

PASSHE Q&A

February 2026

This Q&A addresses common questions by providing a concise, practical understanding of the key financial, operational, and strategic issues shaping PASSHE and its universities.

- 1. How dependent is PASSHE on state appropriations?** PASSHE relies on state funding for a substantial portion of its operating budget—more than many comparable public university systems. These appropriations help keep tuition below national averages and sustain campuses with limited local revenue capacity.
- 2. What can we expect in terms of enrollment at PASSHE universities?** While the system saw its first overall increase in enrollment this fall, enrollment challenges will persist due to a demographic decline in Pennsylvania and the broader Northeast, increased competition from private and out-of-state institutions, and growing student demand for flexible, career-aligned programs. These pressures affect nearly all regional public universities.
- 3. What is the “enrollment cliff,” and how is it affecting PASSHE?** The enrollment cliff refers to a significant, long-anticipated drop in the number of high-school graduates beginning mid-decade. PASSHE expects continued enrollment pressure, particularly at campuses located in regions with shrinking populations.
- 4. Is PASSHE restructuring the academic program array?** Yes. PASSHE universities are realigning their academic offerings to better match workforce needs, reduce duplication across campuses, and address the high cost of maintaining underenrolled programs. This approach strengthens long-term sustainability by ensuring resources are invested in programs with the greatest impact for students, employers, and the state’s economy.
- 5. What steps is PASSHE taking to improve operational efficiency?** PASSHE is expanding shared services, consolidating administrative functions, and redesigning academic offerings to reduce duplication. These efforts aim to lower costs while maintaining academic quality and student support.
- 6. How is PASSHE positioning itself to meet Pennsylvania’s workforce needs?** PASSHE universities are expanding their programs in high-demand fields—such as healthcare, education, business, and STEM—while consolidating or redesigning programs with low enrollment. The goal is to prepare well-rounded graduates who can fill critical workforce shortages across the Commonwealth.
- 7. How does program sharing help manage costs and expand access?** Program sharing allows multiple campuses to jointly deliver academic programs, enabling students to access courses and majors not available locally. This approach supports smaller campuses and preserves program breadth despite enrollment pressures.
- 8. Is PASSHE strengthening its marketing and outreach?** Yes. Understanding that students choose a university and not a system, PASSHE universities leverage their regional brand strength to reach more students. At the same time, the System is increasing joint efforts with the universities to convey the value of being part of PASSHE.

- 9. How can one-time funding strengthen PASSHE's long-term stability, and what needs does it help address?** PASSHE universities have significant one-time needs — including the demolition of unused facilities, deferred maintenance, and technology infrastructure upgrades — that fall outside recurring operating requests. Investments in these areas would help reduce long-term costs and improve campus functionality.
- 10. Why is PASSHE requesting a 5% appropriation increase?** This request — approved by the Board of Governors in October 2025 — will help PASSHE universities maintain affordability, stabilize campus budgets, and avoid shifting costs onto students. State investment keeps tuition low and ensures campuses can continue offering essential academic and student-support services.
- 11. What happens if PASSHE does not receive its requested 5% funding increase?** Without the requested increase, campuses will face continued budget pressure, which could lead to tuition increases, reductions in academic or student-support offerings, or delays in critical investments in facilities and services.
- 12. Why does PASSHE emphasize freezing tuition as a priority?** Freezing tuition helps maintain affordability and reduces sticker-price barriers that can discourage low-income and first-generation students from enrolling. It also supports statewide goals for access and workforce development.
- 13. How is PASSHE approaching long-term growth amid demographic pressures?** PASSHE acknowledges statewide demographic decline and increased competition. Universities are expanding outreach to adult learners and those with some college credit but no degree, reimagining their program array, and exploring new delivery models to stabilize and grow enrollment.
- 14. How is PASSHE helping faculty prepare for the future?** Nearly 20% of faculty thus far have participated in a nationally recognized teaching certification program as part of a large-scale effort to support faculty in strengthening instruction and improving student learning.
- 15. Has the System reported any major progress recently?** The System achieved a record-high 81% retention rate, the strongest result since tracking began in 2004. This reflects a significant improvement in helping students return for their second year and stay on the path to graduation. The System also saw its first enrollment growth in a decade, increased transfer student enrollment, and increased Pell- and first-generation student enrollments.
- 16. What strategies are driving record retention gains?** Innovations such as personalized student support, early-alert outreach, expanded advising services, predictive analytics, and streamlined academic pathways are helping students receive timely guidance and stay engaged in their studies.
- 17. How is PASSHE building on its gains moving forward?** The System is expanding course-sharing opportunities, strengthening academic programs, and reconnecting with former students who did not complete their degrees. These initiatives aim to increase access, improve efficiency, and support Pennsylvania's workforce needs.