

Fiscal Year 2020-21

ANNUAL REPORT



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PREFACE

Greetings:

As the fourth Executive Director of North Carolina's State Education Assistance Authority (SEAA) and on behalf of the Board of Directors, it is my pleasure to submit our Annual Report for 2020-21.

SEAA is the state agency that helps North Carolina plan and pay for education. We administer numerous postsecondary and nonpublic K12 grant and scholarship programs, higher education loan programs, and the state's 529 college savings plans. Additionally, we provide outreach services to education professionals, students, and families on how to plan and pay for college, including working closely with our sector and external partners on North Carolina's *Finish the FAFSA* drive each October. As we move forward, I plan to expand our outreach efforts with an enhanced focus on adult learners. College Foundation, Inc. (CFI), our non-profit partner, administers many of these programs on our behalf.

While there are many accomplishments detailed throughout this 2020-21 Annual Report, there are a few ongoing initiatives that merit special attention:

- SEAA, along with the UNC System and the NC Community College System, recommended consolidating several State-funded postsecondary grant programs. This initiative will both eliminate confusion for students and families by providing a consistent, predictable formula and make more efficient use of State resources. This consolidation was included in Session Law 2021-181 and the new, streamlined program will be available beginning with the 2023-24 school year.
- SEAA also recommended the merger of two K12 scholarship programs for families of students with disabilities into one streamlined program to alleviate administrative burdens for families. I am pleased to say that these requested changes were also enacted into law in Session Law 2021-181 and the ESA+ program will be available beginning with the 2022-23 school year.
- SEAA and the NC Community College System are jointly administering the Longleaf Commitment Program, supported by federal COVID-19 relief funds from both the Governor's Emergency Education Relief Fund and Session Law 2021-181. This program provides additional grants to recent North Carolina high school graduates for up to two years at a North Carolina community college.

In my short time here, I have been amazed by and proud of the commitment and enthusiasm of the entire SEAA team. It has been a remarkable year and I hope this Annual Report presents a useful overview of the many programs we administer on behalf of the citizens of North Carolina.

Sincerely,

Andrea Poole
Executive Director

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LEADERSHIP

BOARD OF DIRECTORS 2020-21

James O. Roberts, Chair

Clay H. Jackson, Vice-Chair

Deirdra W. Hawkes, Treasurer

Jammison A. Applequist

Elizabeth P. Grovenstein, Ex Officio

Jennifer H. Haygood, Ex Officio

W. Rita Jerman, Ed., Effective June 8, 2021

Terri E. LeGrand

Janet L. Williams, Effective June 8, 2021

Former members of the Board of Directors (served until June 8, 2021):

Craig M. Barfield

Phoebe J. Emory

LEADERSHIP TEAM 2020-21

Andrea Poole, Executive Director and Secretary of the Board of Directors

Elizabeth "Betsy" I. Rozakis, Chief Operating Officer and Director of Financial Services/CFO

Leslie Karkanawi, Director of Legal and Regulatory Affairs and General Counsel

Wayne E. Johnson, Director of Guaranty Agency and Repayment Services

Kathryn C. Marker, Ph.D., Director of Grants, Training and Outreach

Mary Shuping, Director of Governmental and External Affairs

Retired during 2020-21

Elizabeth V. McDuffie, Former Executive Director

Julia R. Hoke, Former General Counsel

2020-21 HIGHLIGHTS

During the period from July 1, 2020, through June 30, 2021, SEAA:

- Awarded 121,802 State grants and scholarships for public and private higher education, for a total of \$267,166,624.
- Awarded 2,710 State forgivable loans for vocational service, for a total of \$25,215,431.
- Expanded college savings options for families by sponsoring the Morgan Stanley National Advisory 529, the industry's first advisory 529 plan. By June 30, the plan's net position had grown to \$182,914,467.
- Grew the North Carolina 529 plan, with a 24% increase in fund value and a 3.4% increase in accounts in FY 2020-21.
- Collaborated with myFutureNC and CFI via College Foundation of North Carolina (CFNC) to increase Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) completion among North Carolina high school students.
- Achieved a federal cohort default rate of 2.77% for SEAA guaranteed loans under North Carolina's Federal Family Education Loan Program (NCFFELP) for the federal fiscal

year 2018 (the most recent year for which final data are available), well below the national average of 7.3%. North Carolina has consistently been significantly below the national average default rate.

