



Education  
Finance  
Council™



**HELPING FAMILIES  
PLAN AND PAY  
FOR COLLEGE**

Education Finance Council  
2023 National Impact Report



EFC would like to thank the following organizations for providing data and information for this report:

Alaska Student Loan Corporation  
Arkansas Student Loan Authority  
Bank of North Dakota  
Brazos Higher Education Service Corporation  
Connecticut Higher Education Supplemental Loan Authority  
ECMC  
Georgia Student Finance Commission  
Greater Texas Services  
INvestEd  
ISL Education Lending  
Kentucky Higher Education Student Loan Corporation  
Louisiana Education Loan Authority  
Massachusetts Educational Financing Authority

Midwestern University  
Minnesota Office of Higher Education  
MOHELA  
Montana Higher Education Student Assistance Corporation  
New Jersey Higher Education Student Assistance Authority  
New Mexico Educational Assistance Foundation  
North Texas Higher Education Authority  
Pennsylvania Higher Education Assistance Agency  
Rhode Island Student Loan Authority  
South Carolina Student Loan Corporation  
The NHHEAF Network  
Trellis Company  
Vermont Student Assistance Corporation

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## A MESSAGE

# FROM THE PRESIDENT

Education Finance Council (EFC) is the national trade association of nonprofit and state-based higher education finance organizations. Our members help students plan for and afford postsecondary education. EFC member organizations are mission-driven to improve the lives of those in their communities. These nonprofit organizations go above and beyond to guide families through the complicated student aid system so students can advance in their careers with the least amount of education debt possible.

The higher education sector has forever changed following the COVID pandemic. Students and families are more aware of the cost-benefit of a postsecondary education and the option for workforce development programs. Luckily, EFC members are doing their part to help students navigate the postsecondary education planning, funding, completion, and career pathways by providing free and low-cost products and services to millions of students every year. Our members' financial products, educational programming, and timely interventions enrich the lives of individuals nationwide.

I am honored to present you with EFC's 2023 National Impact Report. This document attempts the impossible; to distill into a few pages the multitude of ways that EFC members transformed people's lives during Academic Year 2022-2023. Our members fill many higher education funding and financing niches. They manage college savings programs, hold FAFSA completion

events, award scholarship and grant aid, disburse low-cost nonprofit student loans and refinance education loans, provide support and counseling to help students persist, administer repayment assistance programs, and so much more.

I encourage you to take advantage of the data and information in the EFC 2023 National Impact Report to learn more about the value EFC members provide their communities and the nation. Use this information to connect people with the nonprofit organization that can cater to their needs.

Together, we can make higher education become a reality for all those who aspire to realize their potential, pursue their career goals, and improve their future.



**Gail daMota**

President,  
Education Finance Council

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# ABOUT EDUCATION FINANCE COUNCIL

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Education Finance Council (EFC) is the national trade association representing nonprofit and state-based higher education finance organizations. EFC member organizations are mission-driven to increase higher education access, affordability, and success by helping students and families plan, save, and pay for college. They provide a wide range of postsecondary education funding and financing options, support the education-to-workforce pipeline, deliver a high-quality loan servicing experience, and provide critical financial literacy resources and counseling services to their communities. Every year EFC members support millions of individuals as they seek to grow their skillset and improve their lives.

EFC Members – while considered part of the private loan market – are distinct from traditional commercial financial institutions that make and service education loans. EFC members are guided by a robust set of principles (see Appendix A) that define their consumer-first programs, and their interests are inherently aligned with the students and families they serve. Nonprofit and state-based lenders also integrate personalized counseling as part of their loan programs to ensure that borrowers are fully aware of the options available to them and only borrow what they need and can afford to repay.

EFC Members across the country provide low-cost education loan programs to help students and families fund the gap between the total cost of attendance at colleges and universities and federal loans, grants, and scholarships. All EFC members encourage borrowers to exhaust federal student loan eligibility prior to applying for a non-federal loan.

Learn more about these nonprofit and state-based programs at [efc.org](https://efc.org).



# NATIONAL IMPACT BY THE NUMBERS

**\$22.674 Billion**

In savings for postsecondary education

**563,806**

Scholarships awarded last academic year

**4.26%**

Average lowest fixed interest rate on in-school loans\*

**\$1.549 Billion**

In grant funding distributed

**997,124**

Number of families assisted with postsecondary access and success programming

\*Rate as of August 2023 and includes available deductions



# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The nonprofit and state-based members of Education Finance Council (EFC) strive to increase postsecondary access and affordability in their states and nationwide. Twenty-Six EFC members provided data and information to inform EFC's 2023 National Impact Report, which summarizes their work in Academic Year 2022-2023 to help students and families afford postsecondary education around the country.

**College Savings:** EFC members are committed to helping students and families borrow less by saving more, particularly when children are young. Seven member organizations administer a state 529 plan, currently helping 1,047,946 students and families save more than \$22.674 billion for college. These and other EFC members are working alongside other nonprofit partners and state agencies to diversify and increase access to college savings accounts through outreach, seeding, and matching programs.

**Postsecondary Access and Success:** Last year, the 21 EFC members with available data assisted 997,124 families, and 23 members held 26,028 workshops and 88,262 one-on-one counseling sessions to help them plan, save, and pay for college. Eighteen EFC members offer online tools and calculators to help families compare college costs and understand financial aid award letters. Eight members also provide comprehensive online career exploration platforms at no charge to users and others provide support such as free in-person events and workshops.

**Financial Literacy Education:** EFC members provide financial management counseling for students in school and after graduation, internship and employment search and exploration resources, student loan repayment counseling, default prevention services and resources, and education about consumer rights. Sixteen EFC members offer free interactive resources where students and families can learn about budgeting and financial concepts online. Some organizations also provide training in financial literacy for secondary school counselors, college access professionals, and college administrators.

**Scholarships and Grants:** Scholarships and grants play a vital role in increasing access to and success in college. In the last year, the 20 EFC members with available data awarded 563,806 scholarships, totaling nearly \$993.84 million to help students pay for academic expenses. Eight EFC members with available data also distributed a total of 499,963 degree grants/awards, totaling \$1.549 billion.

**Education-to-Employment Pathways:** Many EFC members work within their states on initiatives to align education with employment. These efforts include partnerships with employers, workforce development boards, and community colleges to bolster talent pipeline initiatives, loan forgiveness programs for individuals who work in an in-demand field, and outreach programs and partnerships that reach students historically underrepresented in higher education. In addition, four EFC members with available data distributed 1,954 non-degree grants/awards, totaling more than \$6.96 million which can be used by students to pay for a certificate or credential.

**Nonprofit Loan Programs:** During the last year, the 20 organizations with available data made more than 75,645 low-cost education loans, totaling more than \$1.086 billion. A key feature of each education loan provided by nonprofit and state-based organizations is that they offer a fixed interest rate option and some also offer a variable rate option. These loans help students bridge the gap between the cost of attendance and available savings, scholarships and grants, and federal student loans. Thirteen of these EFC members also refinanced 7,200 student loans to help borrowers save hundreds of dollars during the repayment process.

**Education Completion and Repayment Support:** Nonprofit and state-based organizations work closely with borrowers experiencing personal hardship or financial difficulties to offer guidance and assistance. These programs may include counseling services, re-enrollment initiatives to help non-completers return to school and obtain their degree or certificate, and assistance operating employer-provided student loan repayment benefits.

