate](#), keynoted 13 virtual events on education and participated in more than 18 podcasts and live interviews sharing advice on leadership during crisis, innovative solutions to serve America's students, tracking student progress during the pandemic and how COVID-19 will change the way parents think about education. Live interviews were hosted by [American Enterprise Institute](#), [Sirius](#), [ASU/GSV](#), [Education Next](#), [The 74](#) and others.



"KEEP FLORIDA SCHOOLS OPEN" PETITION DRIVE

Launched a social media campaign that reached 69,000+ parents and high school students across the state in two weeks, resulting in 980 clicks to the petition and more than 400 petition signatures.



"This year's enormous challenges are sounding a call to action in education. The future of education has arrived. We need to get it right."

Governor Jeb Bush
ExcelinEd Founder & Chairman



EdPalooza provided an exciting virtual experience that brought the education community together, igniting ideas and inspiring change to address the massive challenges—and explore opportunities for innovation—created by the global pandemic.

The three-day event included EdVision keynotes and interactive EdTalks plus more than 100 Palooza sessions. Attendees heard from renowned leaders and engaged with policy experts on topics ranging from educational equity, early literacy, early college and the future of assessments to education-to-workforce, bridging the digital divide and the future of learning, schools and teaching.

More than 100 speakers, partners and sponsors helped make EdPalooza a resounding success!

"The Rice/Meacham/Williams panel on democracy and education was a triumph – the best I have seen perhaps ever."

–Stefanie Sanford, College Board

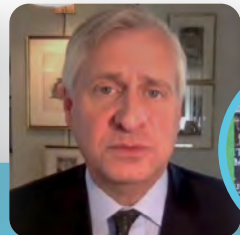
EDVISION | Presidential Reflections

President **George W. Bush** shared with former U.S. Secretary of Education **Margaret Spellings** his extraordinary insights on presidential and gubernatorial leadership in education, the coalition-building that can ignite change and the post-pandemic road ahead for everyone working to ensure success for students and the future of education in America.



"We challenged the soft bigotry of low expectations. We did not accept the notion that only some kids could learn."

–President George W. Bush



EDVISION | In the Hands of our Children: The Road Ahead for a Strong Democracy

Dr. Condoleezza Rice and **Jon Meachum** in conversation with **Juan Williams** shared perspectives on the importance of democracy and civic engagement to the future of our country in a complex, divided and rapidly changing world.

During a time of hyper-partisanship, their conversation explored educational opportunity, equity, religious freedom, participation in government and the role of each individual in ensuring the long-term viability of our nation.



EDVISION | Reflections on Educational Leadership

Drawing on his service in federal, state and nonprofit sectors, former U.S. Secretary of Education **John King** shared perspectives on long-standing issues of educational equity, digital access and the role of assessments. In conversation with **Elisa Villanueva Beard**, King highlighted the innovative strategies educators are using to help their schools move from pandemic recovery to excellence in education.

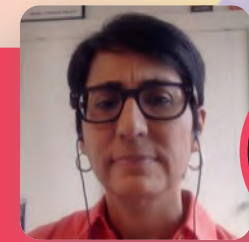
"Such a delight to join John King for this conversation at ExcelinEd's EdPalooza. Leaders like him inspire hope that we can build strong and diverse coalitions to ensure all children have the equitable and excellent education they want and deserve."

–Elisa Villanueva Beard, Teach for America



EDVISION | Undivided: Achieving Digital Access For All

In dissecting today's digital divide, four visionary leaders shared perspectives on digital opportunity and its broad implications for education, equity and our nation's economy and security. Moderated by **Stefanie Sanford**, **Evan Marwell**, **Larry Irving**, **Johnathan Adelstein** and **Governor Jeb Bush** explored transformative solutions that create equity, prioritize students and bridge the digital divide.



EDTALK | Irshad Manji

Irshad Manji, founder of the Moral Courage Project, spoke with Brightbeam CEO **Chris Stewart** about how to celebrate individuality, embrace diversity of thought and transform disagreement into opportunity to develop lasting solutions that can help to heal America.



EDTALK | Amanda Ripley

Bestselling author of *The Unthinkable: Who Survives When Disaster Strikes—And Why*, **Amanda Ripley** shared with ExcelinEd CEO **Patricia Levesque** her research and insight into the human experience during disasters, the decisive moments that result and how to build resilience through unsettling yet transformative times.



EDTALK | Andreas Schleicher

OECD's **Andreas Schleicher** and Walton Family Foundation's **Marc Sternberg** discussed the global and long-term impact of school closures during the COVID-19 pandemic, highlighting international best practices as well as opportunities for transforming education and leveraging the talents of students to give them a compass for success.

EDPALOOZA SPONSORS





Every child deserves access to broadband, internet and access to a device. It's that simple. I'm glad you are taking the time to do something about it and providing action and solutions."

—Kelvin Beachum, Arizona Cardinals NFL Players Coalition Task Force



STATE ROUNDTABLES

ExcelinEd in Action convened many of the nation's boldest leaders and partners in education to share states' student-centered policy innovations and pandemic response. Joining Governor Jeb Bush and ExcelinEd Board members Dee Haslam and former Illinois Governor Bruce Rauner, were Tennessee Governor Bill Lee, Florida Governor Ron DeSantis, Florida Speaker of the House Chris Sprowls, Ohio Governor Mike DeWine and Lt. Governor Jon Husted and Arizona Governor Doug Ducey.

Roundtable participants, including education chiefs and state policymakers, explored ways to strengthen education systems with GEER funds, supporting families, students and educators with investments in transformative programs and resources. With an eye on the future, they identified key goals for education in 2021 and beyond.

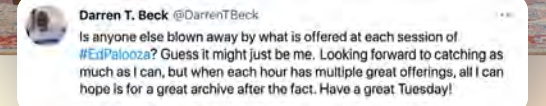
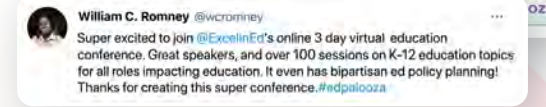
100 SESSIONS IN 11 TOPIC AREAS

Expert panelists explored new and existing education challenges and solutions, showcased the latest research and innovations and highlighted education policy, practice and programs.

- DATA: ASSESSMENTS, ACCOUNTABILITY, SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT, LEARNING LOSS**
- DIGITAL DIVIDE: EQUITY, ACCESS, INSTRUCTION, INNOVATION, INFRASTRUCTURE**
- EARLY LITERACY: SCIENCE, INSTRUCTION, PROGRESS**
- EDUCATION FUNDING: SEAT-TIME, BUDGET CHALLENGES, PENSION OBLIGATIONS**
- NEXT GENERATION LEARNING: STUDENT-CENTERED TRANSFORMATION**
- PATHWAYS: HIGH SCHOOL TO COLLEGE PLUS CAREERS**
- SCHOOL CHOICE: PUBLIC AND PRIVATE OPTIONS, PARENT STORIES**
- SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC MOBILITY: RESEARCH, CHALLENGES, SOLUTIONS**
- TEACHERS AND LEADERS: INNOVATION, TRAINING AND SUPPORT**
- WHOLE CHILD: SOCIAL EMOTIONAL LEARNING, SCHOOL SAFETY**
- COMMUNITY: ADVOCACY, ACTIVISM, COMMUNICATIONS, POLLING**

A VIRTUAL SUCCESS!

