Since 1955 Alaska has partnered with and benefited from the Western Interstate Commission for Higher Education (WICHE) through regional collaboration, resource-sharing, sound public policy, and innovation.

**WICHE ...**

**Provides strong return on investment**
- 1,355 Alaskan residents saved $13.6 million in 2019-20 through the Western Undergraduate Exchange (WUE), Western Regional Graduate Program (WRGP), and Professional Student Exchange Program (PSEP). These WICHE programs provide significant student savings on nonresident tuition at 170+ Western US public colleges and universities and select private health care programs.
- In 2019-20 WICHE Student Access Programs provided Alaska a 2,865 percent return on investment, relative to the state's annual WICHE dues and PSEP support fee investment.
- Alaska students and their families have saved nearly $246 million since the state began participating in WUE.

**Helps Alaska attract students from other states**
- WUE and WRGP incentivized 430 students in 2019-20 to invest their tuition dollars in Alaska, students who might not otherwise pursue an Alaska program.

**Bolsters Alaska’s health workforce**
- Through PSEP, Alaska students earn health degrees in fields such as dentistry, pharmacy, optometry, and several other health fields, more affordably and importantly—70 percent of them return to Alaska to practice in communities that need these health specialists, all at no cost to the state.
- Alaska's behavioral health workforce benefits from a Psychology Internship Consortium that WICHE initiated and supports with Alaska partners. The WICHE Behavioral Health Program prepares psychologists to pursue careers in rural and underserved Alaska communities.
- WICHE also provides contracted technical assistance and consultation on varied Alaska Division of Behavioral Health projects, including health-record programming and system enhancements, and on a recent publication that guides skill development for Alaska health and human services direct-care workers.

**Increases Alaskans' higher education access and affordability**
- The University of Alaska Anchorage, University of Alaska Southeast, and University of Alaska Fairbanks are three of more than 30 college and university members of WICHE's Interstate Passport® Network, which—by enabling block transfer of lower-division general education—reduces barriers to transfer of credits that students may encounter when transferring out of state.
- The University of Alaska Fairbanks and Kodiak College are among 20+ US colleges and universities that WICHE is working with to build an alliance of institutions with high proportions of American Indian and Alaska Native students, and to support their college and career success.
- The Alaska Commission on Postsecondary Education enlisted WICHE to help manage a federal College Access Challenge Grant designed to increase college matriculation and success among low-income Alaskans. Through the grant, Alaska was part of a WICHE-led consortium of grantee states sharing strategies, ideas, and practices to maximize efficiency and sustainability to improve student outcomes.
Helps Alaska allocate resources efficiently

- WICHE offers various data and policy resources to support better-informed decision-making. WICHE’s research projects and collaborations cover postsecondary completion, closing attainment gaps, adult learners, and multistate data-sharing to support educational planning and workforce development. WICHE staff serve as expert resources and provide technical assistance on finance, financial aid, articulation and transfer, strategic planning, student demographics, and more. Our website features Benchmarks, an interactive dashboard featuring the most recent data available on the West’s progress in improving access to, success in, and the financing of higher education, as well as other useful resources.

- WICHE recently collaborated with the Alaska Commission on Postsecondary Education on a US Department of Education grant application that proposed to assess how well the Alaska Performance Scholarship program has met Alaska resident, workforce, and economic needs. Such comprehensive evaluation work would have been cost-prohibitive for Alaska to execute on its own, but is possible when conducted in partnership with WICHE and supported by external funding.

Fosters idea sharing

- WICHE’s Legislative Advisory Committee provides valuable insights on trends and promising practices to Alaska’s legislative leaders as they build partnerships with leaders in other Western states.

- Alaska Commission on Postsecondary Education, University of Alaska Anchorage, University of Alaska Southeast, and University of Alaska System are members of the Western Academic Leadership Forum (the Forum), a consortium of academic officers at bachelor’s, master’s, and doctoral institutions and chief executives and chief academic officers for systems and state governing boards. Karen Carey, provost and dean of graduate studies, University of Alaska Southeast, is chair of the Forum executive committee. Likewise, seven campuses of the University of Alaska are members of the Western Alliance of Community College Academic Leaders (the Alliance), the sister consortium for academic leaders at two-year institutions and related state governing and coordinating boards. Evon Peter, vice chancellor for rural, community, and native education, University of Alaska Fairbanks, is a member of the Alliance executive committee. Both the Forum and the Alliance are hubs for the exchange of ideas and information, sharing resources and expertise, and collaboration on regional initiatives.

- WCET, the WICHE Cooperative for Educational Technologies, is the leader in the practice, policy, and advocacy of technology-enhanced learning in higher education. WCET’s growing membership includes almost 400 institutions, higher education agencies and systems, nonprofit organizations, government agencies, and corporations in all US states and several Canadian provinces. Through its Frontiers blog, convenings, and active online discussions, WCET keeps members informed of the latest in policy change, regulations, and trends in educational technology. And WCET offers a host of resources related to educational technology and faculty support, including advice and guidance for institutions on how to transition their face-to-face offerings to emergency online alternatives and how to increase quality in these courses over time.

- The State Authorization Reciprocity Agreement (SARA) is a voluntary, state-led initiative designed to establish comparable standards for US states and territories regulating postsecondary distance education. SARA expands access to postsecondary educational opportunities, while ensuring meaningful consumer protections for students and reducing regulatory red-tape for institutions. WICHE is responsible for coordinating the membership of SARA states in the West through the WICHE State Authorization Reciprocity Agreement (W-SARA). See nc-sara.org/directory for a list of member institutions.

- The State Authorization Network (SAN) provides institutional support in managing state regulations related to online courses and programs. University of Alaska Anchorage is a member.

- At the outset of the recent outbreak of COVID-19, WICHE quickly reacted, shifted to remote work, and continues to advance our mission. WICHE is facilitating peer-to-peer videoconferences for higher education leaders to connect and identify solutions to common challenges; following legislation passed in response to the crisis; and identifying how emergency funding for students and higher education institutions, as well as block grants to states, can be best used to support education in the West. The Behavioral Health Program is hosting webinars that offer guidance to support the mental wellbeing of their students, and WCET is providing updates and resources to help institutions address issues that arise due to the COVID-19 outbreak.

About WICHE and the WICHE Commission

For more than 65 years, WICHE has served as a trusted partner for states and territories in the Western region in order to address some of society’s most pressing needs. From promoting high-quality, affordable postsecondary education to helping states get the most from their technology investments and addressing behavioral health challenges, WICHE improves lives across the West through innovation, cooperation, resource sharing, and sound public policy.

The WICHE Commission oversees the development of WICHE programs and assures that the Western Regional Compact is carried out for the benefit of the citizens of the West. WICHE’s 48 commissioners, who are appointed by the governors of the 15 Western states and the US Pacific Territories and Freely Associated States, are leaders in higher education; they include state higher education executive officers, college and university presidents, legislators, business and community leaders, and other key partners. Camille Preus from Oregon is the 2020 chair of the Commission.