Dear Colleagues:

Over the past several years, K–12 and higher education leaders across the country have partnered to build seamless transitions from K–12 into postsecondary institutions. With the passage of the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA), we believe states have an invaluable opportunity to double down on alignment for student success.

The Council for Chief State School Officers (CCSSO), the National Association of System Heads (NASH), and the State Higher Education Executive Officers Association (SHEEO) have worked in partnership with Higher Ed for Higher Standards (HEHS) to develop an overview of key windows of alignment opportunity in ESSA. These include: (1) ensuring that college-ready standards and aligned assessments provide students a clear understanding of how to prepare for postsecondary, credit-bearing coursework; (2) developing student support systems that offer students opportunities to speed up and catch up; (3) strengthening teacher and principal training and professional development programs; and (4) aligning long-term student success goals and indicators with the state’s postsecondary attainment agenda. Over the next several months, HEHS will take a deeper dive into several of these areas, publishing resources to support cross-sector ESSA plan development and execution.

Many states have already seen vast improvements in student transitions through efforts to ensure that all students are college and career ready. We believe that through extending these efforts — to develop aligned K–12 and higher education goals, validate college- and career-ready standards and assessments, expand speed-up and catch-up opportunities for high school students, and strengthen educator preparation programs and professional development — we can accelerate the achievements to date.

We recognize there is still much work left to do to close persistent college and career preparation gaps. Efforts to support students in their transitions from K–12 to higher education should remain paramount in ESSA plans. As educators, we realize the tremendous opportunity for student success when we align our work, and we should use the ESSA planning opportunity to develop and strengthen our K–12/higher education partnerships. Together, we can work to deliver an education system that closes equity gaps; improves the earning potential of our citizens; and allows our states to cultivate a robust workforce, capable of sustaining and building a 21st century economy.

We encourage you to take advantage of the ESSA opportunity to strengthen partnerships with your cross-sector colleagues, and we stand ready to support your efforts.

Thank you in advance for your commitment to your students as partners in their success. This is an important milestone in our collective efforts to help prepare more students for college, for careers, and for life.

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