



NEW ENGLAND BOARD
of HIGHER EDUCATION

ANNUAL REPORT 2025

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Mission

The New England Board of Higher Education (NEBHE) advances equitable postsecondary outcomes through convening, research, and programs for students, institution leaders, and policymakers.

Vision

Our vision is that everyone in New England will have lifelong access to affordable, high-value postsecondary education.

Strategic Priorities

The NEBHE Board of Delegates adopted these strategic priorities in March 2023:

- **Affordability:** Advance innovative, strategic alliances to increase affordability and financial sustainability.
- **Equity:** Expand equity-focused practices throughout postsecondary education.
- **Alignment:** Expand connections between postsecondary education and high-demand talent needs.

In pursuit of this mission and vision, NEBHE works across the six New England states to:

- Engage and assist leaders in the assessment, development, and implementation of sound education practices and policies of regional significance.
- Promote initiatives and best practices that support states in implementing important regional higher education policies.
- Advocate for regional cooperation and programs that encourage the efficient use and sharing of educational resources.
- Provide leadership to strengthen the relationship between higher education and the economic well-being of New England.

From the President



Dear Friends:

In a period of challenge and change the New England Board of Higher Education has continued to pursue our strategic objectives, which were adopted by our board in 2023, to support and strengthen the region's higher education ecosystem as we have done since our founding in 1955.

Those strategic objectives are:

Affordability: Advance innovative strategic alliances to increase affordability and financial sustainability.

Equity: Expand equity-focused practices throughout postsecondary education.

Alignment: Expand connections between postsecondary education and high demand talent needs.

I am happy to share highlights with you from the last fiscal year and how NEBHE supported higher education in New England.

- Tuition Break provided over 9,000 students access to the region's public colleges and universities for two-year, four-year, and graduate degrees at discounted tuition rates. These students saved over \$64.2 million in tuition with average savings of \$8,551 for one academic year; a robust example of an affordability initiative that NEBHE has led since 1957.
- The New England Transfer Guarantee, now scaled to all six New England states, has reduced barriers to transfer to 52 participating public and private four-year institutions for 1,362 community college graduates. This initiative has had a transformative impact on higher education access for students in the region, many of whom are from traditionally underserved backgrounds. Over 300 community college graduates have earned bachelor's degrees through the initiative as of the Spring 2024 term in the three states for which analyzed state-level data is being reported (Connecticut, Massachusetts, and Rhode Island).
- Over the past year, the New England Prison Education Collaborative (NEPEC) convened over 60 regional stakeholders through strategic gatherings and national conference sessions, while its virtual quarterly workshops drew 100 attendees. As part of its strategic planning work, NEPEC began co-leading New Hampshire's Corrections Education and Vocational Planning Group, established by legislation to enhance educational programming within New Hampshire's state prison system over a three-year period.

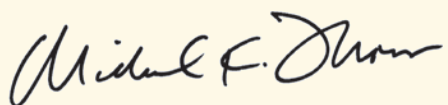
In April, NEPEC announced the RFP for its inaugural Accelerator Grants—allocating \$500,000 to support five higher education institutions in addressing gaps in the region's prison education ecosystems.

- Our work in Open Education is also equity-driven, with a focus on institutional course-marking to alert students to courses that use no-cost learning materials that ensure students are ready to learn on day one, not delayed by inaccessible course materials.
- NEBHE is in its fifth year of collaboration with Connecticut higher education institutions, employers, and the state workforce development team to create industry-validated academic programs in high-demand tech fields to address the shortage of workers in the state. To date more than 700 students have taken these courses in one of 15 programs, and in the program's latest phase, is focusing its efforts on delivering students in Connecticut with skills in Artificial Intelligence. Through this work, we are demonstrating the practical impact of our objective of alignment.
- Another example of our commitment to alignment is NEBHE's newest project, the Learn and Earn Challenge, funded by the Strada Foundation, designed to build a sustainable and scalable internship ecosystem across the region, acknowledging the positive career impact for students participating in high-quality paid internships and the retention benefit to employers. First phase activities included multiple convenings of business, higher education, and policy leaders on strategies to expand internship opportunities for New England students.

I welcome you to read more in this annual report and to share your ideas and questions with us. Every project we undertake is improved by the collaboration across the states that was highlighted in our mandate from the New England governors 70 years ago at our founding.

Thank you for your interest and continued support.

Sincerely,



Michael K. Thomas
President and CEO
New England Board of Higher Education

From the Chair



Dear Colleagues:

In the rapidly shifting environment of higher education, the needs of students and families form the foundation and purpose of the work of the New England Board of Higher Education, both by the board and the staff.

Our roots are deep in the acknowledgement by the governors of the six New England states who founded NEBHE in 1955 that higher education is transformative for individuals, families, communities, and local and regional economies. And our belief in that transformation fuels our mission to collaboratively work across New England to improve affordability, strengthen equity, and expand alignment between postsecondary education and the talent needs of the New England economy.