- ▶ 2,050+ registrants from all 50 states plus 13 nations: Bangladesh, Canada, Finland, France, Germany, India, Israel, Italy, Kenya, Mexico, Netherlands, Sweden and the United Kingdom
- ▶ 200 elected or appointed officials
- ▶ 500 legislative and state education agency staff
- ▶ 300+ teachers, school leaders and administrators
- ▶ 60+ state and national partners
- ▶ Social Buzz: 3,300+ posts; 5.4 million reach, 70.5 million impressions.

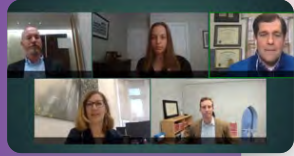


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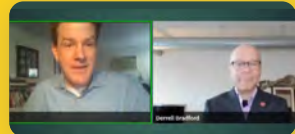
Citizen Stewart @citizenstewart
Thank you @ExcelinEd for ALWAYS being a great partner in the fight to educate every child!

FROM PREDICTING TO PREVENTING – AVOID LEARNING AND ECONOMIC LOSSES FROM BECOMING REALITY

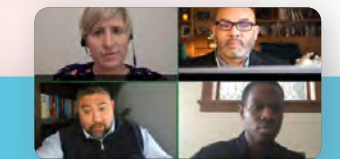


Researchers from McKinsey and Company, the World Bank and Opportunity Insights presented their findings on COVID-19 impacts to education, arming policymakers with data for developing state-specific policy solutions.

SPOTLIGHT: FINE LINES: HOW IMAGINARY BORDERS CREATE REAL BARRIERS

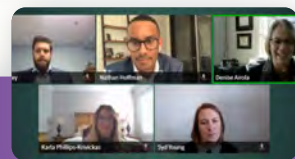


Author Tim DeRoche, in conversation with 50CAN's Derrell Bedford, discussed his research and how we can make the best public schools more accessible.



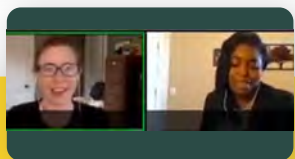
CHARTER SCHOOLS: THE NEXT GENERATION UNBUNDLED

Charter school leaders provided insights into new innovations that are serving students.



PAVING THE WAY FOR NEXT GENERATION LEARNING

Leaders shared the policies needed to support innovation and next generation learning models.



SPOTLIGHT: WHAT'S ALL THIS FUSS ABOUT THE 'SCIENCE OF READING'?

Emily Hanford, senior correspondent for APM Reports, discussed insights from the scientific research in early reading instruction.

EXPLORING BLACK PARENTS' EXPERIENCE WITH PRIVATE SCHOOL CHOICE



Compelling stories and experiences of families have the power to move policy conversations forward. Four Black parents shared their experiences with private school choice programs in Arizona, Florida and North Carolina.

Tamara Van Wyhe @Tch2LrnAK
Absolutely amazing session with @ehanford during #EdPalooza. So many critical pieces addressed ... including importance of rich and robust literacy/reading PD for leaders/administrators. #LeadershipMatters

PREPARING FOR STATE TESTING IN 2020-21: YOU HAVE CHALLENGES, WE HAVE SOLUTIONS!



School accountability experts shared innovative solutions for remote delivery, security and proctoring of state assessments to yield valid and reliable results.



SPOTLIGHT: A CONVERSATION WITH SAL KHAN, FOUNDER OF THE KHAN ACADEMY

In this fireside chat, Khan Academy's Sal Khan discussed closing the opportunity gap for all students and keeping everyone learning.

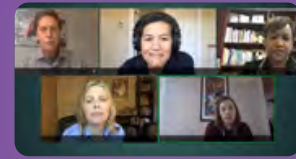
THE FUTURE OF DIGITAL EDUCATION IN A POST-COVID WORLD

Two experienced state chiefs and the CEO of the world's very first digital education company explored the pandemic's impact on digital learning and essential changes for ensuring digital access, resources and proficiency.



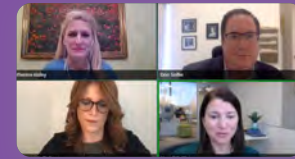
BEST PRACTICES IN CLOSING LEARNING GAPS: WHAT WE KNOW FROM SCHOOL LEADERS, DATA, EQUITY & SYSTEMS THINKERS

As pandemic-related learning losses widen existing learning gaps, panelists identified impactful ways to close knowledge and achievement gaps between racial, ethnic, and income groups.



REDESIGNING PUBLIC EDUCATION AS WE EMERGE FROM THE PANDEMIC

As students return to in-person learning after long absences, panelists discussed what needs to happen to make schools better and more equitable for students in a post-pandemic world.



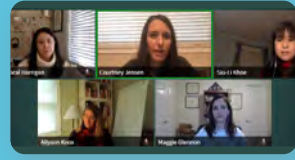
PHILANTHROPY'S RESPONSE TO THE PANDEMIC

Using philanthropy's investments in innovation and delivery models as the laboratories for learning, policymakers heard about solutions for advancing student-centered education policies in 2021.

Nathan Hoffman @Milenahoff
In a year that's presented so many challenges, #EdPalooza is proving to be exactly what I needed to re-ground myself in the work to be done. I'm inspired and hopeful...and it's only day one. S/O @JebBush @ExcelinEd @LevesquePat for a stellar lineup.

WHY COMPUTER SCIENCE IS MORE IMPORTANT THAN EVER

Women leaders in the tech industry explored the computer science policies states are using to ensure students have equitable opportunities in school, career and life—and how have some states set themselves far ahead of the rest.



DO THE LEAST HARM: BEST PRACTICES FOR STATES FACING CUTS TO K-12 FUNDING

Policy experts highlighted states that are doing the best job in making equitable, student-centered, and strategic K-12 funding decisions, based on key principles developed by ExcelinEd and partners.



SERVING ALL STUDENTS: INCREASING TEACHER DIVERSITY IN YOUR STATE

A panel of experts discussed concrete proposals to increase teacher diversity.



EDPALOOZA SPONSORS



Bridge the Digital Divide

ENSURING EVERY STUDENT HAS EQUITABLE ACCESS TO THE DIGITAL SUPERHIGHWAY

During the COVID-19 pandemic, more than 55.1 million K-12 students in the United States were out of school. Of that total, at least 11 million students did not have a computer for online learning, meaning that for almost an entire semester nearly 20 percent of America's students were trying to keep learning—but without access to what is now commonplace technology. And the educators they depend on? Approximately 400,000 of our public school teachers still lack internet.