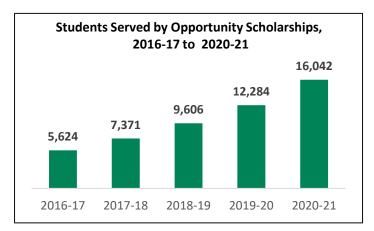
 Awarded the largest cohort of Opportunity Scholarships to date (16,042 awards) – an increase of 185% over the last five years.

COVID-19 RELIEF

In 2020-21, SEAA was tasked with administering several programs funded through various federal COVID-19 relief awards, for higher education and K12 scholarships, online learning, and personal protective equipment (PPE).

Relief funding will span multiple state fiscal years; funds awarded in FY 2020-21 include funding for:

- ✓ Student aid and online learning at private colleges and universities (\$29M)
- ✓ PPE at private colleges and universities (\$5M)
- ✓ Scholarships for students with disabilities attending nonpublic K12 schools (\$6.5M)
- ✓ PPE for nonpublic K12 schools (\$250,000)



HIGHER EDUCATION GRANTS AND SCHOLARSHIPS

SEAA administers student financial aid programs designed to help North Carolinians meet the cost of education at public and private colleges and universities. These awards include both State-funded programs as well as several private scholarships which are administered by SEAA. During the period from July 1, 2020, through June 30, 2021, SEAA awarded a total of 121,802 grants and scholarships for higher education totaling more than \$267 million from State and private sources.

State Grants and Scholarships for Higher Education

SEAA administered 120,237 State-funded grants and scholarships for higher education, for approximately \$263 million in awards. The majority of these awards are made through four programs: the UNC Need-Based Grant, the Need-Based Scholarship for Private Colleges and Universities, the Community College Grant, and the Education Lottery Scholarship.

Table 1: State Grants and Scholarships for Higher Education, FY 2020-21			
Program	Number of Awards	Amount Awarded	
UNC Need-Based Grant	51,610	\$119,069,881	
NC Need-Based Scholarship for Private Colleges and Universities	18,393	87,327,176	
NC Education Lottery Scholarship	26,337	32,743,138	
NC Community College Grant	20,057	14,314,094	
UNC Campus Scholarships	2,880	5,386,497	
NC National Guard Tuition Assistance Program	637	2,047,063	
NC Reach (Child Welfare Postsecondary Support)	323	1,951,718	
Total	120,237	\$262,839,567	

Private Scholarships for Higher Education

SEAA administers various privately-funded scholarships for students attending North Carolina colleges and universities. In FY 2020-21, SEAA administered 1,565 scholarships totaling just over \$4.3 million. The largest scholarship is the Golden LEAF Scholars Program, which is designated for residents of certain rural counties attending UNC and private institutions and is supported by the Golden LEAF Foundation.

Table 2: Private Scholarships for Higher Education, FY 2020-21			
Program	Number of Awards	Amount Awarded	
Golden LEAF Scholars	731	\$2,081,504	
Turrentine Foundation Scholarship	469	847,165	
Aubrey Lee Brooks Scholarship	65	807,738	
Penn Family Scholarship	192	246,450	
Thomas Holmes Carrow Scholarship	22	107,500	
James Lee Love Scholarship	17	87,000	
C.M. and M.D. Suther Scholarship	15	66,700	
Dr. Wade H. Atkinson Scholarship	12	27,500	
Dr. A.P. and Frances Dickson Scholarship	26	27,000	
Criminal Justice Scholarship	9	18,000	
Mayor Anthony Foxx Scholarship	5	5,000	
Jagannathan Scholarship	1	3,500	
John Sharpe Williams Memorial Scholarship	1	2,000	
Total	1,565	\$4,327,057	

NONPUBLIC K12 GRANTS AND SCHOLARSHIPS

North Carolina offers programs for students in kindergarten through twelfth grade that provide assistance to pay for certain expenses at participating nonpublic schools.

The **Opportunity Scholarship** provides funding for tuition and fees to income-qualifying families. The Opportunity Scholarship Program experienced continued growth and received 4,000 more student applications than in the 2019-20 school year. For the 2020-21 school year, the program provided 16,042 awards for a total of \$61,469,705.