We do this work in the collaborative context represented by our board: legislators, state and local government officials, leaders of higher education institutions both public and independent, and employers, working with the staff of NEBHE and our many partners.

We gratefully acknowledge the investment of the six New England states in our work and the foundation grants that enable our initiatives to create new higher education programs in the region's prisons, clear the path for students transferring from community colleges to four-year institutions, and work to create more paid professional internships that set students on a path to success. And we annually celebrate the more than 9,000 students and families across New England who participate in Tuition Break to enroll at out-of-state New England public colleges and universities at a discounted tuition rate.

We welcome your interest and collaboration as we work for the day when everyone in New England will have lifelong access to affordable, high-value postsecondary education.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Mattie Daughtry". The ink is dark and the signature is fluid and elegant.

Mattie Daughtry
Board Chair, New England Board of Higher Education
President, Maine Senate

Tuition Break

In 2024-25, over 9,000 New England residents were beneficiaries of the New England Board of Higher Education's flagship program, Tuition Break. Since its inception in 1957, Tuition Break has served students who attend the region's public two-year, four-year, and graduate institutions by providing them a reduced tuition rate.

This year alone, the total tuition savings for regional students and their families exceeded \$64 million and contributed approximately \$168 million in total revenue for the region's public colleges and universities.

In recent years, Tuition Break implemented its flexible policy, allowing institutions to give the reduced tuition rate to all New England students, regardless of enrolled program. Tuition Break had two more institutions elect the flexible policy – bringing the flexible institution total to 36. More than half of the institutions that participate in Tuition Break are now fully flexible institutions. By evolving the program policies to meet the ever-changing landscape, Tuition Break excels in finding innovative ways to serve its students and institutions.

Tuition Break has seen an increase in the number of unique programs being offered by New England institutions. A few examples of these innovative and enriching programs are; Equine Studies and Management from the University of Connecticut, Conservation Law Enforcement from Plymouth State University, Human-Centered Technology Design from the University of Maine, and Agroecology from the University of Vermont, just to name a few. Tuition Break offers a wide variety of programs for students to take advantage of the reduced tuition rate.

In its 68th year, Tuition Break continues to support New England students on the path to an affordable and meaningful postsecondary education. The program's relevance is felt across the region evidenced by a steady rate in participation with an increase of 1.8%. Tuition Break remains singularly critical to the success of the mission to enable equitable, affordable, and relevant postsecondary experiences for New England students and families.



"The New England Board of Higher Education's Regional Student Program (RSP) Tuition Break has afforded many students from neighboring states the ability to obtain a top-notch degree in their chosen fields of study. We are proud to participate in this program and thrilled to share this opportunity with our students as they choose to enroll at UMass Lowell. UMass Lowell is now listed as a Carnegie Research 1 (R1) university, a prestigious designation used to identify the nation's top research institutions. Only 7% of four-year universities are designated R1."

Michael Belcher
Director, International, Multicultural and Regional Admissions,
University of Massachusetts Lowell



"At the University of New Hampshire, the NEBHE Tuition Break program helps make our R1 top-tier research programs more affordable and accessible to students across New England. By lowering barriers to entry, the program allows more students to take advantage of UNH's world-class faculty, hands-on research opportunities, and strong academic community. We are proud to partner with NEBHE in expanding access to the kind of rigorous, high-impact education that prepares students to thrive and lead in their fields."

Kimberly DeRego
Vice Provost for Enrollment Management,
University of New Hampshire

2024-2025 Impact Summary

\$64,271,116

Total tuition savings for students

\$168,341,447

Total tuition revenue to New England colleges and universities

9,001

Total participating students

\$8,551

Average savings per person

2,700+

Total academic programs available to New England students

66

Participating institutions

New England Prison Education Collaborative

Since the publication of the 2024 annual report, NEBHE has continued to expand its higher education in prison work. In February 2024, NEBHE was awarded five years of grant funding from Ascendium Education Group to establish the New England Prison Education Collaborative (NEPEC), which formally launched in October 2024. NEPEC builds upon the recommendations of the 2023 New England Commission on the Future of Higher Education in Prison.

2024-2025 Impact Statement

\$500,000

Grant dollars to be awarded to New England higher education institutions to spur growth in higher education in prison

Over 60

New England stakeholders convened by NEPEC in breakout gatherings at national conferences

100

Participants in the first two installments in NEPEC's quarterly workshop series

215

New subscribers to NEPEC's bimonthly newsletter

State Strategic Planning in New Hampshire

The New England Prison Education Collaborative (NEPEC) will support all six New England states in the development of state strategic plans that aim to expand access to and success in higher education in prison programming in their states. NEPEC began its state strategic planning work in New Hampshire in March 2025, leveraging the New Hampshire Corrections Education and Vocational Planning Group (CEVPG), which was established by legislation and which NEBHE Director Sarah Kuczynski has been working with since its first meeting in 2024. To accomplish its ambitious state strategic planning work, NEPEC has contracted with Cookson Communications for planning support, and Unlocked Labs to conduct a technological infrastructure assessment identified as a high priority by planning group members.