# COLLEGE SAVINGS

Paying for college is one of the biggest financial concerns that many students and parents have. While financial aid can make college more affordable, most students or families will have to pay some of the costs of higher education either with savings, student loans, and/or parent loans. Long-term consistent savings enable families to reduce the amount of debt they take on when their student goes on to enroll in college.

Seven EFC members administer a state 529 plan, currently helping 1,047,946 students and families save more than \$22.674 billion for college and reduce the amount they need to borrow. These and other organizations are working to promote college savings through outreach and education programs, and 66,636 new accounts were opened to start saving for college in these plans last year.

Many states also offer seed money, matching programs, tax credits or deductions on annual contributions, and lower minimum contribution requirements to help families maximize college savings. These types of programs are proven to increase the socioeconomic, racial, and ethnic diversity of plan participants and allow more families to benefit from college.

## State College Savings Plans

EFC Member	College Savings Plans
Bank of North Dakota	Administers College SAVE 529 Savings Plan and offers three matching programs: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- \$200 New Baby Match</li> <li>- \$300 BND Match</li> <li>- \$100 Kindergarten Kickoff Match</li> </ul>
Georgia State Finance Commission	Administers Path2College 529 Savings Plan
Kentucky Higher Education Assistance Authority	Administers KY Saves 529 Savings Plan
Massachusetts Educational Financing Authority	Administers the U.Plan Prepaid Tuition Program and the U.Fund 529 College Investing Plan and offers a \$50 seed deposit for MA residents through the BabySteps Savings Plan
Minnesota Office of Higher Education	Administers the MNSAVES 529 Savings Plan (MNSAVES)
New Jersey Higher Education Student Assistance Authority	Administers the NJBEST 529 Savings Plan and offers up to a \$750 matching grant and scholarship opportunities worth up to \$3,000
Vermont Student Assistance Corporation	Administers Vermont 529 Savings Plan

### Grants to Help New Jersey Families Save for and Manage College Costs

New Jersey awards one of the nation’s highest amounts of state-funded need-based grant dollars per undergraduate student, helping New Jersey families save for future college expenses and pay for a postsecondary degree or credential. To boost college savings, the state’s Higher Education Student Assistance Authority (HESAA) provides eligible families with dollar-for-dollar matching grants on deposits into a New Jersey Better Educational Savings Trust (NJBEST) up to \$750. Since the program’s inception, more than 1,600 families have qualified for an average state grant of \$734 added to their new NJBEST accounts.

HESAA also provides need-based assistance through the Tuition Aid Grant (TAG), which covers a large share of tuition for nearly one-third of all full-time undergraduate students. In Academic Year 2022-2023, over 78,000 New Jersey students gained access to an affordable higher education from \$458 million in TAG awards. Starting in April 2023, HESAA began offering Summer TAG awards, allowing students to accelerate their studies and further save on overall college costs.

New Jersey also helps families manage college expenses with various scholarships and state income tax deductions for college savings, tuition costs, and state education loan repayment.



## Promoting College Savings in Kentucky

Kentucky Higher Education Assistance Authority (KHEAA) administers the KY Saves 529 Plan and utilizes an integrated approach to promoting college savings, including a number of community-based outreach initiatives to reach residents in remote or rural locations. In Academic Year 2022-2023, KY Saves 529 had more than 150 promotional events, exhibits, and presentations throughout the Commonwealth and partnered with organizations such as the Louisville Zoo, Kentucky State Fair, and community libraries across state for statewide Summer Reading program.

In Academic Year 2022-2023, the KY Saves launched its automatic contribution incentive campaign to encourage new and current owners to set up automatic investment plan (AIP) contributions. Plan owners who enrolled in AIP or payroll deduction during the campaign received one-time \$25 contribution as the incentive, and the campaign produced 130 new accounts during the one-month campaign period.

KY Saves makes it easier for contributors to save with the ReadySave mobile app, which currently enables more than 2,200 users to securely manage and review their personal education savings information. Another unique benefit of the KY Saves Plan is the ability for account beneficiaries with a vested participation agreement to qualify for in-state tuition rates at certain out-of-state institutions if they move to another state.

# POSTSECONDARY ACCESS AND SUCCESS

The process of planning, applying, and paying for college can be daunting, particularly for the families of first-generation, underserved, and other non-traditional students. EFC members offer innovative outreach programs, online tools, and one-on-one support to help learners explore postsecondary education opportunities and careers, finance their education, and chart a path to success.

Last year, the 21 EFC members with available data assisted 997,124 families, and 23 members held 26,028 workshops and 88,262 one-on-one counseling sessions to help them plan, save, and pay for college.

The following EFC members provided information about their college access and success programming for this report:

Alaska Student Loan Corporation

Arkansas Student Loan Authority

Bank of North Dakota

Brazos Higher Education Service Corporation

Connecticut Higher Education Supplemental Loan Authority

ECMC

Georgia Student Finance Commission

INvestEd

ISL Education Lending

Kentucky Higher Education Student Loan Corporation

Louisiana Education Loan Authority

Massachusetts Educational Financing Authority

Midwestern University

Minnesota Office of Higher Education

MOHELA

Montana Higher Education Student Assistance Corporation

New Jersey Higher Education Student Assistance Authority

New Mexico Educational Assistance Foundation

North Texas Higher Education Authority

Pennsylvania Higher Education Assistance Agency

Rhode Island Student Loan Authority

South Carolina Student Loan Corporation

The NHHEAF Network

Trellis Company

Vermont Student Assistance Corporation

## Providing Affordable Access to Higher Education for Pennsylvania Families

Pennsylvania Higher Education Assistance Agency (PHEAA) helps Pennsylvania students afford higher education by providing financial aid services and programs throughout the state. In 2022, PHEAA conducted more than 600 Financial Aid Night events, during which parents and students can learn how to apply for all types of financial aid and file the FAFSA, helping more than 17,600 students/families understand the student aid process and create a plan to pay for college.

PHEAA also provides one-on-one assistance through its free workshops and team of Higher Education Access Partners who are deployed in regions throughout the state, assisting more than 6,200 students and families in 2022. PHEAA conducts more intensive outreach to high-poverty school districts in Philadelphia and Pittsburgh through a dedicated Higher Education Access Partner that works closely and directly with local legislators, community partners, and the school districts to promote FAFSA Completion.

Filing the FAFSA is a critical step that is required to determine eligibility for most student aid programs, including the PA State Grant Program, the seventh largest need-based grant program in the country, which is administered by PHEAA. The program is unique in that it does not operate on a first-come, first-served basis – all students who meet the eligibility requirements receive a grant. Since its inception in 1965, the PA State Grant Program has awarded students over \$12.7 billion, and PHEAA's research shows that the most recent cohort either outperformed or performed similarly to comparable undergraduate populations in terms of graduation rates, time to degree completion, and student persistence.<sup>1</sup>

## POSTSECONDARY AND CAREER EXPLORATION

Postsecondary preparation is a critical component of student success, and it starts well before senior year of high school. Reaching students and their families in the early grades can improve college preparation efficacy. EFC members' postsecondary exploration programs, which include online tools and platforms, help students identify and find the postsecondary education or training program that fits their needs.