Without question, bridging the digital divide is a pivotal step in ensuring all students have equitable access to a quality education.

Data from the National Center for Education Statistics and USAFacts show that 14 percent of children ages 3-18 have no internet access at home, and 17 percent live in households without a laptop or desktop computer. The impact on lower-income students is even greater: a full third (34 percent) of families surveyed reported not having internet because they were unable to afford it.

As policymakers and practitioners reopen schools and help students recover from lost learning, they now know that learning can—and will—occur both inside and outside of the traditional classroom setting. All students urgently need basic devices and access to the Internet in order to learn.

“AS A MOTHER, I CANNOT TELL YOU, WHAT IT MEANS TO GET A MESSAGE FROM YOUR SCHOOL SAYING WE HAVE THE TECHNOLOGY HERE TO HELP YOUR CHILD.

- Deidre Clark, I3 Academy Mother



ONE COMMUNITY'S STORY:

I3 ACADEMY

As other parents nationwide worried in 2020 how their children would transition to online education, Deidre Clark was confident her two sons would be able to learn and thrive no matter what.

That wasn't always the case. Seeing the lack of quality options in her community, Deidre worked with other parents to create a school that could meet the needs of their children. Despite the onset of a pandemic and widespread disruptions to education, I3 Academy, a new public charter school in Birmingham, Alabama, was born.

With a firm commitment to access for all, school leaders knew that digital resources would be essential.

“As soon as we realized this was not going to be a typical year, we started planning on how we would leverage technology for instruction and communication,” said Dr. Martin Nalls, Head of School.

To start, they provided technology to every one of their more than 400 students to ensure support for online learning. The school also provided teachers with training on effective instruction in a digital environment.

For incoming families, I3 staff held online trainings and created a helpline so that students and their parents could easily overcome the challenges that stem from new technology. And school leaders moved all parent engagement activities online to foster a sense of community among families and the school's staff.

“We have unleashed the power of technology, not only in the classrooms, but throughout our entire school operations,” said Dr. Nalls.

POLICY SOLUTIONS



Provide widespread device and internet access for underserved students.



Offer high-quality instruction through online learning platforms and high-quality curriculum.



Support schools and teachers with professional development in online learning.



Develop online services for special education, English language learners and social and emotional well-being.



Establish technology and instructional education accounts for families.

Bridge the Digital Divide

THOUGHT LEADERSHIP HIGHLIGHT:

A NATIONAL CALL TO ACTION

In his action-provoking [opinion editorial](#) for Slate.com, Governor Jeb Bush asked readers to imagine the possibilities “if we could put every area of America on an even playing field when it comes to high-speed internet.”

With millions of Americans lacking fixed broadband service, especially those in rural and low-income communities, Governor Bush noted that “disconnection can disenfranchise,” as underserved populations are ill equipped and unprepared to fully participate in a world increasingly dependent on the internet.

He raised concerns that negative consequences would impact not only commerce, the workforce and workplace, but also access to a high-quality education. The impact on students cut off from self-paced lessons, virtual learning, online resources and educational opportunity is simply unacceptable and will be felt for years to come.

Governor Bush called on Congress to focus on expanding access through three core elements: investment, public-private partnerships and jobs.

RESOURCE HIGHLIGHT:

1:1 DEVICES FOR STUDENTS – MODEL POLICY

ExcelinEd has long believed that students need access to the internet, edtech and digital skills training to be successful in the 21st century. These tools are essential in preparing students for college and careers and, equally important, ensuring students become strong digital citizens.

ExcelinEd’s Policy Director of Digital Equity, Divya Sridhar, led the development of a model policy for state policymakers—the [Digital Devices for All Act](#)—to support access to digital devices for all students. The policy allows districts to use curriculum-based resources, such as textbook funds, to ensure every student is connected to an internet-enabled, digital device installed with instructional materials.

Through the policy, school districts and public charter schools gain increased flexibility to meet the needs of each school and its students, especially those who are underserved.

“If we are serious about economic justice and economic equity, then we need to create a digital footprint that allows everyone to access broadband.”

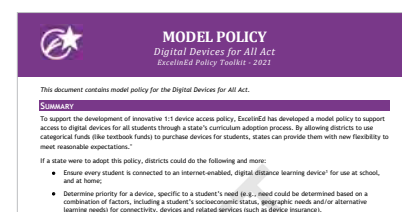


Governor Jeb Bush
Chairman, ExcelinEd



“The Digital Devices for All Act guarantees students, families and educators receive equitable access to resources, helping to bridge the digital divide and empowering everyone to participate in a meaningful digital learning experience.”

Divya Sridhar
ExcelinEd Policy Director of Digital Equity



TEXAS



Texas is home to the largest number of rural students in America – between 800,000 and 1 million students – which makes closing the digital divide especially challenging in the Lone Star State.

SCHOOL DISTRICT SURVEY

To accurately assess technology needs, the Texas Education Agency (TEA) surveyed districts to understand how many devices and hot spots would be required to close the digital divide in their communities. Education Commissioner Mike Morath said that while expanding fiber networks through rural Texas is the ideal long-term solution, providing “Wi-Fi hot spots” was the necessary immediate solution.

TASK FORCE

Following the survey, TEA convened a task force comprised of industry, technology, educators and policy experts to secure funding for bulk orders of laptops and hot spots. The state provided matching funding for low-income students.

OPERATION CONNECTIVITY

In May, state leaders launched [Operation Connectivity](#), investing more than \$200 million in CARES Act funds to buy laptops, tablets and WiFi hotspots. In August, Governor Greg Abbott announced state officials had procured more than 1 million personal devices and 500,000 internet hotspots.

STATE HIGHLIGHTS

To address immediate needs due to pandemic disruptions, states used GEER and Cares Act funds to strengthen digital equity, provide students, families and educators with digital access and bridge the digital divide.

In **FLORIDA**, the Florida Virtual School used CARES Act funding to prepare its digital platform for daily instruction of 4 million students. The online school also gained capacity to prepare up to 10,000 teachers per day for distance learning.



OKLAHOMA Governor Kevin Stitt allocated \$8 million in GEER funds to the state’s Bridge the Gap Digital Wallet grant program. Funds provide up to 5,000 low-income families with \$1,500 grants for curriculum, tutoring services, technology and internet connectivity.



An additional \$12 million was allocated to Learn Anywhere Oklahoma. The initiative provides school districts and families with digital access to high quality and diverse coursework, including Advanced Placement courses across grades K-12.

“It is essential for students to have access to reliable broadband access so they can excel in school and prepare for their future careers. With approximately one million Ohioans lacking broadband access, it is time to invest now to bridge that digital divide.”