Two programs – the **Personal Education Savings Account (ESA)** and **Special Education Scholarships for Children with Disabilities (Disabilities Grant)** – provide assistance with tuition and fees as well as funding to cover certain expenses related to educating a child with a disability. For the 2020-21 school year, there were 1,618 Disabilities Grant awards for a total of \$10,740,448 and 332 ESA awards for a total of \$2,936,250.

Many families qualify for more than one of the K12 programs. For FY 2020-21, 70% of ESA Program participants also received a Disabilities Grant, 13.5% also received an Opportunity Scholarship, and 10% received all three.

Table 3: K12 Grants and Scholarships, FY 2020-21		
Program	Number of Awards	Amount Awarded
Opportunity Scholarship Program (OSP)	16,042	\$61,469,705
Special Education Scholarships for Children with Disabilities (Disabilities Grant)	1,618	10,740,448
Personal Education Savings Account (ESA)	332	2,936,250
Total	17,992	\$75,146,403

HIGHER EDUCATION LOANS

State Forgivable Loans for Vocational Service in North Carolina

SEAA awarded 2,710 State-funded forgivable loans for vocational service totaling \$25.2 million in FY 2020-21. Loans are made for postsecondary study in areas of high demand and critical shortages. Repayment may be satisfied through vocational service or in cash for those not fulfilling the service obligation. A recent review found that 87% of these loans were repaid through vocational service.

Table 4: State Forgivable Loans for Vocational Service, FY 2020-21			
Program	Number of Awards	Amount Awarded	
Forgivable Education Loans for Service (FELS)	2,290	\$21,131,407	
Teaching Fellows Program (TFP)	216	1,662,255	
Transforming Principal Preparation Program (TP3)	167	1,345,439	
Principal Fellows Program (PFP) – renewals	37	1,076,330	
Total	2,710	\$25,215,431	

NC Assist Loan Program

In 2018, SEAA launched the NC Assist loan program, administered by CFI. NC Assist loans are higher education loans that help bridge the gap between the cost of attendance and other financial aid. These loans have no application, origination, or prepayment fees.

- The **NC Student Assist Loan** is available to credit-worthy North Carolina resident students and students who reside outside of North Carolina but are attending an eligible non-profit Title IV institution in North Carolina.
- The **NC Parent Assist Loan** is available to credit-worthy North Carolina resident parents of students attending any eligible in-state or out-of-state school, or out-of-state parents of students who are attending an eligible North Carolina school.

Table 5: NC Assist Loan Program, FY 2020-21 vs. FY 2019-20			
	6/30/2021	6/30/2020	Change
NC Student Assist			
Number of Loans Approved	1,259	1,094	15.08%
Loan Amount Approved	\$16,742,921	\$14,524,427	15.27%
Average Loan Amount	\$13,299	\$13,276	0.17%
NC Parent Assist			
Number of Loans Approved	266	224	18.75%
Loan Amount Approved	\$3,640,935	\$3,113,483	16.94%
Average Loan Amount	\$13,688	\$13,899	-1.52%
Totals			
Number of Loans Approved	1,525	1,318	15.71%
Loan Amount Approved	\$20,383,856	\$17,637,910	15.57%
Average Loan Amount	\$13,366	\$13,382	-0.12%

Loan Repayment and Guaranty Agency

SEAA continues to work to help students prevent delinquency and default on their student loans through loan management programs including loan forgiveness, monthly payment plans, and loan rehabilitation. In the 2020-21 fiscal year, SEAA:

- Processed 1,120 NCFFELP borrower default and other guaranty claims, totaling \$21,047,168.
- Administered loan forgiveness to 49 teachers under the federal Teacher Loan
 Forgiveness Program, totaling \$333,730. With this amount, the Authority has granted
 over \$24 million to over 3,600 teachers through this program since its inception in
 2002.

 Cancelled \$21.4 million of principal in State forgivable loan program indebtedness for borrowers repaying their debts through vocational service under program terms and collected \$6.3 million in principal and interest payments from borrowers who did not fulfill their vocational service obligations.

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the U.S. Department of Education (ED) paused collections on the Federal Family Education Loan Program (FFELP) for March through September 2020 and again in May 2021¹. This pause in collections required SEAA to refund involuntary payments, requiring a considerable amount of staff time and resources to adjust the processes to comply with the ED suspension of collection mandate and to refund payments previously collected. Additional detail on this work will be included in the FY 2021-22 annual report.