Additionally, to prepare states in the region for the strategic planning process, NEPEC began running a quarterly virtual workshop series, with its first and second installments taking place in March and June of 2025, respectively.

Coalition-Driven Work

Beyond the state strategic planning work, the team has created two additional stakeholder groups to drive forward this work. Established in March 2025, NEPEC's Higher Education Working

Group (HEWG) guides institutional engagement efforts. The 12 members of this group bring a diversity of perspectives to NEPEC's work, including lived experience of incarceration, experience directing correctional education, as well as experience in program leadership, accreditation, and federal financial aid regulation. In the short time since their inception, this group has collaboratively finalized the Request for Proposals (RFP) for NEPEC's inaugural round of five \$100,000 Accelerator Grants—aimed at supporting the expansion of prison education programs and reentry initiatives across the region. NEPEC also established a Regional Advisory Council (RAC), whose members serve as an advisory board informing strategic direction of the overall initiative.

Conferences and Convenings

Over the past year, NEPEC team members represented this initiative and NEBHE at several regional and national convenings. These included, in chronological order:

- The Criminal Justice Policy and Planning Division of Connecticut's Office of Policy and Management and the Institute for Municipal and Regional Policy at the University of Connecticut's School of Public Policy co-created event, Expanding Access: The Future of Second Chance Pell Education in 5 Connecticut cities across the state on successive days, Storrs, Hartford, New Haven, Bridgeport and Hartford.
- Ascendium's Higher Education in Prison Grantee Convening in Montgomery, AL.
- Education Commission of the States' Community of Practice Meeting, State Policy Barriers for Justice-Impacted Students in Kansas City, MO.
- The Coleridge Initiative's Annual Convening in Arlington, VA.
- The Alliance for Higher Education in Prison's National Conference on Higher Education in Prison in New Orleans, LA.
- The National Association of Student Financial Aid Administrators' PEP Convening in Washington, D.C.

At two national events, NEPEC hosted New England-focused gatherings for the conferences' attendees. These convenings served to strengthen regional networks and increase awareness about NEPEC's work.

Looking Ahead

The next six months of NEPEC's work will involve the announcement of the inaugural class of five Accelerator Grant recipients, the publication of the first NEPEC whitepaper, the release of the first NEPEC-supported state strategic plan, and the beginning of the next year-long state strategic planning cycle. These milestones and more will be celebrated at NEPEC's regional summit on February 6, 2026, in Bedford, New Hampshire.



"NEPEC's [state strategic] planning work in New Hampshire has provided transformative leadership to move prison education forward in the state. Through a legislatively established working group, Sarah Kuczynski has helped members of this coalition establish statewide goals and facilitated their working with Unlocked Labs to evaluate technological needs for delivering quality curricular opportunities to the incarcerated population and with Cookson Communications to articulate these goals in a cohesive plan capable of gaining traction with diverse stakeholders across the Granite State. Perhaps the most important result of this work is the creation of the relationships among higher education, corrections personnel, and other state partners since these relationships form the basis of the kind of trusting, meaningful partnership that will be necessary to accomplish statewide goals."

Senator David Watters

New Hampshire State Senator and member, CEVPG



"Working with New England Prison Education Collaborative and our partners at NHDOC has helped build a stronger foundation for prison education in New Hampshire. This collaboration provided valuable guidance as we prepared our first cohort for graduation in May 2025 and supported our progress toward permanent program status with the U.S. Department of Education. Regional partnerships like these are essential for increasing educational access and opportunity where they're needed most."

Leah Maciejewski

Vice President of Academic Affairs, White Mountains Community College, Berlin, NH, and member, HEWG and CEVPG



Sarah Kuczynski, PhD, Director, New England Prison Education Collaborative (NEPEC) and Transfer Initiatives, speaking at Ascendium Education Group's HEP (higher education in prison) Grantee Convening in Montgomery, AL.



Above, Sarah Kuczynski (left) and Quinn Barton (right), Project Coordinator, New England Prison Education Collaborative (NEPEC), representing NEBHE's work at the PEP (Prison Education Program) Convening, National Association of Student Aid Financial Administrators, in Washington, DC.

Transfer Initiatives

The New England Transfer Guarantee—now operationalized in all six New England states—unifies statewide transfer for students with an in-state associate degree.

The Guarantee to Northern New England

By June 2024, the Guarantee was successfully scaled to Maine, New Hampshire, and Vermont with the first cohort of students enrolling through the initiative in fall of that year. To date, 18 public and private institutions have joined across these three states. NEBHE plans to publish an enrollment report in December 2025 that will encompass deidentified student-level data from all six New England states for the first time. NEBHE's work implementing state-specific Transfer Guarantees across the region is made possible through generous funding from the Arthur Vining Davis Foundations, the Davis Educational Foundation, Lloyd G. Balfour Foundation, and the Teagle Foundation.

NEBHE provided small subgrants totaling \$44,000 to four-year institutions who applied for funding to carry out specific work to engage faculty around the Guarantee.