Ohio Lt. Governor Jon Husted

Close Learning Gaps

GUARANTEEING
EVERY CHILD
RECEIVES
ACADEMIC
SUPPORT TO
LEARN, SUCCEED
AND ACHIEVE
THEIR FULL
POTENTIAL

Even before students faced up to a year's worth of learning loss resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic, America's schools were failing too many children—particularly the underserved.

According to the Nation's Report Card, almost two-thirds of fourth graders are not performing on grade level in math or reading.¹ What's worse is that despite federal mandates and state-led initiatives to increase student performance, progress over the past 30 years to close learning gaps has been limited. According to the National Center for Education Statistics, Black and Hispanic students are trailing their white peers by up to two grade levels in reading and math assessments.²

The implications of the disparate academic outcomes between race, gender and socioeconomic status extend far beyond the classroom. They have consequences for lifetime earnings, the composition of our nation's prisons and even future health outcomes. The impact of the pandemic is only set to exacerbate these equity gaps.

But it doesn't have to be that way. Effective state policies can have real impact by holding schools accountable for student success, ensuring all learners are reading by the end of third grade, establishing strong supports for those who are struggling and empowering families with transparent information. Only then will we be able to meet every individual's learning needs, close persistent achievement gaps and attain equity in the classroom and beyond.

“ I SEE THOSE STUDENTS WHO WERE ON THE PATH TO DROPPING OUT AND NOW THEY ARE ENGAGED, AND THEY WANT TO COME TO SCHOOL.

- Utica School PTO President Melva Burks



ONE SCHOOL'S STORY:

UTICA ELEMENTARY AND MIDDLE SCHOOL

When Dr. Will Smith became the principal of Mississippi's Utica Elementary and Middle School in 2017, he made a promise to the community to build a culture focused on academic excellence and to change the school's D grade.

In just two short years, Principal Smith helped raise the grade to a B, and he's confident that if assessments had occurred in 2020, the school would have earned an A. Principal Smith credits the school's success to building a strong culture of excellence, making data-driven decisions and engaging the community.

“Teaching and learning is a two-way street,” he says. “Students come up to me in the hallway and ask about their progress, because they are empowered to create their own learning action plans.”

Principal Smith uses assessment data to help students understand what benchmarks they are expected to meet. For example, Utica teachers incorporate the five components of reading (phonemic awareness, phonics, vocabulary, comprehension and fluency) each day, and in two years, the number of students reading on or above grade level increased by nearly 10 percentage points. The percentage of students proficient in math more than doubled.

Assistant Principal La'Tesha Roby said that when Utica students need intensive intervention in reading, “they are invited to ‘promise time’ and given the extra help they need to be successful.”



Parents and community members are invited to “promise nights” at the school, so that everyone is working together to raise student achievement.

POLICY SOLUTIONS



Ensure every child can read by the end of 3rd grade.



Assess learning each year to make sure every student counts.



Hold schools accountable for student outcomes and content mastery.



Inform educators and parents about student progress to empower intervention.



Equitably distribute high-performing teachers to meet the needs of all students.



Distribute funding equitably across all public schools.

Close Learning Gaps

THOUGHT LEADERSHIP HIGHLIGHT:

EARLY LITERACY NETWORK

ExcelinEd's Early Literacy Policy Director, Dr. Kymyona Burk, brings her passion and expertise to convenings of the Early Literacy Network. As a former teacher and education leader in Mississippi, she applies her professional training and first-hand experience in the classroom and education administration to support reading administrators and state literacy coaches in strengthening and successfully implementing state K-3 reading programs.

Throughout 2020, Dr. Burk convened more than 20 early literacy leaders from 14 states via online meetings of the Network. Participants heard from literacy experts on the latest topics and issues in K-3 reading, with in-depth discussions on the identification of high-quality instructional materials and teacher training in the Science of Reading.

Network convenings provided a needed forum for sharing experiences, lessons learned and best practices for effective program implementation – especially critical in the COVID era.

RESOURCE HIGHLIGHT:

COVID-19 EARLY LITERACY LOSS: STRATEGIES FOR STATES

As schools struggled with a myriad of pandemic-related issues, they faced particular challenges with third-grade reading proficiency. By the 2019-20 school year's end, many states had waived annual statewide assessments, eliminating the student performance data that determine whether students are ready to advance to fourth grade. With further learning loss anticipated during the summer, states faced even larger gaps among students in grade-level reading readiness.

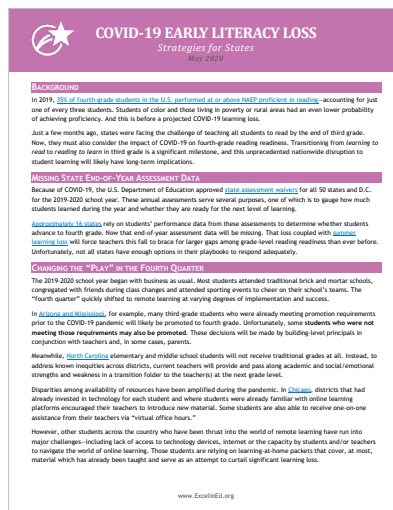
To help states identify and support struggling readers, especially for states without end-of-year assessment data, ExcelinEd published [COVID-19 Early Literacy Loss: Strategies for States](#). The policy brief includes 14 summer and fall-specific strategies for helping students.

From summer reading camps for students and professional development for educators in the science of reading to read-at-home resources for families, parent engagement and implementing proven strategies for early identification of reading deficiencies, the brief offers states and districts approaches for establishing a new normal in literacy education.

“These are great convenings. We enjoy collaborating and bouncing ideas from different states. It is a true network. Thank you for continuing to cultivate the relationships.”



L.M. Clinton
Third Grade Reading Guarantee Administrator, Ohio Department of Education



FLORIDA'S CARES ACT



In June 2020, Florida released its full plan for reopening schools and leveraging CARES Act funding to help students and teachers. The state's plan focused especially on closing persistent achievement gaps affecting disadvantaged students.

BOOSTING READING PROFICIENCY

With early literacy the foundation for all learning, Florida focused on supporting struggling readers with \$5 million in CARES Act funding to train up to 2,000 reading coaches. In addition, the state invested \$5 million to support regional reading specialists specifically trained to help educators over the next two years. The state also invested funds to ensure high-quality curriculum and alignment of CARES Act child-care funding with early reading preparation.

RECOVERING LEARNING LOSS

Florida immediately invested in programs and educators to support rising kindergarten and elementary students in summer 2020. The supports focused on students at risk of losing ground due to the pandemic's disruption of intensive, in-school supports.

Throughout the year, Florida supported teachers with free online courses through Florida Virtual School and by waiving fees for certification exams, which helped approximately 60,000 teachers. Further, to maintain year-by-year data on student achievement and target academic supports, Florida successfully administered nearly 900,000 assessments.

STATE HIGHLIGHTS

TEXAS used GEER funds for its Supplementary Special Education Services Program. Up to 20,000 eligible families of public school children with significant disabilities received online accounts of \$1,500 to obtain educational resources, supplies or therapeutic services.