529 COLLEGE SAVINGS PLANS

The General Assembly has adopted a policy that "encouraging parents and other interested parties to save for the education expenses of eligible students is fully consistent with and furthers the long-established policy of the State to encourage, promote, and assist education" (G.S. 116-209.25) and directed SEAA to administer the State's parental savings trust fund (or 529 plan). Under this authority, SEAA administers two different 529 plans – the long-standing National College Savings Program (NC 529 Plan) and, beginning in 2020, the Morgan Stanley National Advisory Plan.

North Carolina 529 Plan

North Carolina's National College Savings Program, commonly known as the "NC 529 Plan," is maintained by SEAA and administered by CFI, to enable residents of any state to invest funds to pay the qualified education expenses of their designated beneficiaries on a flexible basis with certain tax benefits in accordance with federal tax law.² Investment options include the Federally-Insured Deposit Account, offered by the North Carolina State Employees' Credit Union, and Vanguard Investment Options from The Vanguard Group, Inc.

The NC 529 Plan experienced continued growth in FY 2020-21, with over \$3.3 billion invested (24% increase) and more than 155,000 accounts (3% increase). Table 6, below, includes information on total accounts, fund value, and contributions. Distributions for higher education

¹ The initial pause directed in "Dear Colleague Letter" GEN-21-03 paused payments through September 30, 2021. In August 2021, the pause was extended through January 31, 2022. In December 2021, the pause was further extended through May 1, 2022.

² SEAA is authorized by statute to accept, hold, invest, and disburse contributions, and interest earned on such contributions, from qualified parents and other interested parties as trustee of the fund. SEAA maintains all contributions and any earnings in a separate trust. By law, the assets of the fund must be preserved, invested, and expended solely for the purposes of the trust fund and held in trust for the parents and other interested parties and their designated beneficiaries.

were approximately \$147 million (3% increase over FY 2019-20) and K12 distributions were \$9.7 million (16% increase over FY 2019-20).

Table 6: National College Savings Program (NC 529 Plan), FY 2020-21 vs. FY 2019-20				
	FY 2020-21	FY 2019-20	Change	
Accounts				
Participants (unduplicated)	89,997	86,829	4%	
Beneficiaries (unduplicated)	141,740	138,761	2%	
Accounts (excluding terminated)	155,407	150,247	3%	
Average Account Value	\$21,466	\$17,980	19%	
Fund Value				
Federally Insured Deposit Account	\$169,407,834	\$179,616,036	-6%	
Vanguard Individual Funds	\$1,370,172,276	\$1,027,850,998	33%	
Vanguard Age-based Funds	\$1,796,114,763	\$1,486,724,584	21%	
Total Trust Fund Value	\$3,335,694,873	\$2,694,191,618	24%	
Contributions				
Federally Insured Deposit Account	\$12,187,934	\$14,081,719	-13%	
Vanguard Individual Funds	\$99,826,989	\$90,692,410	10%	
Vanguard Age-based Funds	\$166,194,476	\$145,608,041	14%	
Total	<i>\$278,209,399</i>	<i>\$250,382,170</i>	11%	

Morgan Stanley National Advisory 529 Plan

In 2020, SEAA contracted with Morgan Stanley to establish the nation's first advisory 529 plan. The Morgan Stanley National Advisory 529 Plan is offered through Morgan Stanley Wealth Management Financial Advisors to their clients in North Carolina and nationally. Costs associated with the operation of the Plan are paid by Morgan Stanley, and administrative proceeds from the accounts are shared between Morgan Stanley and SEAA. As of June 30, 2021, the Plan's net position had grown to \$182,914,467.

OUTREACH/FAFSA SUPPORT

SEAA worked in conjunction with the CFNC collaborative and with myFutureNC to increase completion of the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) completion among North Carolina high school students, including:

- Offered six virtual FAFSA Days in October 2020 for students and families in conjunction with North Carolina's Countdown to College, an annual campaign to support college access.
- Coordinated a series of spring FAFSA drive-in events on 20 campuses across the State.

- Provided publicity and training to education professionals for NC FAFSA completion tools, including the public-facing FAFSA Tracker and the *Finish the FAFSA* report for school-based staff.
- Conducted virtual financial aid training that was attended by 1,500 high school education professionals.