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1. The PA State Grant Program Outcomes Study: A Six-Year Analysis of the 2015-16 PA State Grant Cohort March 2023

## Guiding Massachusetts Students to Postsecondary and Career Success

Massachusetts Educational Financing Authority (MEFA) offers MEFA Pathway ([mefapathway.org](https://mefapathway.org)), a free online portal designed to help students plan for academic and career success through middle school, high school, and beyond. MEFA Pathway was the primary college and career planning tool used in Massachusetts by 27,139 students in 149 schools last year.

Students can use MEFA Pathway beginning in middle school to construct a personalized digital picture of who they are and where they want to go. The platform includes engaging activities and organizational tools that help students learn about themselves, find colleges that fit them best, and explore career opportunities. Users also receive personalized information and updates about key milestones and opportunities relevant to their postsecondary school lives. MEFA Pathway includes data on career trends, job growth potential, and the demand of careers across different geographic areas.

MEFA engages adult influencers in the career exploration process as well. Parents and educators can use MEFA Pathway to gain insight into the ambitions, challenges, and goals of their student(s), as well as information and tips. During Academic Year 2022-2023, MEFA hosted 40 early awareness events for families of elementary and middle school students and provided professional development for school counselors, college administrators, and college access professionals through the MEFA Institute.



## College and Career Counseling and Planning Services for Texas High Schoolers

North Texas Higher Education Authority supports inspireED to operate high school-based college and career centers, known as GO Centers. Last year, inspireED served 3,314 students and parents through visits to its GO Centers, helping students complete 1,539 college applications and 1,626 financial aid applications.

The centers host events with group workshops and provide general college and career planning sessions, as well as one-on-one assistance completing the FAFSA. GO Centers hold school- and community-based college planning and financial aid presentations and events and provide counselor training for district partners, serving 300 school counselors in the last year.

## EFC Member's Postsecondary and Career Exploration Programs

The following EFC members offer free online tools where students can input information and explore careers and educational pathways.

EFC Member	Postsecondary and Career Exploration Platform
Alaska Student Loan Corporation	The Alaska Career Information System (AKCIS) is a free online platform utilized by nearly all school districts throughout the state of Alaska. Students can access a variety of postsecondary and career planning tools including career assessments, personal learning and career plans, a resume builder, and more. <a href="http://akcis.org">akcis.org</a>
Georgia Student Finance Commission	GAFutures features several career exploration tools, including interests and skills assessments, information about potential career areas and pathways, including skilled trades, military officer careers, and a military to civilian job search. <a href="http://gafutures.org/career-exploration">gafutures.org/career-exploration</a>
INvestEd	Choosing Your Career helps students explore career and major options with recommended tools and resources. <a href="http://investedindiana.org/preparing/choosing-your-career">investedindiana.org/preparing/choosing-your-career</a>
ISL Education Lending	Offers Return on College Investment, which allows students to compare jobs of interest and learn about return on investment. <a href="http://IowaStudentLoan.org/rocirealitycheck">IowaStudentLoan.org/rocirealitycheck</a>
Massachusetts Educational Financing Authority	MEFA Pathway is Massachusetts' free online portal designed to help students plan for postsecondary success and career readiness through middle school, high school, and beyond. MEFA Pathway provides an array of tools and resources to create an informative and engaging web experience. <a href="http://mefapathway.org">mefapathway.org</a>
Pennsylvania Higher Education Assistance Agency	Education Planner guides students through the entire college-planning process, from choosing a major and a career, to applying for admission and paying for it. Information is targeted at college-bound students, as well as returning students, nontraditional students, parents, and school counselors. <a href="http://educationplanner.org">educationplanner.org</a>
The NHHEAF Network	Partners with YouScience to provide an online career interest and aptitude assessment that helps students identify their strengths and match with careers where they are most likely to succeed. <a href="http://nhheaf.org/planning/career-exploration">nhheaf.org/planning/career-exploration</a>
Vermont Student Assistance Corporation	Advance Vermont offers free, one-stop information about education and career opportunities. The site provides Vermonters with the information and assistance they need to access valuable educational opportunities that will advance their careers, employable skills, income stability, and job readiness. <a href="http://advancevermont.org">advancevermont.org</a>

## CAREER ADVISING AND NAVIGATION SERVICES

Most jobs today require some form of postsecondary education or training, which means young people must set career goals early and follow the right steps to achieve them. Nonprofit organizations are essential to providing the high-quality career advising and navigation that students need and deserve, especially as K-12 schools across the country face a shortage of qualified guidance counselors. EFC members lead high-quality career advising and navigation programs by leveraging community partnerships and data to connect systems, remove financial barriers, and provide the information and resources people need to get and stay on track to an in-demand career.

## Innovative Methods of Talent Finance in South Carolina

South Carolina Student Loan (SCSL) is creating pathways to education and the workforce with BOLD (Better Outcomes, Less Debt) Career Pathways. BOLD partners students with state-wide employers during the educational path to provide a direct line to employment, enhance recruitment and retention, and reduce loan debt to student borrowers. The new program helps cover education expenses and provides students with a successful career path. BOLD targets employers from in-demand industries, helping companies in these competitive markets find talented workers. BOLD advisors mentor students throughout the educational process to monitor grades, act as an advisor, and help students navigate challenges. The outreach team connects students with school or community resources to help them stay on track. After graduation, students begin working while their employer repays the BOLD Loan based on the agreed service requirements.

Beginning the fall of 2022, BOLD has grown to over 30 partnering employers and 13 career workforce pathways, including healthcare and higher education faculty.

## FAFSA COMPLETION ASSISTANCE

The Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) is the first vital step in the federal financial aid process, and its completion is one of the strongest predictors of whether a student will attend college. Unfortunately, the students who could benefit most from financial aid are the least likely to apply. In fact, an estimated \$3.58 billion in Pell Grants went unclaimed in 2022 simply because students did not complete the FAFSA.<sup>2</sup>

For the 2024-2025 aid year, Federal Student Aid (FSA) will launch the “Better FAFSA” - a significant overhaul of the form that will reduce the number of questions from 108 to a maximum of 46 and make substantial changes to the need analysis, application process and user experience, terminology, and more. FSA will also implement a direct data exchange with the Internal Revenue Service (IRS), allowing FSA to access tax information for applicants directly.

The Better FAFSA has several benefits, including a more streamlined application process and expanded student eligibility for federal student aid. At the same time, a complete overhaul of the FAFSA is a major initiative that requires training and careful planning to ensure students and their families understand the changes and feel comfortable with the process. For example, the Better FAFSA will be a role-based form that will require everyone who puts information into the online FAFSA to have a unique FSA ID, a huge change from previous practice. FSA IDs will need to be created and confirmed prior to accessing a FAFSA, which may take up to four days and could delay the process of filing if families are unaware of this step.

EFC members are working hard to help students and families through this transition while continuing to boost FAFSA completion rates for students with a demonstrated financial need. The 17 members with available data assisted with 96,677 FAFSA's last year, through services like FAFSA completion events and help centers, workshops and information sessions, and one-on-one appointments.

## Helping New Hampshire Students and Families Navigate Change

Starting in the Academic Year 2023-2024, the state of New Hampshire will require all high school students to complete the FAFSA as a prerequisite to graduation, during the same year FSA will transition to the Better FAFSA. Early results from other states that have adopted such a policy have shown increases in FAFSA filing rates and postsecondary enrollment, effectively closing the gap in FAFSA completion between low- and high-income school districts.<sup>3</sup>

To help students and their families navigate these changes, The NHHEAF Network is working with key leaders and stakeholder groups, including school counselors, principals, and financial aid professionals, to create a FAFSA Resource Toolkit that includes messaging templates, a step-by-step guide, FAQs, local resources, contact information for on demand support, and social media templates. NHHEAF is also developing an educational animation video that will launch in the fall of 2023 and cover a breadth of FAFSA topics, including the Better FAFSA and the upcoming mandate.