FLORIDA leaders dedicated \$500 million to increase teacher pay. The state also set aside \$7.5 million to help +15,000 struggling readers with reading scholarship accounts and increased VPK funding by \$8.1 million, allowing an estimated 178k additional students to participate in the Voluntary Pre-K program.



ALABAMA leaders invested an additional \$26.9 million to strengthen the state's early literacy program and support implementation of the Alabama Literacy Act, passed in 2019.



IDAHO increased reading proficiency intervention funding by \$3.2 million and, notably, ensured these funds were made permanent and available in future years. Schools can now count on uninterrupted support for students' individualized reading plans.



GEORGIA took steps aligning with ExcelinEd's Fewer, Better Tests policy by maximizing instruction time, moving tests closer to the end of the school year and eliminating unnecessary assessments.



“The research is clear. Young students need supports and resources to become strong readers. By investing in early literacy, we are closing learning gaps and securing Alabama's future. Literacy is fundamental to success across all fields of learning, and Alabama is committed to preparing our early learners to read so they are able to read to learn.”



Alabama Governor Kay Ivey



Empower Families with Opportunity

PROVIDING FAMILIES WITH ACCESS TO THE LEARNING ENVIRONMENT THAT BEST FITS THEIR CHILD'S NEEDS

Demand for choice rose dramatically in 2020 as schools across the country closed their doors and families struggled to keep children learning. Yet even before the pandemic's disruptions, far too many students were assigned to schools ill fitted to their learning needs.

According to an August 2020 survey, more than two-thirds of parents supported the concept of educational choice.

Yet options for families remain limited. While more than two dozen states now offer certain disadvantaged students a private alternative to a neighborhood school, less than 1 percent of the 50.8 million K-12 students nationwide actually have access to a private choice program. And for families seeking public options, more than 1 million students remain on waitlists for access to a charter school.

Parent demand for options is now higher than ever. And with proven benefits ranging from increased college attendance and taxpayer savings to academic improvement—even for students remaining in traditional schools—ExcelinEd is working to expand educational opportunities to everyone.

“NOT KNOWING WHETHER MY KID WOULD HAVE A CHANCE LIKE OTHER KIDS – AS A PARENT, THAT HURTS. I WANT HIM TO HAVE A CHANCE.”



ONE FAMILY'S STORY:

HAGATA AND LUCCA

Hagata was a newly single Florida mom, putting herself through nursing school. She wanted a great education for her son, Lucca, but couldn't afford to live in neighborhoods that had high-quality schools.

She struggled each month with the pressure of paying rent and utility bills and also paying for Lucca to attend a Montessori pre-kindergarten where he was excelling. She wanted him to stay on a successful track and begin his elementary education at the school.

Hagata learned about Florida's K-12 scholarship programs, the Florida Tax Credit Scholarship and Family Empowerment Scholarship, and immediately applied. But both of Florida's income-based scholarship programs were full that year, and Lucca was placed on a waitlist.

Hagata became an vigorous advocate for her son's education. She and other parents asked Florida lawmakers to increase the number of available K-12 scholarships so that Lucca and more students could attend a school that works best for them.



A year later, in 2020, Florida lawmakers added 29,000 additional scholarships for Florida's families, and Lucca received the scholarship he needed. He's attending a school that's a great fit, and he is on track for academic success. In Hagata's words, "We are very grateful—our whole family—for this opportunity."

POLICY SOLUTIONS



Eliminate school district boundaries for families to enroll their children in any public school in the state.



Add and expand high-quality public charter schools that are equitably funded.



Allow all education dollars to follow the student regardless of which school they attend.



Level the playing field for special-needs and low-income families through education scholarship accounts.



Expand opportunity for underserved families through scholarships funded by voluntary donations.



Unbundle education at the course level.



Empower Families with Opportunity

THOUGHT LEADERSHIP HIGHLIGHT:

ESA ADMINISTRATORS NETWORK

ExcelinEd formed a first-of-its-kind ESA Administrator Network in 2020 to support sound administrative practices across new and existing Education Scholarship Account (ESA) programs.

The Network serves as a gathering space for administrators to share knowledge, learnings and resources, identify national and state-specific solutions, provide professional development for future administrators and deepen understanding of the policies, hallmarks and supports needed for successful ESA program implementation.

Seven states participated in the network's first convenings: Arizona, Colorado, Florida, Idaho, Illinois, North Carolina and Texas, reviewing the latest federal stimulus packages and implications for private schools, exploring opportunities for future ESA policy advancement and addressing challenges in launching new ESA programs.



“Leveraging this network is definitely the way to ensure excellent customer service for families and efficient operations for the states.”

Kathryn Marker, Ph.D.

Director, Grants, Training & Outreach
North Carolina State Education Assistance Authority

RESOURCE HIGHLIGHT:

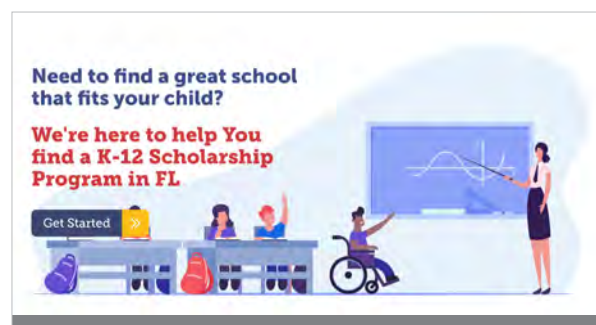
MYCHOICESINEDFL.ORG

ExcelinEd launched [MyChoicesinEdFL.org](https://mychoicesinedfl.org), a one-of-its-kind parent portal providing comprehensive information on Florida's seven scholarship options for K-12 students.

The user-friendly site prompts parents to learn more about each of the state's school choice programs and to complete an online survey to determine their child's eligibilities. Parents with a range of concerns can explore options for a child in a failing public school or struggling to read, a child who has been bullied or harassed, a child who has special needs or any family seeking a private school option.

Personalized survey results are delivered directly to parents, with information on the programs for which they qualify and guidance on the application process.

In the website's first year, 81,000 unique users visited [MyChoicesinEdFL.org](https://mychoicesinedfl.org), 25,500 surveys were completed, with 600 families provided personalized support. More than 84 percent of families completing the survey qualified for at least one of the state's scholarship options.



“This was very helpful! My son has the McKay scholarship, but I wasn't aware of the reading scholarship. I have started completing the paperwork for that process.”

One parent's feedback

OKLAHOMA



Oklahoma's Governor Kevin Stitt strategically used CARES Act funds to expand online course access and safeguard school options for underserved families.

[Learn Anywhere OK](#) was newly created with a \$12 million investment to provide unlimited, digital access for school districts, students and families to a diverse catalog of K-12 coursework, including Advanced Placement subjects, which are often unavailable in rural areas.

In the first months of the program, [more than 250 school districts](#) participated in the new program.

