



FY26

EQUITY PLAN IMPLEMENTATION SUMMARY

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EQUITY PLAN IMPLEMENTATION SUMMARY

SECTION 1: INSTITUTIONAL PROFILE

Prompt: Provide the following information:

Institution name

Reporting lead (name/title)

Contact information

SUCCESS Plan team members



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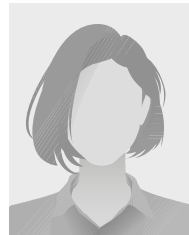
Governors State University (GovState) is a public, comprehensive institution located in University Park, Illinois, serving the diverse communities of the Chicago Southland region. Founded in 1969, the University offers undergraduate, graduate, and doctoral programs grounded in a mission of access, equity, and student success.



Derrick Brown

Assistant Director Of
Academic Resource Center

Governors State University was recently approved as a Strengthening Institutional Program by the Department of Education. As a Minority-Serving Institution, emerging Hispanic-Serving Institution, and Predominantly Black Institution, GovState is committed to advancing inclusive excellence, workforce development, and community impact. The institution serves a high proportion of first-generation, Pell-eligible, and adult learners and prioritizes strategies that improve persistence, completion, and post-graduation outcomes.



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SECTION 2: EQUITY PLAN FOCUS AND PRIORITY POPULATIONS

Prompt: Identify the focus areas guiding the institution's implementation.

- **Priority student groups identified in the institutions approved Equity Plan**
- **Top three strategies the institution focused on during FY25 and FY26**

Governors State University remains committed to a student-centered definition of success in which **ALL students—regardless of background or identity—are expected and supported to succeed.** While this commitment is universal, institutional data continue to reveal persistent disparities in outcomes across specific student populations. As such, the University maintains a targeted, data-informed approach that prioritizes student groups experiencing the greatest equity gaps, while advancing strategies that improve outcomes for the entire student body.

Priority Student Groups

Consistent with the approved Equity Plan, priority student populations include:

- Black/African American students, with a particular focus on Black male students
- Hispanic/Latine students, as part of our continued progress as an emerging Hispanic-Serving Institution
- First-time, first-year students
- First-generation and Pell-eligible students
- Student parents and caregivers

These groups were identified based on institutional data demonstrating disparities in retention, academic performance, and completion outcomes.

Top Three Institutional Focus Areas (FY25–FY26)

During FY25 and FY26, the University concentrated its efforts on three overarching equity-focused goals:

- 1. Reduction of D, F, and Withdrawal (DFW) Rates**
Targeting high-impact gateway courses with disproportionate equity gaps to improve course completion and academic progression.
- 2. Increase in Student Retention**
Advancing strategies to improve term-to-term and year-to-year persistence for all students, with a focus on closing equity gaps among priority populations.
- 3. Increase in Graduation Rates**
Strengthening pathways to degree completion to ensure more students successfully persist through graduation in a timely manner.

Detailed strategies, interventions, and analyses supporting these focus areas are outlined in the Appendix, including the University's Retention to Graduation (R2G) Plan and the DFW Root Cause Analysis.

SECTION 3: PROGRESS TOWARD INSTITUTIONAL EQUITY GOALS

**Prompt: Describe the progress the institution has made toward implementation of their Equity Plans:
What movement has the institution made toward the Implementation Plan/Timeline outlined in the Equity Plan?
What metrics were outlined in the Equity Plan for near-term outcomes, and what was the baseline and where are the metrics now? Include both (quantitative or qualitative) measures.
How is the institution tracking progress? (same as above?)
Based on implementation or SUCCESS Program feedback, has the institution revised, added, or retired any policy, service, strategy, or practice changes outlined in the Equity Plan?**

Response

Progress Toward Institutional Equity Goals

During Academic Years 2024–2025 and 2025–2026, Governors State University has made measurable progress in advancing its Equity Plan, transitioning from foundational capacity-building to coordinated, institution-wide implementation.

Infrastructure and Systems Development

The University established core structures to support sustained student success efforts, including the First Year Cohort Retention Committee, Student Success Committee, and a DFW Taskforce focused on gateway course outcomes. First-year advising was centralized within the Academic Resource Center, and the First-Generation Center was launched to provide targeted support. These structural changes have improved coordination, accountability, and service delivery across units (see Appendix A).