NHHEAF provides free information, resources, and support for New Hampshire families during the college and career planning process, including FAFSA assistance for students, parents, and school counselors.

2. National College Attainment Network, “In 2022, High School Seniors Left \$3.58 Billion on the Table in Pell Grants” (January 2023)

3. National College Attainment Network, “How One State Increased FAFSA Completion by 26 Percent” (October 2018)

## Preparing Indiana Families for FAFSA Changes

Big changes are coming to the FAFSA application process, and INvestEd is helping Indiana students and their families prepare. Since the new FAFSA will require all contributors to establish an FSA ID in advance of filing, INvestEd plans to hold special workshops dedicated to helping students and parent contributors create FSA IDs before meeting with a counselor to complete the form once it becomes available.

INvestEd has also added a new type of outreach event called FSA+ that teaches families about financial aid and upcoming FAFSA changes. In Academic Year 2022-2023, INvestEd hosted 838 postsecondary education planning events in Indiana to help students and families prepare for education beyond high school, including early awareness presentations about college savings, financial aid, FAFSA filing workshops, and reviewing financial aid offers. Nearly all attendees report finding these events helpful in addressing their financial aid and FAFSA-related questions, with more than 95 percent indicating that they are likely to contact INvestEd for further help and over 97 percent stating they will recommend the organization to others.

INvestEd offers free one-on-one counseling sessions for those who would like additional help. The organization also partners with the Indiana State Financial Aid Association and the Commission for Higher Education to offer a series of counselor workshops that cover college planning and financial aid at 13 locations across the state.

## COLLEGE PLANNING AND FINANCIAL AID

College is usually the first and among the most expensive credit purchases a person will make in life, and trying to understand true college costs and financial aid can be confusing. The financial aid notifications sent to prospective students are inconsistent from school to school, making comparisons difficult and obscuring real costs. EFC members provide online tools, counseling, publications, workshops, and targeted outreach to assist students and families as they compare costs and explore financing for their education.

### EFC Member's Online Tools and Calculators

The following EFC members offer free online tools where families can input information to simplify the process, compare college costs, understand financial aid award letters, and get the true cost of a loan.

EFC Member	Online Tools and Calculators
Alaska Student Loan Corporation	The Alaska Career Information System (AKCIS) is a free online platform utilized by nearly all school districts throughout the state of Alaska. In addition to postsecondary and career planning tools, students and their families can use the tool to compare college costs and institutions. <a href="http://akcis.org">akcis.org</a>
Arkansas Student Loan Authority	The College Cost Calculator helps students compare and determine the cost of attending college, the actual cost of a loan, and to compare multiple loans including both federal and private loans. <a href="http://asla.info/College-Cost-Calculator">asla.info/College-Cost-Calculator</a>
Bank of North Dakota	The Salary-to-Debt Calculator helps students understand how different student loan amounts will impact their future finances and the Regional College Cost Sheet provides estimated attendance costs for colleges in North Dakota, Minnesota, Montana, and South Dakota in one convenient document. <a href="http://bnd.nd.gov/salary-to-debt-calculator">bnd.nd.gov/salary-to-debt-calculator</a>
Brazos Higher Education Service Corporation	Free online education materials cover preparation for FAFSA deadlines, tips for finding scholarships and grants, writing financial aid appeal letters, understanding award letters, and more. <a href="http://studentloans.com/blog">studentloans.com/blog</a>
Connecticut Higher Education Supplemental Loan Authority	CT Dollars & Sense is a financial literacy and wellness portal that provides a one-stop shop to help plan, save, and pay for college. There are articles, videos, calculators, and more. <a href="http://ctdollarsandsense.com">ctdollarsandsense.com</a>
ECMC	Offers a downloadable Make Your Decision worksheet that is available for students and families to compare college costs. <a href="http://ecmc.org/media/qqilwq4n/make-your-decision.pdf">ecmc.org/media/qqilwq4n/make-your-decision.pdf</a>

Georgia Student Finance Commission	<p>The GAFutures Portal provides several public resources and tools, as well as customized financial aid information, college application, and dual enrollment management through a student account dashboard. High school students are provided grade-level specific letters (called Plan&amp;Pay4College letters) that provide targeted information on college planning and financial aid. The site also has a college database search tool and a scholarship database search tool.</p> <p><a href="http://gafutures.org">gafutures.org</a></p>
INvestEd	<p>The College Planning Toolbox tracks the various pieces of the college planning puzzle, allowing for more informed decisions. Students can compare savings options and project the funds needed to cover college costs and the amount they should save.</p> <p><a href="http://investedindiana.org/literacy/collegeplanningtoolbox">investedindiana.org/literacy/collegeplanningtoolbox</a></p> <p>The INvestEd Student Loan Marketplace allows students to compare various lenders and shows actual interest rates and loan costs.</p> <p><a href="http://investedindiana.org/loans/student-loan/marketplace">investedindiana.org/loans/student-loan/marketplace</a></p>
ISL Education Lending	<p>Offers a suite of resources and tools online, including Return on College Investment, Student Loan Game Plan, College Funding Forecaster, and Parent Handbook.</p> <p><a href="http://iowaStudentloan.org/smartborrowing">iowaStudentloan.org/smartborrowing</a></p>
Massachusetts Educational Financing Authority	<p>Several calculators are available for use throughout the college planning process, including the College Savings Calculator, College Cost Projector, College Planning Tool, Expected Family Contribution Calculator, College Cost Calculator, and Student Loan Payment Calculator.</p> <p><a href="http://mefa.org">mefa.org</a></p>
Midwestern University	<p>The Financial Wellness website provides access to numerous financial wellness tools to help students understand the financial planning process and the true costs associated with student loans. 1-on-1 Financial Wellness Sessions use the learning tools within this website to expand learning.</p> <p><a href="http://sensiblestrategies.igrad.com">sensiblestrategies.igrad.com</a></p>
New Jersey Higher Education Student Assistance Authority	<p>Provides the Tuition Aid Grant award estimator, the NJCLASS supplemental loan payment calculator and application process, state, and federal loan redemption programs, and over two dozen resources to help students make informed decisions about their higher education options.</p> <p><a href="http://hesaa.org/tagestimator/current/studentstatus.asp">hesaa.org/tagestimator/current/studentstatus.asp</a> and <a href="http://hesaa.org/oNJCLASS/jsp/world/amortizationCalculator.jsp">hesaa.org/oNJCLASS/jsp/world/amortizationCalculator.jsp</a></p>
Pennsylvania Higher Education Assistance Agency	<p>My Smart Borrowing allows students to see the cost of their intended school, expected salary in their chosen field, and offers tips to avoid overborrowing.</p> <p><a href="http://mysmartborrowing.org">mysmartborrowing.org</a></p>
Rhode Island Student Loan Authority	<p>Several online tools and calculators are available, including EFC Calculator, College Calculator, Budget Calculator, and Salary Calculator.</p> <p><a href="http://risla.com/calculators">risla.com/calculators</a></p>
South Carolina Student Loan Corporation	<p>The College Planning Center includes calculators, scholarship searches, and blog posts for anyone to use without creating an account. For more detailed help, users can create an account for access to the financial center for savings and school costs, calendars with important dates, test preparation, the Common College Application, and the FAFSA.</p> <p><a href="http://scstudentloan.invitededucation.com">scstudentloan.invitededucation.com</a></p>
The NHHEAF Network	<p>The College Financing Tool helps students and parents plan for the long-term costs of college and better understand their return on investment in education.</p> <p><a href="http://nhheaf.org/financing/college-financing-tool">nhheaf.org/financing/college-financing-tool</a></p>
Trellis Company	<p>MOSAIEC provides money management tools, tips, and information for modern college students, including prep and enrollment resources, financial aid types and packages, FAFSA completion tools, a school and major post-grad calculator, career choice calculator, a student loan repayment calculator, a work vs. borrower calculator, and a student loan interest calculator.</p> <p><a href="http://mosaiec.org">mosaiec.org</a></p>
Vermont Student Assistance Corporation	<p>The Financial Aid Comparison Tool is a downloadable resource that helps students interpret financial aid offers and better compare options.</p> <p><a href="http://vsac.org/resources/financial-aid-offer-comparison-tool">vsac.org/resources/financial-aid-offer-comparison-tool</a></p>