Southern New England Progress Report

NEBHE is preparing to publish its third annual Guarantee enrollment report highlighting program trends in Connecticut, Massachusetts, and Rhode Island. Data from this report was previewed in a May 2025 issue of Inside Higher Ed's Beyond Transfer blog.

NEBHE Transfer Initiatives on the Road

To get the word out about the Transfer Guarantee in northern New England, NEBHE has presented about the initiative at several key events. These include NEBHE staff speaking at the Maine Educational Loan Marketing Corporation Peer Learning session in September and hosting an October event to promote the Guarantee to advisors in the Community College System of New Hampshire. In the spring NEBHE moderated two panels comprised of institutional representatives from institutions participating in the Guarantee at the New England Transfer Association annual conference in April and NEBHE presented with a Community College of Vermont collaborator at the annual conference of the Vermont Student Assistance Corporation in May.



"The New Hampshire Transfer Guarantee has fundamentally smoothed the path for Granite State students seeking to continue their education beyond an associate degree. Students love it because they can clearly see the road ahead and know exactly what they need to do to gain guaranteed admission to their chosen four-year institution. Advisors love it because the barriers they once had to explain—application fees and complex credit transfer processes—are now gone. The Guarantee is helping students stay focused and feel supported to continue their academic

journey—a win for students and a win for the state."

Dr. Jennifer Cournoyer, Vice President for Academic & Student Affairs,
River Valley Community College, New Hampshire

2024-2025 Impact Summary

52

Participating four-year institutions across all six New England states

1,362

Community college graduates participated across Connecticut, Massachusetts, and Rhode Island

73%

Guarantee students who are enrolled full-time

47.5%

Guarantee students who receive Pell Grants

26

Median age of Guarantee students

95%

Student retention rate (one semester post-transfer)

328

Guarantee students who have graduated from participating four-year institutions since 2021

3.62 GPA

Average cumulative grade point average of Guarantee students upon baccalaureate completion

\$44,000

NEBHE provided subgrants to four-year institutions to engage faculty around the Guarantee

Still Curious: Learning for the Long Game

The NEBHE Transfer Initiatives team was invited to present at the 20th anniversary edition of the Annual Transition and Career Planning conference entitled “Still Curious: Learning for the Long Game” and sponsored by the Vermont Student Assistance Corporation in May 2025. The conference planners positioned the new opportunity for associate degree-holders to easily transfer to public and independent 4-year Vermont institutions as part of “models and methods that address preparation for post-secondary education and career readiness, access, and opportunity.” The well-attended NEBHE presentation was entitled “Reducing Barriers & Creating Opportunities: The Vermont Transfer Guarantee” and was a collaborative effort by NEBHE’s Rob Johnston and Nicole Stetson of the Community College of Vermont.



Representatives from two- and four-year Guarantee institutions in New Hampshire interface during a “speed dating” activity at NHTI – Concord’s Community College.

Policy & Research

NEBHE's Policy & Research team informs leaders in higher education and government through research, policy analysis, and capacity building. In 2024-2025, Policy & Research prioritized NEBHE's workforce alignment strategic priority by hosting a statewide Tech Talent Ecosystem Summit event in Connecticut, publishing the third installment of its annual economic impact report series, releasing a data report on the mental health workforce in New England, and expanding its portfolio of grant-funded work to include the Learn and Earn Internship Challenge. The team also hosted a Legislative Advisory Committee meeting focused on college student mental health and published a policy brief recommending strategies to support postsecondary student mental health in the region.



Tech Talent Accelerator

The Connecticut Tech Talent Accelerator (TTA) grant program supported by the Connecticut Department of Economic and Community Development and the Office of Workforce Strategy enables strategic partnerships between local technology corporations and higher education institutions to meet the evolving talent needs of the state. This collaborative initiative ensures that faculty members and corporate leaders work together to create and revise academic program offerings, reflecting the immediate and projected needs of Connecticut's technology industry.

Since 2021, TTA has supported two cohorts of grantees and has accomplished the following:

- The creation of 15 industry-validated academic programs in high-demand tech fields
- The enrollment of 701 learners in a TTA-funded course or program
- The delivery of 117 industry-recognized credentials provided to learners
- The facilitation of 109 internship opportunities to learners, with 15 leading to full time employment
- Assisted 116 learners who received an interview, job offer, or earned employment with a Connecticut employer

At the end of 2024, the Policy & Research team concluded the second iteration of the TTA project with a statewide Tech Talent Ecosystem Summit event. Attended by 180 lawmakers, business leaders, higher education faculty and staff, and students who participated in the TTA program, the event offered speakers and panel discussions and hosted collaboration sessions to share best practices, network, and develop strategies for future action on matters pertaining to workforce alignment in postsecondary education in Connecticut.