Early Identification and Intervention

GovState expanded its use of predictive and early alert tools to proactively identify and support at-risk students. The College Student Inventory (CSI) completion rate increased from 84% (Fall 2024) to 91% (Fall 2025), strengthening early insight into student needs. Data indicate that 34% of first-year students were identified as at-risk, with primary concerns including academic stress (22%), mental/educational stress (28%), and intent to transfer (35%). Importantly, high receptivity to services—mental health (48%), academic support (40%), and social engagement (41%)—has enabled targeted, coordinated outreach.

Expansion of Early Alert Systems (GSU STAR)

The institution strengthened early alert monitoring through progress surveys administered in weeks 2 and 6. While early-term participation fluctuated, Week 6 completion increased from 54% to 62% (Fall 2024–Fall 2025), and Spring Week 2 participation improved from 36.5% to 44.4%. Increases in flagged concerns, including attendance and risk of failure, reflect improved detection of student needs rather than declining performance, enabling more timely intervention.

Targeted Academic Support and Capacity Building

The Academic Resource Center expanded its Student Success Coaching model from one to four professional staff, increasing capacity for proactive outreach, academic coaching, and intervention. Coaches support students through GPA recovery planning, progress monitoring, and response to early alerts, contributing to improved persistence efforts.

Continuous Improvement and Policy Alignment

The University has refined practices based on implementation data and SUCCESS Program insights. Key changes include strengthening faculty engagement in early alerts, integrating CSI more fully into onboarding, and enhancing follow-up protocols for student outreach. Policy revisions, including required midterm grade reporting for GENST students, have institutionalized early academic monitoring.

Summary of Progress

Collectively, these efforts demonstrate a shift toward a coordinated, data-informed, and equity-centered student success model. While challenges remain—particularly in scaling interventions and ensuring consistent engagement—the institution has established a strong foundation for continued progress in retention, academic performance, and degree completion.

SECTION 4: STUDENT AND STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT

Describe how stakeholders shaped the institution's work.

- **How did students, faculty, advisors, and frontline staff inform implementation?**
- **What methods were used (surveys, listening sessions, councils, focus groups, etc.)?**
- **What changes has the institution made based on the feedback?**

Faculty, staff, academic advisors, and students have played an important role in developing and refining Governors State University's equity plan by sharing their experiences, ideas, and feedback. This engagement among various members of the campus community has been an essential element in identifying equity gaps and proposing solutions. Over the past two years, faculty, staff, and advisors have implemented the equity plan by charting student success and actively responding to student needs (appendix A).

During the initial development of the equity plan, the university relied on input from faculty, staff, and student members of the Equity Plan Team, as well as feedback from the broader campus community. The Office of Institutional Engagement and Excellence (IEE, formerly the Office of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion) conducted a Diversity and Equity Campus Climate Survey and has convened focus groups to discuss the campus climate during the development of the equity plan in 2023 and 2024. IEE is continuing to track the implementation of the equity plan by convening several focus groups in spring 2026.

Governors State continues to collect data on the implementation and effectiveness of the equity plan through several regularly administered surveys. The university launched the Campus Sexual Misconduct Climate Survey in 2023 and issued it again in 2026. Moving forward, this survey will be given biennially in odd-numbered years. The College Student Inventory (CSI) & Mid-Year Student Assessment surveys have been given annually to all first-year students since 2024. Developed by the enrollment management firm, Ruffalo Noel Levitz, the CSI and Mid-Year Student Assessment surveys use noncognitive indicators to identify at-risk students. Because the surveys are given each year, they help gauge evolving student needs and provide data that university staff use to develop strategies to support students. Additionally, IEE has conducted a faculty trend report to identify and propose solutions to faculty equity gaps (Appendix A).