# FINANCIAL LITERACY EDUCATION

Financial literacy is the key to helping learners make well-informed, responsible economic and financial decisions. EFC members help set students up for a successful academic career and prepare them for life after graduation by providing financial literacy education and training programs, financial management counseling for students in school and post-graduation, internship and employment search and exploration resources, student loan repayment counseling, default prevention services and other resources to students, families, schools, and lenders. Some programs help educate students and families on their consumer rights.

## FOR STUDENTS AND FAMILIES

EFC members assist students and families by providing financial literacy training and programs that focus on, but are not limited to, understanding basic money management, budgeting, credit cards, interest rates, and the benefits of saving.

### EFC Member's Online Financial Literacy Tools

The following EFC members offer free interactive resources where students and families can learn about budgeting and financial concepts online.

EFC Member	Postsecondary and Career Exploration Platform
Alaska Student Loan Corporation	Resource libraries are available on a variety of financial literacy topics, including the Success Center Online Resource Library; Smart Savings, Smart Borrowing; Loan Comparison Card; Managing Your Finances; and the Before You Borrow Guide. <a href="http://acpe.alaska.gov/planning/request-materials">acpe.alaska.gov/planning/request-materials</a>
Bank of North Dakota	Features a resource library with financial literacy tools to help residents make smart financial decisions. <a href="http://bnd.nd.gov/financial_education">bnd.nd.gov/financial_education</a>
Brazos Higher Education Service Corporation	Offers many informational articles on financial literacy topics, along with a variety of student loan calculators. <a href="http://studentloans.com">studentloans.com</a>
Connecticut Higher Education Supplemental Loan Authority	CT Dollars & Sense is a financial literacy and wellness portal that provides a one-stop shop to help plan, save, and pay for college. There are articles, videos, calculators, and more. <a href="http://ctdollarsandsense.com">ctdollarsandsense.com</a>
ECMC	The Financial Awareness Basics program provides money management resources designed for students, families, and educators on topics such as financial terms, banking, budgeting, consumer credit reports. <a href="http://ecmc.org/studentseducators/student-resources/financial-awareness-basics-fab">ecmc.org/studentseducators/student-resources/financial-awareness-basics-fab</a>
Georgia Student Finance Commission	GA Futures provides access to financial literacy tools that help students create a spending plan, maintain a balanced budget, and make informed financial choices. <a href="http://gafutures.org">gafutures.org</a>
ISL Education Lending	Student Planning Pointers for Parents (SP3) is an email service that provides free information on college planning and financial literacy. <a href="http://SP3.org">SP3.org</a>
Massachusetts Educational Financing Authority	Provides blog posts, videos, webinars, and calculators on the cost of higher education and how to make wise financial decisions when saving for college expenses, creating the college list, selecting a college, and determining how to pay the college bill.  MEFA is also the state sponsor of Attainable, the Massachusetts ABLE savings plan for individuals with disabilities, and offers online guidance to help educate Attainable savers on the financial details of their accounts. <a href="http://mefa.org">mefa.org</a>
Midwestern University	The Financial Wellness website provides numerous financial wellness tools and 1-on-1 Financial Wellness Sessions that use the learning tools within this website to expand learning. <a href="http://sensiblestrategies.igrad.com">sensiblestrategies.igrad.com</a>

New Jersey Higher Education Student Assistance Authority	HESAA offers financial aid programs to middle schools and others to supplement their financial literacy programs, including Reach Higher and Real Money 101. <a href="https://hesaa.org">hesaa.org</a>
North Texas Higher Education Authority	inspirED iGrad is a personal finance program provided by inspirED outreach. The tool performs a financial assessment and provides recommendations to promote healthy financial habits. <a href="https://inspiredoutreach.igrad.com">inspiredoutreach.igrad.com</a>
Pennsylvania Higher Education Assistance Agency	You Can Deal With It helps soon-to-be and recent college graduates find debt management and budgeting advice to get them started on the right financial foot after graduation. Parents and schools find information pertaining to them in separate sections. <a href="https://youcandealwithit.com">youcandealwithit.com</a>
Rhode Island Student Loan Authority	RISLA currently offers financial literacy factsheets on topics including financing higher education, budgeting for your future, understanding credit, and avoiding identity theft. <a href="https://risla.com/financial-education">risla.com/financial-education</a>
The NHHEAF Network	The College Financing Tool allows students and families to explore the impact of saving on their future cost of college. For students who have been accepted to college, they can directly compare their offer letters to learn which school will be their best financial fit. <a href="https://nhheaf.org/financing/college-financing-tool">nhheaf.org/financing/college-financing-tool</a>
Trellis Company	MOSAIEC offers money management tools, tips, and information about college planning and paying for college including online tools and videos. <a href="https://mosaiec.org">mosaiec.org</a>
Vermont Student Assistance Corporation	A variety of online supports for students and families are available, primarily related to paying for education or training. Tailored resources are available for new Americans, adult students, those struggling to pay loans, and employers. <a href="https://vsac.org/i-am">vsac.org/i-am</a>



## One-on-One Financial Wellness Sessions for Midwestern Students

Midwestern University's financial literacy program, Sensible Strategies, promotes informed borrowing and educates students about financial concepts at no cost to them. Sensible Strategies provides multiple programs aimed at helping students build a strong foundation to handle complex financial decisions, including presentations and workshops with both one-on-one and group discussions, special events hosted with external financial professionals, and web-based tools to develop financial strategies and a personal repayment plan.

Starting last year, Midwestern has now added one-on-one financial wellness sessions, which have become one of the main features of the platform. The one-on-one sessions cover a range of topics including student loan repayment, budgeting, credit management, retirement and investing strategies, tax inquiries, business strategies, and more. In each session, a student (and in some cases their partner and/or parents) meet with a Certified Financial Education Instructor (CFEI) to discuss financial concerns and general financial well-being. Sessions are scheduled through Microsoft Bookings, which connects directly with Microsoft Outlook and Teams. Students have the choice of in-person or virtual meetings, and sessions are available Monday through Friday (and in some instances over the weekend).

