



**MINNESOTA STATE**  
Board of Trustees

**AGENDA ITEM SUMMARY**

**NAME:** Joint Meeting: Board of Trustees and Leadership Council      **DATE:** January 23, 2024

**TITLE:** Supporting the State's Students

Action

Review and Discussion

*This item is required by policy*

**PRESENTERS**

Dennis Olson, Commissioner, Minnesota Office of Higher Education

Wendy Robinson, Assistant Commissioner for Programs, Policy, and Grants, Minnesota Office of Higher Education

Thomas Sanford, Assistant Commissioner for Operations, Minnesota Office of Higher Education

Nekey Oliver, Director of Government Relations, Minnesota Office of Higher Education

Keith Hovis, Director of Communications, Minnesota Office of Higher Education

Meghan Flores, State Grant/State Financial Aid Manager, Minnesota Office of Higher Education

Tara Winchester, State Program Administrator, Minnesota Office of Higher Education

Roger Moe, Chair

Scott Olson, Chancellor

Satasha Green-Stephen, Senior Vice Chancellor for Academic and Student Affairs

Paul Shepherd, Interim Associate Vice Chancellor for Student Affairs and Enrollment Management

Noelle Hawton, Chief Communications and Marketing Officer

**PURPOSE**

The Minnesota Office of Higher Education will provide an overview of key initiatives to support students to access higher education including: Direct Admissions, American Indian Scholars Program, and the North Star Promise Scholarship Program.

**BACKGROUND INFORMATION**

**[Minnesota Office of Higher Education](#)**

The Minnesota Office of Higher Education is a cabinet-level state agency providing students with financial aid programs and information to help them gain access to postsecondary education. The agency also serves as the state's clearinghouse for data, research and analysis

on postsecondary enrollment, financial aid, finance and trends.

Their mission is: "to support the pursuit and completion of a higher education credential by every Minnesotan, regardless of race, gender, or socio-economic status, in order to enhance our democracy, the State's economic vitality, and individual quality of life."

Through advocacy and actions, they work to:

- achieve student financial access to postsecondary education;
- enable students to choose among postsecondary educational options;
- protect and inform educational consumers;
- produce independent, statewide information on postsecondary education; and
- facilitate interaction among and collaborate with organizations that share responsibility for education in Minnesota.

The Minnesota Office of Higher Education is responsible for statewide initiatives such as:

- [Educational Attainment Goal 2025](#): Working to increase the percent of Minnesotans age 25 to 44 who have attained a postsecondary certificate or degree by 2025.
- [FAFSA Completion Initiative](#): The Office of Higher Education (OHE) will be taking part in the FAFSA Completion Initiative effective for the 2016-2017 academic year.
- [Minnesota P-20 Statewide Longitudinal Educational Data System](#): The Minnesota Office of Higher Education is a key partner in developing a P-20 student data system for Minnesota to provide educators and policymakers with more comprehensive data about student experiences and performance.
- [PIPELINE Project Dual Training Grants](#): The PIPELINE Project was established by the Minnesota Legislature in 2014 to expand dual training and apprenticeship programs in Minnesota. Additional legislation passed in 2015 created a grant award program to help employers develop dual training programs.

Minnesota State and the Minnesota Office of Higher Education work collaboratively on a number of statewide efforts:

- [Minnesota P-20 Education Partnership](#) - In 2009, legislation was enacted to formally create the Minnesota P-20 Education Partnership, which evolved from Minnesota's former P-16 Education Council. The Minnesota P-20 Education Partnership exists to create a seamless system of education in Minnesota that maximizes achievements of all students, from early childhood through postsecondary education and into the workforce. The partnership is charged with developing recommendations to the governor and the legislature designed to maximize the achievement of all P-20 students while promoting the efficient use of state financial and human resources, thereby helping the state realize the maximum value for its investment. The partnership is led by an executive committee comprised of leaders from Minnesota Department of Education, Minnesota Office of Higher Education, Minnesota State Colleges and Universities, and University of Minnesota. In addition, the partnership includes members representing other education and education-aligned organizations, agencies, and institutions, as well as the state legislature.

- [Next Generation Nursing Assistant Initiative](#) - After meeting the initial goal of recruiting and training 1,000 new nursing assistants, the Next Generation Nursing Assistant initiative received additional funding and offered a second round of free training. In the 2023 Legislative Session, the Next Generation Nursing Initiative received funding to continue the program into 2025.

In 2022, Minnesota State and the Minnesota Office of Higher Education were jointly recognized by the State Higher Education Executive Officers Association (SHEEO) with the Exceptional Agency Award for strong partnerships implementing grant programs that eliminate financial barriers, expand access to postsecondary education, and strengthen the workforce pipeline. This marked the first time that SHEEO presented an award jointly to two organizations.

### **Direct Admissions**

Every student is “college material.” This core belief is the driving idea behind the Office of Higher Education's new program called [Direct Admissions](#). This pilot program will notify graduating high school seniors from selected Minnesota high schools that there are multiple partner colleges and universities that are eager to admit them based on their academic records and their projected graduation date. This program will allow students to apply with confidence, knowing that the "will I get in?" question has already been answered with a "YES!"

Early in the school year, seniors at participating high schools who are on track to graduate will receive personalized communication, co-signed by their high school and the Office of Higher Education, that lists all participating Minnesota colleges and universities they are proactively admitted to. **Students must then complete a FREE admissions application for each of the colleges and universities they are interested in attending.** All participating colleges and universities are waiving application fees as part of the Direct Admissions program. All Minnesota State colleges and universities participate in the program.

### **American Indian Scholars Program**

The [American Indian Scholars Program](#) was established in the 2023 Legislative Session. This program provides a first-dollar tuition and fee-free pathway for Minnesotans eligible for resident tuition who are enrolled members or citizens of any federally recognized tribe or Canadian First Nation to attend a Minnesota State institution or the University of Minnesota. Students not eligible for resident tuition who are enrolled members or citizens of a Minnesota Tribal Nation are also eligible for the program.

### **North Star Promise Scholarship Program**

Beginning in fall 2024, the [North Star Promise \(NSP\) Scholarship program](#) will create a tuition and fee-free pathway to higher education for eligible Minnesota residents at eligible institutions as a "last-dollar" program by covering the balance of tuition and fees remaining after other scholarships, grants, stipends and tuition waivers have been applied.

By making college accessible and affordable, NSP is intended to have a positive impact on multiple fronts:

- Help stabilize enrollment at Minnesota public institutions of higher education;
- Serve as an economic driver for Minnesota by educating qualified workers who are much needed to fill vacancies in the state's labor force;
- Create a viable higher education path for Minnesota residents who may have previously thought education was not a possibility for them.

It is estimated that this program will impact 15,000-20,000 students in the first academic year.

### **Minnesota State Marketing for the North Star Promise**

As previously presented to the trustees, Minnesota State began marketing the North Star Promise at the State Fair in August 2023.

Following the board conversation about messaging, as well as an environmental scan and student focus groups, paid advertising copy was tightened to promote “Free College Tuition” to ensure clarity and avoid misleading students.

Paid advertising on Facebook and Instagram from September 1 – December 15, 2023 has been very effective, drawing **12,993** people to click on the ads to date, bringing them to <https://www.minnstate.edu/admissions/affordability.html>.

In addition, total applications across the system between September-December 2023 increased by approximately 17% as compared to the same time period in 2022.