The Policy & Research team is currently working with the Connecticut Office of Workforce Strategies to initiate a third round of grantees focused specifically on emerging skills in Artificial Intelligence. The goals of this third iteration of the project—in partnership with the Business-Higher Education Forum—will be to create an AI skills framework that defines the types of AI

2024-2025 Impact Summary

180

Participants at the Tech Talent Ecosystem Summit event in Connecticut hosted by Governor Ned Lamont

5

Convenings of business, higher education, and policy leaders on strategies to expand internship opportunities for New England students

3

Data-focused publications

15

Industry-validated academic programs created by CT Tech Talent Accelerator participants to address industry talent needs

skills that are in demand in CT, and will fund a third cohort of institutional grantees to reskill/upskill Connecticut’s workforce, align postsecondary curricula to workforce needs, and expand AI-focused work-based learning opportunities for students.

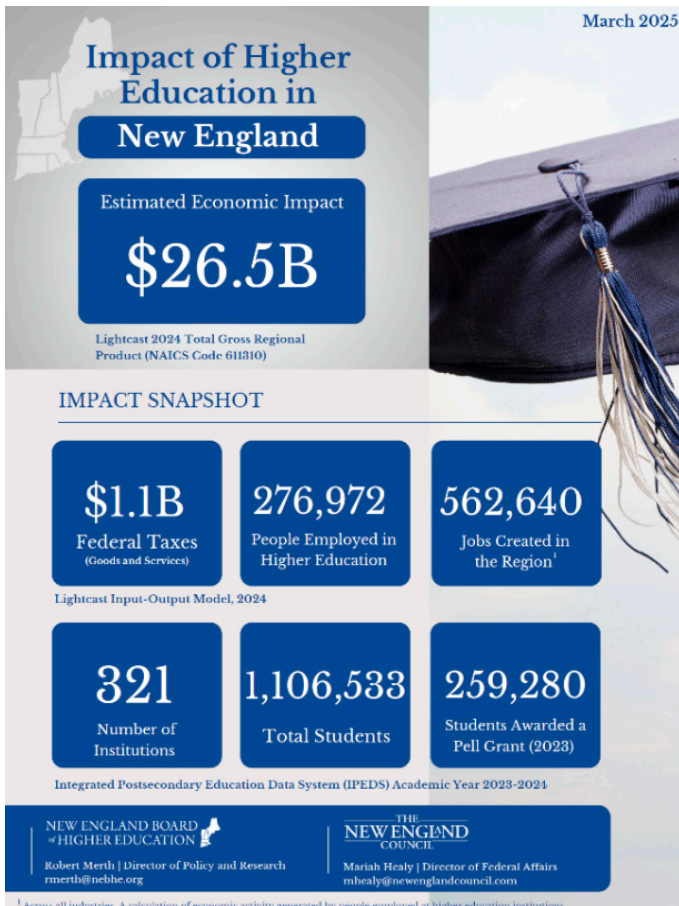
Publications

Economic Impact of Higher Education

For the third year, in partnership with the New England Council, the Policy & Research team developed a series of one-page briefs demonstrating the impact of higher education for each New England state and regionally. The New England Council used these briefs in interactions with federal policymakers and disseminated them to their audiences via their website and newsletter.

Regional Highlights from 2024-2025:

- **An additional 24,964 jobs were created** from 2024 to 2025 in the New England higher education sector.
- **1,106,533 students were served**, including 259,280 Pell Grant recipients.
- **\$1.1 billion in federal taxes generated** were from New England’s higher education sector.



Mental Health Workforce in New England

The “Mental Health Workforce in New England” report offers a detailed look into the shortage of mental health workers in New England.

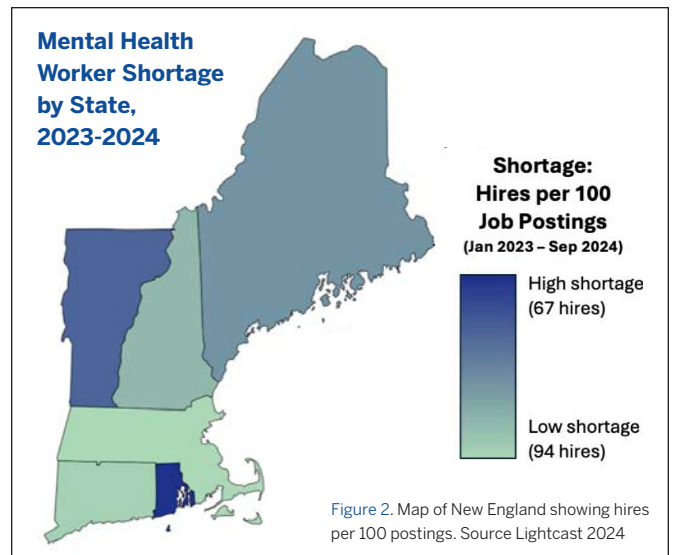
Key findings from the report include the following:

- Since 2023, there are between 6-33 unfilled mental health positions each month per 100 job postings in New England.
- This shortage is mostly driven by a lack of psychiatrists and followed to a lesser degree by social workers.
- Shortages vary significantly by New England state with Rhode Island reporting the largest shortages in the region.

