Building Momentum at the State Level: NCAN Members Share Policy Priorities

Florida

OVERVIEW

The Florida state profile consisted of interviews with five participants from three NCAN member organizations in the state. It was evident that leaders in Florida were focused on workforce efforts, specifically career and technical education (CTE) and rapid credentialization, with all three organizations mentioning both issues. Interviewees also discussed accountability and performance-based funding in the context of access and attainment.

In discussing NCAN’s role and support, interviewees viewed NCAN as a thought partner and requested that the organization continue to use its capacity to provide members with information on state best practices and with opportunities to convene.

STATE POLICY CONTEXT

Notable policies in place in Florida related to attainment include acceptance to four-year institutions upon earning an associate degree, common course numbering across public institutions, and a 2+2 community-college-to-university transfer system, all of which make Florida a transient state where individuals can move between postsecondary institutions without losing credits. However, interviewees noted an urban and rural divide in terms of access and attainment.

Legislative activity in the 2021 session mirrors the topics discussed by NCAN members, with less state-level activity around credit award and transfer or postsecondary completion and attainment, and with more effort around postsecondary financial aid, affordability, and finance. According to Education Commission of the States, zero bills have been introduced related to credit award and transfer or postsecondary completion and attainment, while 16 bills have been introduced on postsecondary financial aid, affordability, and finance—two of which were enacted (H.B. 1261; H.B. 1507).

POLICY PRIORITIES

Florida interviewees came to a near consensus on NCAN’s policy priorities. All three organizations discussed a push for a mandatory FAFSA requirement in the state, highlighting recent legislation on the issue. All organizations prioritized need-based aid. One organization noted that the state does not have a defined need-based system, even though about 60% of FAFSA filers in Florida qualify for Pell Grant eligibility. Additionally, organizations prioritized state higher education funding more broadly.
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<th>HIGHER-PRIORITY ISSUES</th>
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The three issues that members identified as lower-priority were listed as such either because much of the work has already been done or because there is not a concentrated state effort on the issue. One organization mentioned that equitable free college is an issue susceptible to political pushback, and another noted that some believe concerns remain about the effectiveness of free-college programs. Members stated that transfer pathways are already in place and that the policy conversation there is less of a focus. Similarly, members highlighted existing supports for access and affordability for undocumented students, making that a lower-priority issue, but one organization claimed it would like to see an expansion of those supports.

**EMERGING ISSUES**

Many of the emerging issues discussed by Florida leaders were focused on the workforce and the value of a postsecondary education. All three organizations discussed various aspects of CTE, with two discussing rapid credentialization programs that offer employable certifications or credentials in three to twelve months.

Interviewees also recognized the impact of program policy changes made in response to the COVID-19 pandemic, specifically noting flexibilities provided to students around the Florida Bright Futures Scholarship. Members noted that the added flexibilities around community service requirements and testing deadlines may help more students make use of the program, with one organization stating that “giving equitable access to opportunities is something I would like to see continue, not just when there is an emergency.”

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—SURVEY PARTICIPANT
NCAN SUPPORT

NCAN members in Florida identified both areas of support and policy issues that they would like to collaborate on with NCAN. In terms of support, members would like to see NCAN continue to play a role in thought partnership, providing state examples of best practices, and facilitating convenings.

NCAN Thought Partnership: Interviewees regarded NCAN as an organization that provides an honest take on policy and as a partner in the policy process. They highlighted opportunities to collaborate with NCAN and other state leads to also further NCAN’s approach to various policy issues.

State Policy Research: Interviewees found policy research to be very beneficial, whether that came in the form of broad case studies or specific best practices from other states.

Across-State Network: All organizations expressed an interest in connections with peer states to learn about best practices and to work on common issues. Members discussed the utility of existing NCAN convenings, advocacy engagement opportunities, and state lead connections. One organization also mentioned the possibility of NCAN connecting states for access and attainment events, such as those for FAFSA completion.

Speaking on policy, members noted that they would like guidance in exploring mandatory FAFSA policies, a priority issue area for the state. They also wondered if NCAN could play a role in the standardization of data among institutions. Member organizations would like NCAN’s support in learning about other states that have normalized and streamlined the process of sharing data among postsecondary institutions.

NCAN would like to thank the following member organizations for their insights and participation in this research: Florida College Access Network; Broward County Public Schools; and LEAP Tampa Bay College Access Network.