## TRAINING AND PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

EFC members also offer expertise on a variety of financial literacy topics to school counselors, college outreach professionals, college administrators, and other professionals working with students and their families.

### Preparing Alaska's Postsecondary Stakeholders for the Better FAFSA

Alaska Commission on Postsecondary Education (ACPE) Outreach held more than 220 trainings and train-the-trainer workshops for teachers and counselors in Academic Year 2022-2023, covering a variety of topics such as Master the FAFSA, Funding Your Future, Generations: Understanding Your Audience, Alaska College and Career Advising Consortium (ACAC) Training, and AKCIS Trainings.

In the fall of 2023, ACPE Outreach will hold its inaugural Alaska FAFSA Summit to provide thorough training and prepare postsecondary education stakeholders in Alaska for the transition to Better FAFSA. Master the FAFSA training sessions will continue throughout the Better FAFSA launch for those who need additional training and support, along with regular communications and updates regarding the delayed release of the FAFSA and other developments.



# SCHOLARSHIPS AND GRANTS

Scholarships and need-based grants also play a vital role in increasing access to and success in college by reducing the total amount that a student may need to borrow to pay for college costs. There are many free college scholarships available online for students from various backgrounds and are often tailored to support their interests, situations, and professional goals. Unfortunately, the amount of information available can be overwhelming, and students often have a hard time getting started in their search. Similarly, all states and institutions offer some form of need-based aid through grants or financial assistance, but the application process can be confusing.

EFC members offer a variety of scholarships, and many administer state grant programs. They also serve as a connective tissue, helping students and families find and navigate these opportunities and successfully complete the application process.

## Improving College Persistence with a Unique Scholarship Program for Low-Income, First-Generation Students

The ECMC Scholars Program is offered in select high-need high schools in Connecticut, Oregon, and Virginia. Students enrolled in the program go through a rigorous two-year mentoring program in their junior and senior years of high school. ECMC Scholars receive regular newsletters with college planning information and can participate in a wide range of in-person and virtual college planning and financial literacy workshops.

ECMC Scholars who complete the two years are awarded a \$6,000 scholarship to pursue higher education at an accredited, Title IV participating school of their choice and are assigned a near-peer coach for the first two-years after high school graduation.

Initial data indicates that students engaged with their coaches tend to persist at a higher rate, on average, than their state and national peers. ECMC has awarded \$9 million to 1,498 Virginia students since 2005; \$6.4 million to 1,073 Oregon students since 2008; and \$4.5 million to 753 Connecticut students since 2012.

## SCHOLARSHIPS

In the last year, the 20 EFC members with available data awarded 563,806 scholarships, totaling nearly \$993.84 million to help students pay for academic expenses. Many of the scholarship programs operated by EFC members are unique in that they pair the opportunity to secure additional funds for college with financial education, college savings, and/or college planning tips and information. Others are designed to follow cohorts of students to and through higher education, with intensive support and guidance along the way. The following EFC members provided data about their scholarship programs for this report:<sup>4</sup>

Arkansas Student Loan Authority

Bank of North Dakota

Brazos Higher Education Service Corporation

Connecticut Higher Education Supplemental Loan Authority

ECMC

Georgia Student Finance Commission

Greater Texas Services

INvestEd

ISL Education Lending

Louisiana Education Loan Authority

Midwestern University

Minnesota Office of Higher Education

MOHELA

Montana Higher Education Student Assistance Corporation

New Jersey Higher Education Student Assistance Authority

North Texas Higher Education Authority

Rhode Island Student Loan Authority

South Carolina Student Loan Corporation

The NHHEAF Network

Vermont Student Assistance Corporation

4. Alaska Student Loan Corporation provides funding for Alaska Performance Scholarship, but data is not included in this report.

## Fostering Financial Literacy in Iowa with College Scholarships and Savings Deposits

ISL Education Lending operates several programs in Iowa that merge financial literacy education with scholarships and college savings. The Iowa Financial Know-How Challenge has been a long-standing lead program in providing financial literacy to high school seniors. Last year, more than 3,800 high school seniors registered for the challenge and experienced the Student Loan Game Plan and Return on Investment tools. To incentivize participation, fifty participants who completed the modules and a related assessment were awarded a \$1,000 scholarship.

ISL Education Lending also offers financial literacy programs for parents, including the Save Now Save Later program. Parents with students in sixth through twelfth grade can register and review the Parent Handbook tool to be entered into a drawing for \$1,000 deposits into College Savings Iowa accounts. Last year, 5,924 eligible parents registered for the program, and 25 college savings plan deposits were awarded.

In addition, Student Planning Pointers for Parents (SP3) provides parents of eighth through twelfth grade students with twice-monthly emails containing timely tips and tools on planning for education and training after high school. Parents who sign up for this service are eligible to be in quarterly drawings for one of 40 deposits of \$250 into a 529 college savings plan.



## Scholarships to Promote College Savings and Planning in Missouri

Scholarships to Promote College Savings and Planning in Missouri: The Missouri Scholarship & Loan Foundation (MSLF) was formed by MOHELA to make higher education more accessible and affordable for Missouri families through scholarships and low-cost student loans. MSLF promotes college savings and planning with the My Missouri (MyMO) Scholarship Promise Program. Through this program, high school students who would be eligible for the Pell Grant in college can earn \$2,500 each year by meeting college-going benchmarks. Students can earn up to \$10,000 total for use at any eligible Missouri institution.

As part of the requirements to apply for the program, the student and their family must open a MOST 529 account and contribute at least \$1.00 to start saving for college. The goal is to encourage families to start and continue saving. MyMO's first cohort will graduate from high school in 2025, and 24 percent of participating students and families are still making contributions into their account a year after they first contributed.

# GRANT AWARDS

States provide billions of dollars in need-based financial aid to support low-income or underrepresented students each year. Many EFC members administer their state grant program and work hard to ensure that eligible students receive information about the availability of funds and know how to apply. In the last year, eight EFC members also distributed 499,963 degree grants/awards, totaling \$1.549 billion to help in-need students pay for academic expenses.

The following EFC members provided data about their grant programs for this report:<sup>5</sup>

ECMC

Kentucky Higher Education Student Loan Corporation

Midwestern University

Minnesota Office of Higher Education

New Jersey Higher Education Student Assistance Authority

Pennsylvania Higher Education Assistance Agency

South Carolina Student Loan Corporation

Vermont Student Assistance Corporation

## Grants to Help Georgia Students Complete

This year, Georgia Student Finance Commission (GSFC) launched the Georgia College Completion Grant Program, which provides up to \$2,500 awards to assist eligible students with a demonstrated financial need who are within 80 percent of earning their credential and are experiencing a financial aid gap with their cost of education. Eligible postsecondary institutions are awarded an annual allocation to be awarded to their eligible students.

GSFC administers more than 20 state scholarship, grant, and loan programs, including the HOPE Career Grant, which is available to qualified students who enroll in majors specifically aligned with industries in which there are more jobs available in Georgia than there are skilled workers to fill them. GSFC also launched the HOPE High School Equivalency Examination Grant Program (HSE) this year for Georgia residents to assist with the cost of a state approved High School Equivalency examination through the Technical College System of Georgia.



5. Alaska Student Loan Corporation provides funding for need-based financial assistance, but data is not included in this report. Georgia Student Finance Commission administers both scholarship programs and grant programs, and award information was reported in aggregate and included in the scholarships section of this report.