Oklahoma also invested \$10 million to create a [Stay in School Fund](#), providing supplemental scholarships to assist an anticipated 1,500 low-income families with tuition payments. By helping economically hard-hit families maintain stability for their children, the scholarships also protected local districts from large, unplanned jumps in school enrollment.



The Stay in School program was a noteworthy success, allowing nearly 1,900 children to stay in their chosen school. The scholarship recipients were able to continue attending 97 different private schools across the state, including schools in more than a dozen rural counties.

STATE HIGHLIGHTS

IDAHO Governor Brad Little used GEER funds to directly support parents. More than 18,000 low-income families were eligible to receive up to \$1,500 per child for educational resources and services.



FLORIDA allocated \$15 million in CARES Act Safety Net funds to create private school stabilization grants for schools where more than 50% of the student body relied on school choice scholarships. And state leaders expanded public school options for military families and added \$42 million in scholarship funding to serve +4,000 additional special needs students. Scholarship eligibility for low-income families expanded to serve more than 28,000 students. And Florida's charter schools gained \$170 million for facilities, serving more than 300,000 students.



NORTH CAROLINA invested \$6.5 million in grants to more than 2,500 families needing special education services, expanded eligibility for Opportunity Scholarships to more low-income families and, with a \$22 million investment, helped more than 3,800 students enroll in virtual charter schools.



ARIZONA focused on its Native American students by improving their eligibility for Empowerment Scholarships, while **UTAH** added a tax-credit scholarship program for students with special needs, serving up to 1,700 students.



INDIANA successfully created funding equity for more than 90 charter schools in the state, elevating resources and support for the 40,000 students in those schools.



TENNESSEE directed more than \$37 million to provide 5,000 students in Memphis and Nashville with education savings accounts. The program was not implemented following a constitutional challenge.



“States around the nation are proving that options for families translates into success for students. We continue working in Indiana to expand opportunity for every child and the chance to reach their full potential in school and beyond.”



Speaker Todd Huston
Indiana House of Representatives

Strengthen Pathways to College + Career

SUPPORTING
EVERY STUDENT
IN GAINING IN-
DEMAND SKILLS
FOR LIFELONG
SUCCESS

Too many of our nation's students are unprepared for what they will face after high school. To compete for jobs, they will need postsecondary credentials—either a college degree or technical skills and certifications, or *both*. In fact, 60 percent of the nation's fastest-growing jobs require postsecondary work.

The challenge for states is to prepare K-12 students to advance successfully into college and career. Currently, nearly 2 million first-year college students need remedial help and must spend time and money on remedial courses. Others lack access to career and technical training aligned with higher-skill, higher-wage, in-demand jobs, diminishing their ability to rise and achieve.

It is when students are unprepared and employment pipelines run dry that jobs across hundreds of industries go unfilled, and states—and our nation—suffer from unrealized economic growth.

Creating high-quality college and career pathways for students is the answer. *ExcelinEd* promotes proven policies that best equip graduates for the rigors of the college classroom and that align career readiness and credentials to workforce needs. College and career pathway policies bring purpose to learning by allowing students to earn authenticated skill sets informed by labor market demand. Further, these policies improve educational equity by ensuring more rigorous courses are available and incentivized for all students.

“ BETWEEN THE ACADEMIC RIGOR AND HIGH EXPECTATIONS, I KNOW I WILL BE PREPARED FOR COLLEGE.



Gainesville High School
Cambridge Program

ONE STUDENT'S STORY:

JUSTUS AND COLLEGE ACCELERATION

Like all young children, Justus wasn't thinking about college when he started school. He spent his early years homeschooling and then attending a faith-based academy. But when it was time for high school, he clearly had his eyes on the future.

Justus chose a college acceleration program, the Cambridge International program, offered at his local high school in Gainesville, Florida. He was hungry to be challenged, and even as a ninth grader took accelerated math and history courses. He also was excited about the many college-level STEM courses available in the program.

Justus is a senior this year, and when he graduates in 2021, he'll do so with more than just college credits on his transcript. He'll also have saved thousands of dollars in college tuition toward earning his degree.

From Justus' perspective, that's not even the best part. Justus believes his accelerated high school program has prepared him for the rigors of college-level coursework and the challenges in achieving his career goal as a successful business entrepreneur.

His high school's college acceleration focus helps students earn college-credits in courses ranging from Psychology to Marine Science. So far, Justus' favorite class was Global Perspectives and Research, where students study social trends and learn to evaluate the credibility of information sources.

In less than a year, Justus will be in college, armed with college credits and the personal strengths in academic ability, aspiration and achievement that his efforts in high school have firmly established.

POLICY SOLUTIONS



Develop a continuum of policies and programs that support student pathways aligned with higher-skill and higher-wage jobs.



Blur the lines between high school and postsecondary through college acceleration and innovative school models.



Support students in navigating pathway options and through key transition points to college and career.



Connect data systems across secondary, postsecondary and workforce to know if students and programs are successful.

A Strengthen Pathways to College + Career

THOUGHT LEADERSHIP HIGHLIGHT:

EDUCATION TO WORKFORCE CONTINUUM

States and policymakers have become keenly aware that strong economies depend on sound connections between education systems and America's workforce. But most state initiatives to improve career pathways have focused on points along the continuum, such as student advising or apprenticeships. These efforts do not recognize that states need a full ecosystem of policies, aligned programs and supports to give all students the opportunity to fulfill their potential.

To strengthen student pathways into higher-wage, in-demand careers, ExcelsinEd conducted research to create a comprehensive [Education to Workforce Continuum](#) for states. It focuses on comprehensive career roadmaps, with an analysis of the policies needed to strengthen the learning continuum for students.

RESOURCE HIGHLIGHT:

CREDENTIALS MATTER

ExcelsinEd's work to improve college and career pathways continues to be driven by workforce statistics and the limited preparedness of today's students. Last year, [Credentials Matter](#) research identified that only 19% of credentials currently earned by K-12 students are in demand by employers. Yet the growth rate in jobs requiring postsecondary credentials is double—and sometimes more—the growth rate of jobs requiring just a high school diploma.

Credentials *do* matter. ExcelsinEd, in partnership with Burning Glass Technologies, continued the research in 2020 with data updates on [credential attainment and workforce demand](#). The findings show that just over half of all states collect K-12 quantitative data on credentials attainment. And no state in the nation is highly aligned in terms of supply for credentials earned by students and demand for those credentials in the job market.

For students, that means schools are not preparing them well for successful futures after graduation. For policymakers, they need relevant data—accompanied by actionable policy—to change that.



“Building clear pathways to better connect what is learned in school with what is actually needed in the workplace can help prepare students for a lifetime of success. We want all students to be workforce ready.”

Janet Ayers
ExcelsinEd Board Member
President, The Ayers Foundation

“Ensuring that the supply of credentials is aligned with the demand by employers is fundamental to giving graduates a real chance in their careers.”