College Student Mental Health in the Post-COVID Era

The “College Student Mental Health in the Post-COVID Era” report provides readers with a survey of the research and statistics documenting the rise of mental health challenges reported by students since the COVID-19 pandemic. Key findings from the report include the following:

- Nearly two-thirds of students who are considering dropping out of college cited mental health challenges as a primary reason.
- Preliminary analyses show a mismatch between the demographic composition of college students on the one hand, and mental health providers on the other in New England.
- There are several steps lawmakers can take to address these issues including attracting diverse talent in the mental health profession, increasing funding for campus-based mental health centers to prevent burnout, and improving other on-campus services such as career services, financial aid, and other supports.



Learn and Earn Challenge

Funded by the Strada Education Foundation, the Learn and Earn Internship Challenge is a multi-phase initiative designed to build a sustainable and scalable internship ecosystem across the six New England states. This project is a partnership with the Burning Glass Institute and is guided by the goal of creating 10,000 new paid, high-quality internships for postsecondary students over the next three years. This initiative will increase awareness of the economic value of internships, influence policy development, and foster equity in work-based learning experiences. Ultimately, it will contribute to national discourse on internships as a bridge between academic training and career readiness.

Since the launch of the project in October 2024, the Learn and Earn project team has hosted multiple convenings with lawmakers, state officers, business leaders, campus career coordinators, higher education presidents, and HR representatives from Fortune 500 companies such as Wayfair, Fidelity Investments, and Bank of America. In these convenings, the project team heard support for the relevance of the initiative for stakeholders and discussed the barriers, opportunities, and strategies to expand internships and other work-based learning opportunities for students in New England.

Many of the themes from these conversations are reflected in the second significant program activity that the project team has undertaken—the Learn and Earn Resource Hub. The Resource Hub is a compendium of information on the topic—including summaries of research studies, white papers, and NEBHE-authored case studies—that allow users to quickly learn about what is currently known about best practices in supporting and expanding high-quality internship and work-based learning opportunities. The Resource Hub is found on the NEBHE website.

Open Education Program

NEBHE's work in Open Education is based on the belief that all students deserve unfettered access to their learning materials on the first day of class, regardless of their financial situation. That's why NEBHE launched its Open Education program in 2019, to assist in and build upon coordinated state strategies, enhance and promote effective policy frameworks, and share best practices to accelerate the integration of open educational practices and open educational resources (OER) in the Northeast. NEBHE continues to work closely with public and independent institutions, states, and regional compact partners to learn how to best support the ever-changing landscape of open education.

No-Cost Course Marking Grant

This year, with generous support from the William and Flora Hewlett Foundation, NEBHE successfully completed the pilot No-Cost Course Marking Grant initiative and has been able to replicate this initiative for a second round of programming. Three participants from the last cohort — Johnson & Wales University (Providence, RI), New England College (Henniker, NH) and St. John Fisher University (Rochester, NY) — have returned for a second round grant. NEBHE has also partnered with three new institutions — Plymouth State University (Plymouth, NH), University of Maine at Augusta (Augusta, ME), and Central Maine Community College (Auburn, ME) — to support the initial phases of their implementation of no-cost course marking.



Representatives of participating institutions joined with NEBHE for a June 2025 planning retreat.

"Gathering for the retreat built an instant community and provided clarity around the course marking process. We left the retreat understanding the extensive network of support between

NEBHE and mentor institutions. We also came away with a deeper appreciation that creating a course marking system is both rewarding and complex. While our process may not mirror others exactly, we're all moving the needle to the good."

Cynthia Kitchin (left), *Director of Library Services*, University of Maine at Augusta and **Jessica Ludders** (right), *Senior Learning Experience Design Manager*, University of Maine at Augusta

How it works

Course marking assigns specific, searchable attributes to courses in the student information system, enabling students to make informed decisions about their course schedules based on financial considerations. This initiative is crucial to promoting the use of OER, as it alerts students at the point of registration to courses using no-cost materials. NEBHE's support has enabled these institutions to significantly expand faculty knowledge and use of OER in addition to ensuring equitable access to courses with materials relevant to student experiences that help close the achievement gap between lower-income and higher-income learners.

Lindsey Gwozdz, Fellow, Open Education, and her colleague at the University of North Dakota, Dr. Virginia Clinton-Lisell, published a peer-reviewed article in the journal *Open Praxis* based on research conducted during NEBHE's last Hewlett grant on course marking at independent institutions. The article "[Examining multiple layers of course materials cost: experiences of private college students](#)," looked at how students enrolled at independent institutions experience, navigate, and prioritize the cost of course

2024-2025 Impact Statement

\$90,000

Grant dollars directed to postsecondary institutions through NEBHE for the adoption, learning, and use of Open Education practices

6

Postsecondary institutions engaged in Open Education practices through a NEBHE partnership

929

Courses from No-Cost Course Marking Grant partners used OER or no-cost materials for Fall 2024

18,532

Students from No-Cost Course Marking Grant partners who were impacted by registering for no-cost and OER marked courses for Fall 2024

Compared to their (non-Pell recipient) peers, Pell grant recipients at independent institutions: spend more time and effort searching for ways to save money on course materials; experience higher levels of stress due to the cost of learning materials; and prioritize the cost of materials in course selection over other factors like day, time, instructor, and location.