# EDUCATION-TO-EMPLOYMENT PATHWAYS

Most jobs today require some form of postsecondary education or training, and this is increasingly seen as a necessary step to entering the job market and earning higher paying positions. However, finding the educational path that will lead to a given career can be challenging and complex. Increasingly, state leaders are working to connect education-to-employment pathways that equip individuals with the right information and resources to guide them to and through postsecondary education and into a rewarding profession. EFC members are working to bridge the gap between education and employment in a number of ways, including programs that incentivize students to follow in-demand career paths.

In addition, the four EFC members with available data distributed 1,954 non-degree grants/awards, totaling more than \$6.96 million which can be used by students to pay for a certificate or credential.

The following EFC members provided information about their education-to-employment programs for this report:

Alaska Student Loan Corporation  
Bank of North Dakota  
Connecticut Higher Education Supplemental Loan Authority  
ECMC  
Georgia Student Finance Commission  
INvestEd  
ISL Education Lending  
Kentucky Higher Education Student Loan Corporation  
Massachusetts Educational Financing Authority

New Jersey Higher Education Student Assistance Authority  
New Mexico Educational Assistance Foundation  
North Texas Higher Education Authority  
Pennsylvania Higher Education Assistance Agency  
Rhode Island Student Loan Authority  
South Carolina Student Loan Corporation  
The NHHEAF Network  
Trellis Company  
Vermont Student Assistance Corporation

## ADDRESSING SHORTAGES OF SKILLED WORKERS

During the period following the COVID-19 pandemic - commonly known as the Great Resignation of 2022 - more than 50 million workers quit their jobs, leaving behind job openings that are still affecting many industries today. Many states are now facing sustained shortages of skilled workers in critical areas such as manufacturing and construction, nursing and healthcare, and teaching and school support professionals. EFC members are working with state leaders in education and the workforce to design innovative programs that are helping to bridge the gap.

### Addressing the Teacher Shortage and Increasing Workforce Diversity in North Dakota

Like many states across the country, North Dakota is facing a critical and increasing teacher shortage. To help address the issue, Bank of North Dakota (BND) awarded fifty \$2,000 scholarships last year to students from the state pursuing a wide range of teaching specialties. BND provides scholarships through funding for local and statewide North Dakota Dollars for Scholars (NDDFS) programs, awarding \$217,000 to 140 students in 2023.

BND also funds a wide range of college planning workshops and events across the state aimed at improving access to postsecondary education for first-generation and low-income students and increasing workforce diversity. In 2023, BND helped 654 North Dakota low-income students to receive dual credit assistance, paying for tuition and fees and eligible books costs for up to two college courses per year while in high school. BND also provided funding for 667 first or final GED exams and the Indian Youth Leadership Academy, an annual week long leadership conference for Native American youth.



## Addressing Vermont's Workforce Shortage to Help Local Businesses

In 2022, Vermont Student Assistance Corporation (VSAC) worked closely with the state legislature to craft a number of new workforce programs focused on industries with high demand and high growth employment opportunities. These include the new Vermont Trades Scholarship Forgivable Loan Program, administered by VSAC, which offers funding for tuition, initial licensing fees, and exam fees for qualified recipients who enroll in high-need trades training and certificate programs.

With the support of the Vermont legislature, VSAC also initiated the Nurse Faculty Forgivable Loan Program and the Forgivable Loan for Mental Health Workers that both address areas of great need in Vermont.

In addition, with support from legislators and the Governor, VSAC announced the 802 Opportunity Grant in 2021, which provides free tuition at the Community College of Vermont (CCV) for Vermonters with a family income of \$50,000 or less. Through VSAC's research and advocacy, in 2022, legislators increased the household income eligibility threshold to \$75,000.



## EMPLOYEE EDUCATION BENEFITS

Employee education benefits offer individuals the ability to grow and develop knowledge and additional skills to further their career. Employers can help employees and improve job satisfaction and retention by paying for educational expenses, student loan repayment assistance, and/or providing tuition reductions or scholarship grants. EFC members work with employers to facilitate these types of benefits and support these efforts.

## Facilitating Tuition Assistance for Rhode Island Workers

In 2022, Rhode Island Student Loan Authority (RISLA) launched its Employer Tuition Assistance Program. The program encourages companies to offer tuition assistance or reimbursement programs to their employees by reducing the administrative workload associated with these education benefits. Employers can use RISLA's secure online portal and document upload process, document and eligibility verification notification reminders, funds disbursement, payment tracking, billing and reporting, and customer support to simplify the process.

RISLA also works with employers to offer programs to help their employees reduce student debt. RISLA provides partners with an exclusive interest rate discount for refinancing student loans, student loan repayment counseling, college planning services, free relevant topic webinars, and a robust financial literacy learning platform for their employees.

# NONPROFIT LOAN PROGRAMS

Twenty-one EFC members offer low-cost education and refinancing loans. These state-based and nonprofit programs feature low interest rates, low or no origination fees, and lower monthly payments and lower total debt than many other education loan options, including the Federal PLUS Loan program and for-profit education loan programs.

Most loan programs require a credit-worthy borrower or co-signer, resulting in extremely low default rates (often less than one percent). Many programs also include borrower benefits, such as income-based repayment, interest rate reduction options, internships, and benefits for graduates that work in a critical field in the organization's state.

For a more complete picture of the benefits offered by these programs, please view Appendix B: State-based and Nonprofit Loan Program Details at [efc.org/page/national\\_report](https://efc.org/page/national_report).

## IN-SCHOOL UNDERGRADUATE LOANS

Nonprofit and state-based education lenders encourage borrowers to first exhaust federal student loan limits before using non-federal education loans. Non-federal education loans are meant to fill a gap between the cost of attendance and available savings, free money, and federal student loans by offering borrower-friendly terms and benefits.

During the last year, the 20 organizations with available data made more than 75,645 low-cost education loans, totaling more than \$1.086 billion. A key feature of each education loan provided by nonprofit and state-based organizations is that they offer a fixed interest rate option and some also offer a variable rate option. As of August 2023, the average lowest fixed interest rate offered by these programs is 4.26 percent (with available deductions).



### A New Low-Cost Undergraduate Loan Option for Texas Students

For Academic Year 2022-2023, Brazos Higher Education launched the low-cost Brazos Student Loan, designed to help Texas undergraduate and graduate students save money when borrowing for college. The loan helps students cover the gap between the cost of tuition and other educational expenses when scholarships, grants, and federal Direct Loans are not enough. Brazos charges no fees and offers an Immediate Repayment option, and Interest Only option, and a Deferred Repayment option to students, which, along with multiple terms, allows students to create an affordable, custom student loan that meets their financial needs and goals. Brazos offers complete transparent pricing by posting its interest rates online at [studentloans.com](https://studentloans.com).

Brazos is also working to improve college access and affordability for Texas students through its Murray Watson Jr. Scholarship, which provided \$60,000 to Texas students in the last academic year. The scholarship program has a holistic award criterion that includes a focus on first-generation students and underserved communities.

## GRADUATE LOANS

Graduate school is expensive, in part because resources like scholarships and grants are harder for students to find. Most students will borrow student loans to cover some or all their expenses. When federal unsubsidized student loans are not enough to cover the cost of a degree program, graduate students may be able to save money by borrowing from nonprofit or state-based lenders that offer lower interest rates and have fewer or no fees.