Beginning in 2024, the Dean of the College of Arts and Sciences (CAS) convened a DFW Action Plan working group composed of CAS faculty teaching courses that have routinely posted high rates of D's, F's, and/or Withdrawals. Seeking to develop strategies to promote student retention and persistence, the working group gathered faculty feedback on possible reasons for high DFW rates in particular courses. Faculty members shared ideas and pedagogical strategies to lower DFW rates and began to implement plans at the course level. Tracking DFW rates semester over semester has been particularly helpful in gateway and General Education courses, where class sizes and student struggles remain relatively constant and predictable. Faculty feedback on strategies implemented, coupled with semesterly changes in course DFW rates, offers insight into which strategies are positively affecting outcomes in individual courses. Through the DFW working group, faculty implement key elements of the equity plan (e.g., addressing several of the equity gaps identified in the plan) and provide ground-level feedback on which strategies and classroom practices are working.

Based on stakeholder input, Governors State has developed several programs and initiatives to implement the equity plan. Notably, the university has established a First-Generation Center, launched a Financial Aid Awareness Initiative, and created a Student Success Committee and a First Year Cohort Retention Committee. As noted above, the College of Arts and Sciences has convened a DFW Action Plan working group. Deans, chairs, and coordinators have begun actively promoting faculty utilization of GSUStarfish, the academic early alert system, which can help identify struggling students and connect them to crucial support. Student Success professionals and academic advisors have created a comprehensive spreadsheet to track all first-year students. With this tool, university staff track flags raised through GSUStarfish, reach out to struggling students, follow up with students who are late to register for the next term, and work to assist students who may be at risk of leaving college. The Office of Career Services has also launched the 4-Year Career Compass to help students determine majors, choose career paths, and find employment. Additionally, students now have access to the ALEKS Math Assessment during new-student orientation, and financial literacy lessons have been integrated into the first-year Mastering College course.

Stakeholder feedback has been central to the implementation and evolution of the equity plan, particularly efforts to increase retention and persistence among first- and second-year students and first-generation students.

SECTION 5: PARTNERSHIPS AND RESOURCES

Describe how stakeholders shaped the institution's work.

- **Internal units involved (advising, IR, DEI, IT, registrar, etc.)**
- **External partners (community-based organizations, employers, foundations)**
- **Grants, philanthropic resources, or other funding used**
- **SUCCESS Program Targeted Technical Assistance or Communities of Practice participated in**

Governors State University advances its equity goals through a coordinated, cross-functional model supported by internal collaboration, external partnerships, and targeted funding.

Key internal units—including Institutional Engagement and Excellence, Institutional Research, Advising, the Academic Resource Center, Registrar, IT, and the Counseling and Wellness Center—work collectively to support data-informed decision-making, early intervention, academic support, and student well-being. This integrated approach ensures that student success is embedded across academic and student affairs functions.

External partnerships and philanthropic investments further strengthen this work. Support from organizations such as American Association of State Colleges and Universities, Interfaith America, Field Foundation, and Joyce Foundation has enabled the University to expand programming focused on pluralism, equity, and first-generation student success.

GovState also engages in statewide collaboration through the Illinois Board of Higher Education SUCCESS Program (see Section 7), aligning institutional strategies with statewide equity priorities.

Additional details are provided in Appendix A and the Student Enrollment Management Plan.

SECTION 6: BARRIERS, SUPPORT REQUESTS, AND SUCCESSSES/BEST PRACTICES

Prompt: Summarize the key challenges and what support would be most helpful. Also share any positive successes/best practices to share with the field.

- **Key policy, data, staffing, or funding barriers**
- **Capacity or implementation challenges**
- **Specific support needs (ex/ Technical Assistance, Communities of Practice, policy clarification, data tools)**
- **Successes/best practices to share with other institutions**

Key Barriers to Equity Implementation

Funding Constraints

Governors State University continues to advance equity goals within the context of structural, fiscal, and capacity constraints that impact the institution's ability to scale and sustain student success initiatives.

Facilities and Physical Capacity Limitations

Capacity challenges related to physical infrastructure present ongoing barriers to creating an equitable and engaging campus environment. The University has a critical shortage of mid-sized classrooms (serving approximately 30–40 students), with only a small number of such spaces available campuswide. This limits scheduling flexibility, instructional design, and the ability to offer sections that align with student demand.

Additionally, the campus lacks a centralized student commons or dedicated event spaces and needs adequate athletic and recreational facilities to support existing teams or expand offerings. Collectively, these facility constraints impede the University's ability to cultivate a robust campus culture that promotes student belonging, engagement, and persistence outside the classroom, which is particularly impactful for equity-eligible students.