SEAA, through CFNC, continued to work with the NC Department of Commerce and other agencies on the new NCCareers.org website, including launch of the single sign-on process, which utilizes the CFNC.org log-in for both sites. The single sign-on provides a seamless experience for users seeking to research and prepare for careers.

In response to a decline in college applications, especially in economically distressed counties, CFNC launched the "Take Your Dreams Off Hold" campaign from March-April 2021 to encourage students to complete the three most important college enrollment steps: residency determination, FAFSA, and college applications. Preliminary data show a 12% increase in college applications in Tier 1 counties and a 22% increase in college applications in Tier 2 counties.

RESIDENCY DETERMINATION SERVICE

The Residency Determination Service (RDS) implements existing residency law to determine a student's eligibility for in-state tuition. RDS uses a centralized, computerized system and provides an appeal process for applicants who believe their residency determination is incorrect. RDS enables a student to use one residency determination for admissions to multiple North Carolina public colleges and universities and to demonstrate residency for State aid program consideration at all (public and private) North Carolina colleges and universities.

North Carolina's statutory requirement that a student be a resident for the purposes of tuition and State aid has been in place for many years, pre-dating the creation of RDS. Specifically, G.S. 116-143.1 requires that "to qualify as a resident for tuition purposes, a person must have established legal residence (domicile) in North Carolina and maintained that legal residence for

at least 12 months immediately prior to his or her classification as a resident for tuition purposes."

In FY 2020-21, more than 315,000 students used RDS, and the RDS call center responded to 91,899 calls. According to a December 2021 Residency Determination Service Data Analysis Update report for the period July 2020 through September 2021:

- Approximately 78% of all students received a Resident classification after entering tax and vehicle registration information and over 90% of all students completing RDS received a resident classification after entering tax, vehicle, and voter registration information.
- Continued improvements to the RDS process since 2017 are helping to reduce the percentage of all students who did not finish the RDS Online Interview, with the percentage declining, from 6.31% in 2018 to 3.99% in 2021.

³ Prior to RDS, residency determinations were made at the campus level for UNC constituent institutions, community colleges, and independent colleges and universities (for financial aid purposes). In 2013, the General Assembly directed that residency for tuition purposes should be determined in a coordinated manner and directed the establishment of "a coordinated and centralized process for residency determination that enables efficiencies within the public sectors of higher education and that simplifies the process for enhancing accuracy and consistency of outcomes." SEAA was designated as the agency responsible for administering RDS according to existing state residency laws.

FINANCIAL INFORMATION

As of June 30, 2021 (in thousands)⁴

As of Julie 30, 2021 (III thousands)		
Statement of Net Position	n	
Assets		
<u>Current Assets</u>		
Restricted Cash and Investr	nents	\$579,562
Receivables		140,946
Other Current Assets		13
Noncurrent Assets		2.474.442
Restricted Cash and Investm	nents	3,471,442
Notes Receivable		925,050
Capital Assets		2,088
	Total Assets	\$5,119,101
Liabilities and Net Position		
Current Liabilities		******
Accounts, Notes, Bonds Pay		\$354,301
Other Payables and Accrued	Liabilities	285
Noncurrent Liabilities		4.447.770
Accounts, Bonds Payable		4,117,773
Other Liabilities		6,291
	Total Liabilities	4,478,650
Net Position		
Net Investment in Capital As		2,088
Restricted for Educational A	_	531,752
Unrestricted for Student Aid	l Program	106,611
	Total Net Position	640,451
	Total Liabilities and Net Position	\$5,119,101
Statement of Revenue, E	expenses, and Changes in Net	Position
Revenues		
Non-operating Aid		\$78,482
Grants		178,695
Investment Earnings		23,606
Interest Earnings on Loans		27,887
Miscellaneous		18,247
Grants, Aids, Subsidies		(228,925)
	Total Revenues (Expenses)	\$97,992
Expenses		
Student Loan Service Cance	llations	20,698
Interest Costs		13,192
Other Administrative and G	eneral	40,316
	Total Expenses	\$74,206
	Change in Net Position	\$23,786
Net Position		
Beginning of Year		616,665
End of Year		\$640,451
	=	

⁴ Note: Audited financial statements are available on our website at <u>www.ncseaa.edu</u>.

APPENDIX A: MISSION, VISION, & VALUES

MISSION

We help North Carolina pay for education.