Open Education Program *continued*

materials with other factors. Their findings will potentially inform course-marking practices at postsecondary institutions.

Kicking off the second iteration of the grant, NEBHE brought together this year's new cohort for a planning and workshop retreat in Dedham, MA, in June, 2025. The retreat included two panel sessions, the first of which was a livestreamed discussion on "Getting Started with Course Marking" with Dr. Robert Awkward, Assistant Commissioner for Academic Effectiveness at the Massachusetts Department of Higher Education, Dragan Gill, Associate Professor and Reference Librarian at Rhode Island College, and a Community College of Rhode Island student, Pasquale Camastro. The second session was focused on "Lessons Learned from the Field" and had speakers from last year's cohort institutions including Chelsea Hanrahan, Director of Danforth Library, and Alex Lattner, University Registrar, both from New England College; Kimberly Cavanaugh, University Registrar, from Johnson & Wales University; and Kaitlin Bonner, Associate Professor of Biology, from St. John Fisher University.

Open Education in New England

The 2024 national Open Education Conference was hosted in Providence, RI, in October – the first time the conference has been hosted in New England. NEBHE Fellow, Lindsey Gwozdz, Research Consultant, Dr. Virginia Clinton-Lisell, and the NEBHE team presented on course marking at the conference, expanding the awareness of the impact of course marking and the significance it has on institutional transparency and student agency.

NEBHE also brought together its regional Open Education Advisory Committee for a full-day in-person event in October to review our course marking work and research and gain insights from state representatives on the conditions of Open Education in their states. The committee includes members from Connecticut, Maine, Massachusetts, New Hampshire, New Jersey, New York, Pennsylvania, Rhode Island, and Vermont.



"Here in Rhode Island our state motto is Hope. So much of our work in Open Education rests on hope. Hope that we can provide more inclusive learning materials and culturally relevant pedagogical experiences for our students. Hope that there will be a day when we won't have to explain why a student is entitled to not only a free textbook but also one that affirms

their identities in ways that make learning meaningful and engaging for them."

– Opening remarks from **Lindsey Gwozdz**, *NEBHE Open Education Fellow*, 2024 Open Education Conference

National Consortium for Open Educational Resources

The four regional education compacts are collaborating to scale and sustain the use of open educational resources and practices across the nation. The work of this collaboration, known as the National Consortium for Open Educational Resources, is funded by grants from the William and Flora Hewlett Foundation to the Midwestern Higher Education Compact, the New England Board of Higher Education, the Southern Regional Education Board and the Western Interstate Commission for Higher Education.

The compacts created and launched the ncoer.org website last fall to publicize and share their work.

Through this collaboration, NEBHE has expanded its networks and shared experiences by co-hosting a community gathering at the 2024 Open Education Conference. Additionally, NEBHE Fellow, Lindsey Gwozdz, has co-presented with MHEC colleagues on no-cost course marking work through speaking engagements at WICHE's OER West Annual Convening in April 2025 and for CCCOER (Community College Consortium for Open Educational Resources) in July 2025.

Building on all these efforts, NEBHE will continue to support institutions with significant Pell-eligible student populations in implementing course marking, developing comprehensive resources and guides, and conducting research on the impact of course marking on various student populations.

Legislative Advisory Committee

The Legislative Advisory Committee (LAC) is comprised of legislative delegates to the NEBHE Board and additional sitting legislators from each state who have an interest in higher education. NEBHE convenes the LAC annually to strengthen state higher education policymaking in New England, promote interstate collaboration, and inform NEBHE's policy analysis, research, and program activities.

Student Mental Health and Policymaking

Over the past year, NEBHE convened LAC members to consider the timely topic of mental health needs of today's college students, exploring various state policy options and approaches. Key points from the convening included:

- Federal and state policies are evolving strategies to provide grants, programs, and/or operations funding for mental health in the postsecondary education pipeline.
- Beginning in 2023, 17 bills were introduced across New England related to mental health on college campuses. Specifically, 11 bills on increasing/improving mental health services, two bills towards mental health education, and four bills on supporting mental health-related fields.



Back Row: **Michael Thomas**, NEBHE CEO and **CT Rep. Gregg Haddad**, NEBHE Chair.
Front Row: **Charlie Morse**, Licensed Mental Health Counselor at Worcester Polytechnic Institute, **Grace Moore**, Former NEBHE Policy & Research Intern, **Zainab Okolo**, Senior VP Policy, Advocacy, & Government Relations at The Jed Foundation, **RI Rep. June Speakman**, at the Fall 2024 Board meeting in Kennebunkport, ME.



"NEBHE's Legislative Advisory Committee provides its members with a valuable opportunity to compare notes about how we, in our role as state legislators, work to make higher education in our state the best it can be for our students in these challenging times. I am grateful for the panels and workshops that NEBHE offers, and for the information the staff compiles for us about legislative action across New England. It informs the policy work we do in immeasurable ways."