Staffing and Faculty Capacity

GovState operates with a relatively small faculty and staff workforce given the scope, diversity, and complexity of its student population. This constrains faculty availability for mentoring, high-impact practices, and curriculum innovation and staff capacity to implement, sustain, and assess equity-focused initiatives. Limited human capital affects both instructional

and student-support functions, increasing workload pressures, and reducing the institution's ability to respond nimbly to emerging student needs.

Data and Technology Constraints

While the institution is committed to data-informed decision-making, several interconnected barriers limit progress, including: A limited number of personnel with access to institutional data; insufficient staffing dedicated to data analysis and reporting; and technology platforms that lack integration, usability, or analytic capacity. Together, these challenges hinder the University's ability to fully leverage disaggregated data to monitor equity outcomes, evaluate interventions, and support continuous improvement.

Capacity and Implementation Challenges

The combined impact of funding, facilities, staffing, and data limitations creates implementation challenges across multiple areas. Among the most pressing challenges is the inability to scale equity initiatives beyond pilot phases and sustaining programs once grant or temporary funding ends. Additionally, it becomes difficult to coordinate cross-unit equity efforts with limited staff capacity, or to embed equity metrics consistently into planning, assessment, and budgeting processes. These conditions require the institution to prioritize carefully, often delaying or constraining initiatives that would otherwise advance equity goals more rapidly.

Support Requests

To address these barriers, the following forms of support would be most impactful:

- Policy and funding advocacy aligned with the equitable funding model to close persistent structural gaps.
- Technical assistance focused on:
 - o Building internal data capacity.
 - o Improving access to and use of equity-focused analytics.
- Communities of Practice with peer institutions serving similar student populations to share strategies, benchmarks, and scalable solutions.
- Data tools and platforms that support disaggregated reporting, and equity dashboards.

Targeted, sustained support in these areas would significantly enhance GovState's ability to implement equity strategies effectively and at scale.

Successes and Emerging Best Practices

Despite significant structural and resource constraints, Governors State University has made meaningful progress in advancing equity through intentional, coordinated, and data-informed practices that can serve as models for similarly resourced institutions.

A key success has been the development of a proactive early-intervention framework that integrates multiple data sources to identify and support students at risk of disengagement. Through coordinated use of the College Student Inventory (CSI), Mid-Year Student Assessment, and Early Alert Progress Surveys administered via GSU STAR in weeks 2 and 6 of each term, the University has established a systematic approach to identifying both academic and non-academic barriers early in the student experience. These tools are intentionally paired with defined outreach protocols that differentiate between critical and non-critical alerts and assign follow-up responsibility to advisors, Student Success Coaches, and other campus partners. This layered model enables timely, personalized interventions before challenges escalate to course failure or stop-out.

The University has also demonstrated progress through the centralization and clarification of first-year student support structures. First-year advising has been centralized within the Academic Resource Center, improving consistency in communication, case tracking, and referrals. The establishment of the First Year Cohort Retention Committee, the Student Success Committee, and the First-Generation Office has created shared ownership of early persistence goals while reducing fragmentation across units. These structures are particularly impactful for first-generation and equity-eligible students navigating institutional complexity for the first time.

Another best practice is the intentional integration of student voice through high-engagement assessment tools. The CSI has been embedded into orientation (Journey Days) and first-year coursework (Mastering College), resulting in strong completion rates (91% in Fall 2025) and actionable insights into students' academic stress, mental and educational challenges, transfer intent, and receptivity to support services. Rather than treating these instruments as passive diagnostics, the institution uses results to drive coordinated, personalized outreach across advising, counseling, financial aid, career services, and student success coaching. This practice reinforces an equity-oriented approach that responds directly to students' self-identified needs.

Finally, GovState has advanced equity through cross-unit collaboration that frames student success as a shared institutional responsibility. Academic and student affairs units work collectively to address barriers related to finances, mental health, academic preparedness, and sense of belonging. Examples include coordinated outreach to students indicating intent not to reenroll, integration of financial literacy into first-year curricula, and (when funds are available) the use of retention waivers and flexible debt-hold practices to reduce financial obstacles to persistence. These strategies demonstrate how institutions with limited resources can maximize impact through alignment, communication, and coordinated action.