We are the State agency that promotes access to education by administering financial aid and savings programs, informing students and families about paying for education, teaching educators about financial aid administration, and advocating for resources to support students.

VISION

Working in effective collaboration with our partners, we are the recognized leader in service to North Carolina students and families, schools, colleges, and policy makers for innovative, high quality financial aid programs and activities.

VALUES

- **Respect:** We respect the contributions of our colleagues and value their commitment to helping the agency serve the people of North Carolina. We treat our customers, our partners, and each other with compassion, friendliness, courtesy, and honesty.
- **Professionalism:** We are dedicated to achieving the highest standards of integrity and ethical behavior, technical knowledge, and informed judgment.
- **Responsibility:** We expect efficiency, effectiveness, and accountability in service to our customers and to each other.
- **Innovation:** We strive to be forward-thinking and flexible in identifying business challenges and seeking creative solutions.
- **Teamwork:** We are committed to a collaborative cohesive work environment, understanding that our success depends on open communication and working together.

APPENDIX B: FULL LIST OF PROGRAMS

State Scholarship and Grant Programs

- Child Welfare Postsecondary Support Program (NCREACH) (Disbursement)
- North Carolina Community College Grant
- North Carolina Education Lottery Scholarship
- North Carolina National Guard Tuition Assistance Program
- North Carolina Need-Based Scholarship for Private Colleges and Universities
- Tuition Grant for Graduates of NC School of Science and Math
- UNC Campus Scholarship
- UNC Need-Based Grant

State Career-Specific Forgivable Education Loan for Service Programs

- Board of Governors' Dental Scholarship Loan (Repayment)
- Board of Governors' Medical Scholarship Loan (Repayment)
- Forgivable Education Loans for Service
- Future Teachers of North Carolina Scholarship Loan (Repayment)
- Health, Science and Mathematics Scholarship Loan (Repayment)
- Millennium Teacher Scholarship Loan (Repayment)
- North Carolina Optometry Scholarship Loan (Repayment)
- Nurse Education Scholarship Loan (Repayment)
- Nurse Educators of Tomorrow Scholarship Loan (Repayment)
 (Graduate Nurse Scholarship Program for Faculty Production)
- Nurse Scholars Program (Repayment)
- Physical Education-Coaching Scholarship Loan (Repayment)
- Principal Fellows Program (Renewals)
- Prospective Teacher Scholarship Loan (Repayment)
- Social Work Education Loan Fund (Repayment)
- Teacher Assistant Scholarship Loan (Repayment)
- Teaching Fellows Program
- Transforming Principal Preparation Program

State Loan Programs for Higher Education

- NC Assist Loans for Students and Parents
- National Board Certification Loan Program (National Board for Professional Teaching Standards)
- North Carolina EXTRA Loan Program (Alternative Loan Collections)
- Carolina Computing Initiative Loan Program (Alternative Loan Collections)

APPENDIX B: FULL LIST OF PROGRAMS

Private Scholarship Programs

- Dr. Wade H. Atkinson Scholarship
- Aubrey Lee Brooks Foundation Scholarship
- Thomas Holmes Carrow Scholarship
- Criminal Justice Scholarship
- Dr. A.P. and Frances Dickson Scholarship
- Mayor Anthony Foxx Scholarship
- Golden LEAF Scholars Program for Four-Year Students
- Jagannathan Scholarship
- James Lee Love Scholarship
- Penn Family Scholarship
- C.M. and M.D. Suther Scholarship
- Turrentine Foundation Scholarship
- John Sharpe Williams Memorial Scholarship

Federal Family Education Loan Program (Guaranty/Repayment)

- Consolidation Loans
- Graduate/Professional PLUS Loans
- Parental PLUS Loans
- Stafford Loans
- Unsubsidized Stafford Loans

Nonpublic K12 Programs

- Opportunity Scholarship
- Personal Education Savings Account
- Special Education Scholarships for Children with Disabilities

College Savings Plans

- North Carolina's National College Savings Program (NC 529 Plan)
- Morgan Stanley National Advisory 529 Plan

Other Programs Administered

- North Carolina Residency Determination Service (RDS)
- College Foundation of North Carolina (Information Dissemination)
- Finish the FAFSA (Information Dissemination)
- State Authorization Reciprocity Agreement North Carolina (SARA NC)
- Federal Work-Study State Contribution