### A Low-Cost, No Cosigner Loan for Graduate Students in Louisiana

Last year, Louisiana Education Loan Authority (Lela) introduced the LelaChoice Graduate No Cosigner Loan for graduate students who are unable to pay all college costs with a combination of financial aid, savings, and other income. The fixed interest rate loan has no origination fees and features a number of borrower benefits, including no interest capitalization, in-school repayment options, and interest rate reduction with autopayment.

Lela also offers a cosigner loan option for graduation students, as well as supplemental loans for undergraduate students and education loan refinancing. All LelaCHOICE student loan applicants are offered the Student Loan Game Plan within the application process. The module instructs borrowers to keep total borrowing to no more than the expert-recommended realistic first-year salary and shows them how to make choices now that can reduce future borrowing, personalize results based on earnings tied to college majors, and adjust choices to adjust outcomes. Using Student Loan Game Plan, students may find ways to borrow even less than their expected first-year salary.

## REFINANCING LOANS

Many nonprofit and state-based organizations offer education refinancing loans. Refinancing allows a borrower to consolidate high-interest rate education loans into a single loan, reducing their monthly payments and, in many cases, their overall debt burden.

In the last year, the 13 nonprofit lenders that provided data for this report refinanced 7,200 loans to help borrowers save money by offering lower interest rates and with fewer or no fees. As of August 2023, the average lowest fixed interest rate offered by these programs is 5.08 percent (with available deductions).

### Incentivizing Teacher Recruitment and Retention

Through support from the State of Connecticut, Connecticut Higher Education Supplemental Loan Authority (CHESLA) created the Alliance District Teacher Loan Subsidy (ADTLS) Program, which funded its first refinance loans in August 2022. The Alliance District Teacher Loan Subsidy Program offers a 3 percent subsidy on Alliance District refinance loans, as long as the teacher continues to teach in a Connecticut Alliance District. Alliance Districts are the most under-resourced districts in the state.

CHESLA also offers Refi CT, fee-free fixed rate loan with interest rates as low as 4.99 percent with a co-signer. Since the program launched in 2016, CHESLA has refinanced nearly 400 education loans, helping borrowers save thousands of dollars over the life of their loan. In comparing borrower Refi CT rates to the weighted average rate of the underlying loans, Refi CT borrowers reduced their interest rate by 2.47 percent.

CHESLA also helps individuals save money on the cost of education through scholarships and low-cost, nonprofit undergraduate loans. Each year, CHESLA provides about \$500,000 in need-based scholarships for those seeking an undergraduate degree or a healthcare or manufacturing certificate. Since the 2015-2016 academic year, CHESLA has provided \$10.9 million in scholarships, impacting 5,733 students.

# EDUCATION COMPLETION AND REPAYMENT SUPPORT

Students struggle to complete higher education for many reasons, with millions of learners leaving school each year without a credential. Those who leave with student debt and never earn a credential are three times more likely than college graduates to default on their student loans. EFC members strive to improve college completion rates and work closely with borrowers experiencing personal hardship or financial difficulties to offer guidance and assistance.

The following EFC members provided information about their support programs for this report:

Alaska Student Loan Corporation

Arkansas Student Loan Authority

Bank of North Dakota

Brazos Higher Education Service Corporation

Connecticut Higher Education Supplemental Loan Authority

ECMC

Georgia Student Finance Commission

INvestEd

Massachusetts Educational Financing Authority

Midwestern University

Minnesota Office of Higher Education

New Jersey Higher Education Student Assistance Authority

Pennsylvania Higher Education Assistance Agency

Rhode Island Student Loan Authority

South Carolina Student Loan Corporation

Trellis Company

Vermont Student Assistance Corporation

## Success Coaching and Counseling for Minnesota Borrowers

The Minnesota Office of Higher Education (the Office) offers student success coaching for first-time SELF loan borrowers. In 2023, the Office expanded the number of borrowers served by its student success coaching program. An independent evaluation of the program to study its effectiveness is being conducted and will cover the first five years.

The Office of Higher Education administers the Student Loan Debt Counseling (SLDC) Grant Program, which provides counseling for Minnesota residents who have student loans in repayment. SLDC grantee Lutheran Social Services (LSS) helps borrowers who are delinquent on their student loans to understand their loan and repayment options, manage repayments, and develop a workable budget based on the borrowers' full financial situation regarding income, expenses, and other debt. From September 2021 through June 2023, 94 percent of participants avoided default, 82 percent saw an increase in their credit score, and 93 percent reported an increase knowledge and/or adjusted personal behaviors for repaying their student loan debt.<sup>6</sup>

## COLLEGE COMPLETION

The transition to college can be a challenging time, particularly for first-generation and other nontraditional students. EFC members are working to help students navigate the college environment and reconnect after they have stopped out.

### Helping Stopped Out Students Get Back on Track

Trellis Company works with institutions, including 72 minority serving institutions through a partnership with Federal Student Aid, to re-enroll students with some college but no credential through staff training focused on reengaging stopped-out students as well as providing retention services via connecting students to on-campus resources. Trellis also offers one-on-one coaching for students needing a deeper level of assistance to connect with support services to maintain enrollment.

In 2022, Trellis expanded its efforts through research to help colleges understand their student populations, consulting to help colleges align their re-enrollment process with student needs, and direct student outreach on behalf of colleges. Early results show that 7.7 percent of students contacted by Trellis re-enrolled in their college.

Trellis also provides one-on-one coaching sessions to educate students and assist them with navigating career pathways and options. Trellis has also commenced engagement with local healthcare providers and the local workforce board to assess needs and interest for pilot opportunities in workforce development. Trellis is in the early stages of fostering relationships with local employers.

6. Numbers are reported from participants who agreed to a credit score check and/or completed a survey. From September 2021-June 2023, LSS met with 1,713 clients. Of those 1,713 clients, 95 percent agreed to a credit check.

# SUPPORT FOR BORROWERS IN REPAYMENT

Whenever possible, EFC members work with individual borrowers who have defaulted on their loans or are experiencing long-term financial hardship, to modify their repayment plan and help them stay on track with repayment. Through innovative programs and partnerships, and by leveraging years of experience counseling borrowers, EFC members proactively reach out to borrowers who are behind on payments and make every reasonable effort to offer assistance and get borrowers back on track.

## Preventing Default and Guiding Borrowers in Arkansas

Arkansas Student Loan Authority (ASLA) provides default management services to Arkansas colleges and universities to lower the state's overall default rate and the rates of individual schools. ASLA uses skip-tracing techniques to locate borrowers and acts as a counselor, not a collector, to help borrowers understand their options while guiding them to delinquency resolution.

In addition, ASLA partners with Edfinancial Services to provide state-of-the-art cohort management software, the Default Prevention System (DPS). DPS is used to manage data from multiple loan sources, monitor repayment activity, flag delinquent borrowers, and secure resolutions. Institutions can use the web-based DPS to accurately track their cohort default rate at any time during the two- or three-year cohort period.

Since ASLA began its default management program in 2013, Arkansas moved from being ranked 49th in the country to 27th in 2019. Even though the COVID payment pause has been in effect since March 2020, ASLA has continued this trajectory. As of the fall of 2021, Arkansas's default rate moved below the national average for the first time and continued to be below the national average into the fall of 2022.





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