Together, these practices reflect an emerging culture of equity-minded, data-informed decision-making at Governors State University. They offer transferable lessons for other institutions serving high proportions of equity-eligible students while operating within constrained fiscal and structural environments.

SECTION 7: ENGAGEMENT WITH STATEWIDE SUPPORT OPPORTUNITIES

Prompt:

- **Describe how the institution is using statewide support in the planning process.**
- **Participation in Communities of Practice**
- **Use of Targeted Technical Assistance**
- **Engagement with Knowledge Sessions or Podcasts**
- **SUCCESS Program feedback used to strengthen implementation**

Governors State University has actively engaged with statewide support through the SUCCESS Program to strengthen its equity-focused student success planning and implementation. These supports have informed both the institution's strategic direction and its operational approach to addressing disparities in retention, academic performance, and completion.

Participation in Communities of Practice

GovState participated in SUCCESS Program Communities of Practice, with a particular focus on DFW reduction in gateway courses. A key takeaway from this engagement was the application of root cause analysis as a structured, data-informed method for identifying barriers to student success. This approach directly informed the University's internal analysis and planning processes, including the development of a comprehensive driver diagram and intervention strategies aimed at reducing DFW rates and improving course success outcomes.

Through this work, the institution examined contributing factors such as instructional practices, assessment alignment, early intervention systems, and coordination of academic support. Additional root cause analyses, including a "5 Whys" framework, further clarified systemic issues impacting student performance, such as inconsistencies in course design, limited early support structures, and variation in instructional practices across sections. These insights were reinforced through broader systems analysis, including identification of structural and student-related barriers impacting success in gateway courses (Appendix A).

Use of Targeted Technical Assistance

While GovState did not formally utilize targeted technical assistance during this reporting period, the institution leveraged internal expertise and cross-functional collaboration to apply SUCCESS Program frameworks and tools within its own context.

Engagement with Knowledge Sessions and Podcasts

The GovState SUCCESS Initiative team engaged in regular team meetings that included the review and discussion of all SUCCESS Program podcasts and knowledge-sharing sessions. These discussions provided opportunities to reflect on emerging practices, align institutional strategies with statewide insights, and reinforce a shared understanding of student success priorities across units.

Use of SUCCESS Program Feedback

Feedback and insights from the SUCCESS Program informed the institution's ongoing implementation efforts. One key takeaway is the recognition that broader participation in SUCCESS-related meetings and engagements across the institution would further strengthen alignment, shared learning, and collective ownership of student success goals. As a result, GovState is working to expand engagement beyond the core team to ensure that more units benefit from statewide collaboration and knowledge exchange.

SECTION 8: INSTITUTIONAL APPROVALS AND CONTACT INFORMATION

Prompt:

Executive Approver

Name / Title Signature / Date

Primary Contact for Follow-Up Name / Title / Email / Phon

Response

Executive Approver

Dr. Joyce Ester, President

Signature

Date

Primary Contact

Dr. Joi Patterson, Chief of Institutional Engagement and Excellence

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APPENDIX A

PURPOSE

Provide concise, relevant evidence illustrating how the institutional strategies are being implemented and what early impact is occurring.

ITEMS	FOCUS	LIST
1	Implementation artifacts (timelines, Gantt charts, project trackers)	Retention to Graduation Plan Retention to Graduation Progress Report DFW Action Planning worksheet Student Success tracking sheet
2	Revised policies or procedures (ex/ placement, re-entry, SAP appeals)	Satisfactory Academic Progress (SAP) Policy revision
3	Process maps showing changes (early alert workflow, advising triage, root cause analysis, etc.)	Fishbone Diagram Primary Driver diagram 5 Why's document
4	Training documentation (agendas, slides, rosters)	PD Relational Teaching
5	Technology examples (nudges, chatbot scripts, degree planning screenshots)	Undocumented Student Ally Training Safe Zone Training AI Training
6	Communications/outreach materials	Mastering College Syllabus LEAP website
7	Engagement documentation (listening session notes, surveys, advisory meetings)	Campus Climate Survey Report – 2023 Campus Climate Survey Preliminary Report - 2026 College Student Inventory (CSI) Student Forums and Listening Session
8	Other	2024 Equity Plan