June S. Speakman, Ph.D.

Rhode Island State Representative and Professor, Department of Politics and International Relations, Roger Williams University

State Authorization Reciprocity Agreements

State Authorization Reciprocity Agreements (SARA) provides a voluntary, state driven framework for the oversight of postsecondary distance education. Participating states agree to follow standardized processes for approving eligible institutions and managing interstate activities in a comparable and student-centered way.

NEBHE serves as the regional compact responsible for coordinating SARA participation across eight states: Connecticut, Maine, Massachusetts, New Hampshire, New Jersey, New York, Rhode Island and Vermont. This work is carried out in collaboration with the National Council for State Authorization Reciprocity Agreements (NC-SARA) and the nation's three other regional education compacts.

With the majority of U.S. states and territories now participating, and more than 2,300 institutions engaged nationwide, SARA continues to serve as a key mechanism for promoting consumer protection and access to quality distance education while reducing regulatory burden and cost.

2024-2025 Impact Summary

8 States

NEBHE manages SARA membership for six New England states plus New Jersey and New York

362

Colleges and universities in New England, New Jersey and New York participate in SARA

526,497

Students in the NEBHE region SARA institutions enrolled in distance education

\$100 million

Estimated amount that institutions in the eight NEBHE SARA-participating states would have paid in initial authorization fees to states without SARA

\$34.6 million

Estimated amount that institutions in the eight NEBHE SARA-participating states would have paid in annual renewal fees to states without SARA

Source: Institution Cost Savings Study

Strengthening Policy

NEBHE actively engaged in the 2025 SARA Policy Modification Cycle, which saw 32 proposals submitted, including 10 from Regional Steering Committees (RSCs). Additional proposals came from institutions, advocacy groups, education policy experts, and NC-SARA staff, reflecting broad national interest in interstate distance education.

Proposals submitted or supported by the NEBHE Regional Steering Committee focused on strengthening state authority, financial oversight, and institutional transparency. Key themes included:

- **More Robust Financial Oversight**

Policy Modification Proposal 25-0747 focused on enhancing state access to current financial information for SARA-participating institutions. This proposal is meant to allow the calculation of Federal Responsibility Composite Scores by entities other than the U.S. Department of Education when needed.

- **Expanded Public Information on Provisional Status**

The proposal sought to require institutions approved under provisional status to publicly disclose this designation on their websites, along with the reason for the status, placing information in a location where students are more likely to seek out information.

- **Equal Policy Application Across Sectors**

A proposed revision sought to affirm that all institutional sectors (public, nonprofit independent, and for-profit independent) would be affected by SARA policy on the same basis, regardless of their control or Title IV participation status, unless otherwise stated.

These policy themes, which will be voted on in the fall of 2025 by the NC-SARA Board, reflect NEBHE's continued commitment to a SARA framework that prioritizes student protection, empowers state oversight, and strengthens transparency and trust in interstate distance education. NEBHE also provided ongoing guidance to states and institutions to help interpret evolving policy and federal rulemaking within the context of SARA participation.

[View the current SARA Policy Manual \(Version 25.1\)](#)

Regional Collaboration

NEBHE facilitated monthly regional SARA leadership meetings, bringing together state regulators, institutional representatives, accreditors, and national partners. These meetings provided timely updates, a venue for peer exchange, and space to surface emerging questions related to compliance, authorization and federal policy alignment.

Keeping up with N-SARA

In 2025, seven of the eight NEBHE SARA states were awarded SARA State and Territory grants – with many using funds in part or whole to host statewide convenings of SARA-participating institutions. NEBHE partnered closely with state agencies to deliver programs tailored to local needs. Topics included:

- Professional licensure disclosures
- Federal negotiated rulemaking and new regulations
- SARA data reporting and use
- Institutional best practices and compliance tools

NEBHE continues to be recognized as a trusted convener and resource hub for state authorization and related policy and practice. As distance education evolves, NEBHE’s leadership remains grounded in collaboration, transparency, and student-centered oversight.

Follow SARA regionally and nationally at the NEBHE website and at <https://www.nc-sara.org/>

“The Office of College and University Evaluation values our collaborative and productive relationship with NEBHE, which supports us in carrying out our responsibilities related to the State Authorization Reciprocity Agreements.”

Andrea Richards

Supervisor of Higher Education Programs, Office of College and University Evaluation, New York State Education Department

Cost Savings

NEBHE, through its partnership with the Midwestern Higher Education Compact (MHEC), offers Cost Savings programs that were developed in response to recognized needs by postsecondary institutions. Cost Savings is an area of NEBHE that grows as needs are identified. All education institutions or public agencies in New England can participate.

For example, MHEC’s student health solutions are available to higher education institutions in the NEBHE region.

In addition, MHEC technology contracts are available in the NEBHE region to all higher education institutions, K-12 districts and schools, cities, states, and local governments.

For more information visit
<https://nebhe.org/costsavings/>

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