Matt Sigelman
CEO, Burning Glass Technologies

INDIANA



With the Governors Emergency Education Relief (GEER) funds, Indiana's Governor Eric Holcomb dedicated \$50 million to his [Next Level Jobs](#) program, increasing support for learners seeking credentialing as well as employers willing to train and hire them.

[Next Level Jobs](#) is one of the nation's most compelling retraining programs, with a comprehensive approach that incorporates two grants. One grant provides free job training in one of Indiana's five high-demand job fields: Advanced Manufacturing, Building and Construction, Health and Life Sciences, IT and Business Services and Transportation and Logistics. It pays for all tuition and fees for qualifying high-value certificates at any eligible training provider. An employer grant is also available to help businesses fill in-demand positions, reimbursing participating employers for employees who are trained, hired and retained.

In further actions to connect education and the workforce, one of Indiana's main technical colleges, [Ivy Tech](#), developed a structured process for learners to apply for reverse transfer degrees, helping students who leave four-year universities early to earn associate degrees.

To make this possible, Ivy Tech established agreements with all public four-year colleges and universities in the state, as well as many private institutions. In December 2020, Ivy Tech reached a milestone of awarding 1,000 credentials through reverse transfer.

STATE HIGHLIGHTS

ALABAMA expanded college acceleration this year with an investment of \$2.5 million for dual credit opportunities for students. They also continued to cover exam fees, totaling \$7.4 million, for low-income students taking Advanced Placement courses.



FLORIDA instituted bonus funding incentives for school districts when their students excel in dual enrollment programs. **GEORGIA** successfully took action to streamline its dual-credit program.



COLORADO strengthened the connection between education and career by creating a pathway for students to gain academic credit for work-related experiences. Through the College Credit for Work Experience program, students and adults can earn postsecondary credit for competencies gained in internships or apprenticeship programs. With additional pathways for gaining credit, students can earn a certificate or degree more quickly, thereby reducing their costs.



KENTUCKY set attainment goals to help increase participation in critical computer science courses by underrepresented groups. To improve workforce preparedness, **WEST VIRGINIA** created a State Advisory Council on Postsecondary Attainment Goals.



“Between 2016 and 2020, 9,000 Colorado students gained industry-recognized certifications aligned with in-demand jobs and industries, through just one of the many innovative programs our state has funded to create and support a system of multiple pathways to college and career.”



Colorado Governor
Jared Polis

Reimagine Learning

TRANSFORMING
THE WHEN,
WHERE AND
HOW OF
EDUCATION TO
INDIVIDUALIZE
LEARNING

America's conventional, one-size-fits-all education system leaves too many students unengaged and disconnected. High school graduation rates are at an all-time high, but students aren't necessarily ready for what's next. Eighty percent of today's 15- to 17-year-olds lack work-based experience, and 50 percent of 4-year university students need remedial courses. These realities reveal that something isn't quite right with how traditional K-12 education engages and prepares students.

Schools and educators must put students at the center of learning, tailoring experiences to meet the unique strengths, interests and needs of individuals. Education should simultaneously develop students' talents, help them master necessary knowledge and skills and cultivate valuable and relevant experiences.

2020's pandemic underscored that now, more than ever, education must be reimagined. *Parents want normalcy—but not a return to normal.*

It's time to rethink education, including flexible paths to academic mastery, credit for work experience and allowing students to learn anywhere. From delivery and pace to place and path, alternative learning models have become a necessity for a high-functioning, 21st-century education system that allows students to earn success and lead a fulfilled and purposeful life.

“ WITH EACH PROJECT, WE KNOW WHAT COMPETENCIES WE ARE EXPECTED TO MASTER. I CAN MOVE AT MY OWN PACE, BUT STILL GET ALL MY LEARNING DONE.



ONE STUDENT'S STORY:

KAITLYN AND PROJECT-BASED LEARNING

When Kaitlyn started her junior year at Purdue Polytechnic High School, she immediately noticed the different learning style. Her school is a charter school created through a community partnership between Purdue University and the City of Indianapolis.

“At my old school, teachers said, ‘Here’s our lesson for today, and this is how we are going to do it.’” Kaitlyn often felt rushed and didn’t have the time to delve into the subject matter she was learning. And her grades suffered.

PPHS is a school that uses hands-on and project-based learning, and it connects students to industry partnerships.

Before every project begins—whether it’s a production plan for an upcoming robotics competition or creating a poetry anthology—Kaitlyn’s teachers are clear on the expected outcomes.

Almost immediately, Kaitlyn began to thrive. Having the agency to chose projects that interested her made the learning experience more personal. And not only did her grades improve, she became involved in three team sports.

She’s also a published author. Kaitlyn’s English Language Arts project – a series of poems with her classmates – was published in 2020.

And as part of PPHS’s first graduating class, Kaitlyn will be leaving school not only with the skills to be successful in college and career, but with a lifelong love of learning.

POLICY SOLUTIONS



Personalize learning with a flexible path and pace to achieve mastery.



Fund education based on the value of learning instead of time spent in seats.



Rethink traditional hiring practices and allow teachers to bring school to students.



Reconsider the structure of school to include new models such as micro schools and learning pods.



Redesign 12th grade to include relevant postsecondary and career experiences.



Provide credit for learning and experiences earned outside of schools.

Reimagine Learning

THOUGHT LEADERSHIP HIGHLIGHT:

NETWORK OF STATE INNOVATION PARTNERS

ExcelinEd's Network of State Innovation Partners serves as an ongoing forum for education leaders to advance innovation efforts in their states. Participants from 19 states engage to exchange ideas, strategies and best practices for giving schools the support and flexibility to develop student-centered approaches to learning.

In 2020, the network focused in-depth on COVID-19 response and the accelerated call nationwide for new and innovative ways to meet learners' needs. The network's reach broadened to nearly 50 participants from 24 states and 6 partner organizations.

Each virtual convening during the year provided a platform for states to share the impacts of COVID-19 and the supports needed to advance innovation and learning for students during a challenging year.

Discussions focused on strategies for leveraging data to inform decision making; robustly supporting the needs of special education and English Language Learners; and developing effective strategies for communicating with families.

RESOURCE HIGHLIGHT:

FLEXIBILITY GUIDES TO ADVANCE INNOVATION

The COVID-19 pandemic highlighted the importance of building resilient, student-centered education systems with the flexibility to personalize learning and meet the unique needs of students and their communities.

An increasing number of states are now taking steps to reimagine learning and provide that flexibility. Often, districts and school leaders have more flexibility available than they realize.

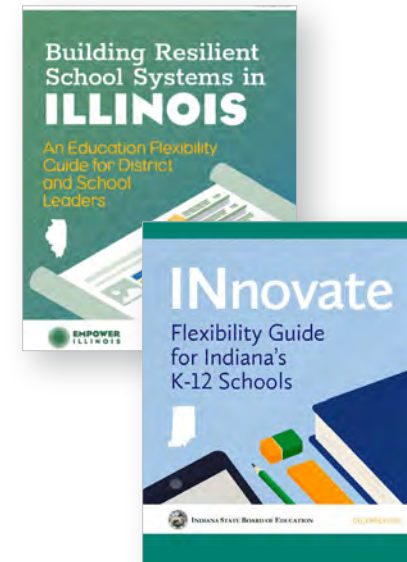
To address this, ExcelinEd collaborated with [Utah](#), [Illinois](#) and [Indiana](#) to develop state-specific guides that deepen the understanding of district, school leaders and policymakers on the flexibility provided by their states.

Each guide shares a common goal, yet was designed to reflect the unique needs of each state to expand innovative, student-centered approaches to learning.

“Partnering with ExcelinEd to share Utah's story has expanded our network of state leaders and organizations across the country that pursue and support innovative educational initiatives designed to better prepare students for postsecondary success. Whether it's policy, promising practices, or partnerships, ExcelinEd is a trusted partner in facilitating connections that help inform our next generation learning efforts.”

Sydney Young
Education Specialist

Personalized Competency-Based Learning
Utah State Board of Education



NEW HAMPSHIRE



Education's massive disruptions in 2020 challenged states to find new, high-quality solutions to sustain and accelerate learning. New Hampshire's student-focused strategies have positioned the state as a leading education innovator.

New Hampshire's innovations were facilitated by state-level changes that included flexibility from seat-time constraints, a grading system that supports competency-based education and options for earning credit for learning outside the classroom.

INNOVATIVE PARTNERSHIP

Then, to address learning loss with schools closed, the state's Department of Education created a partnership with innovator Sal Khan's new Schoolhouse. world initiative, giving students access to its peer-to-peer tutoring platform. Schoolhouse.world offers struggling students free, unlimited access to individualized instruction as they work to catch up.

Additionally, by demonstrating subject mastery and completing a module through Khan Academy, students can also earn a certificate—and academic credit—as a tutor on the platform.

“We are thrilled that New Hampshire could become the inaugural launch state for this incredibly important platform. Sal Khan is a legend in education. Now New Hampshire students will have access to this live support and the ability to mentor other students. It is a timely solution that addresses so many needs.”

Frank Edelblut

New Hampshire Commissioner of Education

STATE HIGHLIGHTS

ARIZONA Governor Doug Ducey became one of the first governors to leverage GEER funding for innovation grants. His \$1 million investment in A for Arizona's Expansion & Innovation Fund provides microgrants to K-12 schools that are innovating to best serve their students. Notably, the microgrants enabled school leaders to accelerate innovative learning for Arizona's most vulnerable student populations.



INDIANA's more than 1,900 public schools now have access to innovation opportunities with a new waiver application process. Waivers support innovation by expanding flexibility to prioritize student-centered practices. They may be granted for constraints such as seat-time requirements, state-mandated curriculum and restrictions around working with local industry.



IDAHO continued its commitment to the state's mastery-based education pilot program of 32 schools with an appropriation of \$350,000. This allows the pilot program to continue implementing student-centered learning and to monitor the ongoing success of the program.



Arizona Governor Doug Ducey

Fiscal Accountability

AS WITH OUR FORMULA FOR STUDENT ACHIEVEMENT, THE FOUNDATION FOR EXCELLENCE IN EDUCATION BELIEVES IN ACCOUNTABILITY AND TRANSPARENCY IN OUR OPERATIONS.

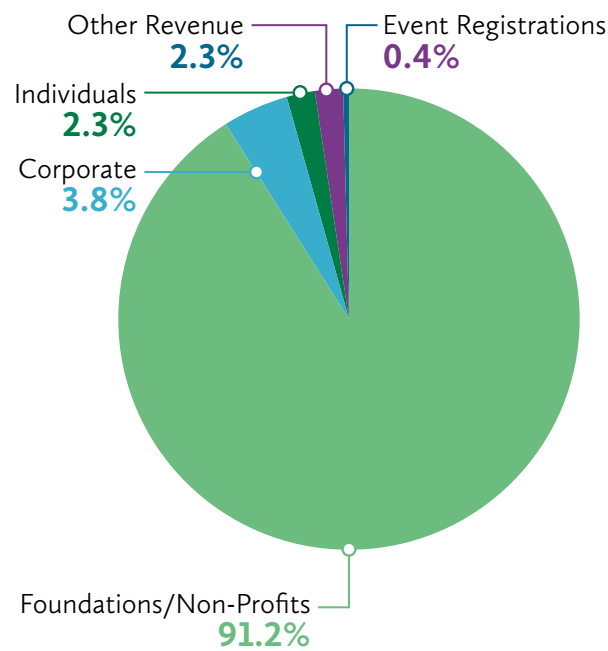
As trusted stewards, we are committed to sound fiscal management and maximizing the use of every dollar toward policy solutions that are increasing student learning, advancing equity and readying graduates for college and career.

In 2020, 78 percent of ExcelinEd's expenses were invested directly into our policy, advocacy and communications work to support states in transforming education.

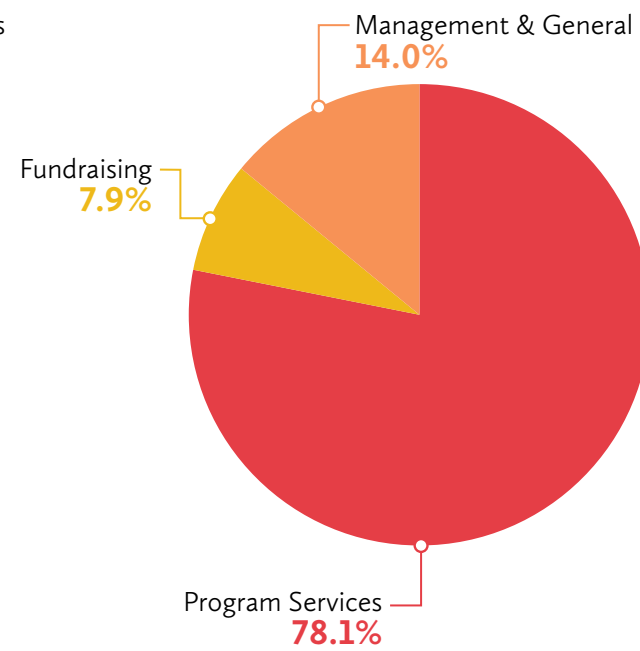


2020 REVENUE & EXPENSES

2020 REVENUE



2020 EXPENSES



To review our recent 990 filings, visit [ExcelinEd.org/financials](https://www.excelined.org/financials).

ExcelinEd 2020 Donors

We often think of education reform as policies written in legislation or rules enacted by elected officials and appointed boards. Rather, reform is a profound game changer in the lives of individual children, a gift that allows them to maximize their potential.



We are deeply grateful to our donors who believe in the gift of a quality education, and with their generous support of our work, we are transforming policy and transforming lives.

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