



New Jersey  
Council of  
County Colleges

# New Jersey's OPPORTUNITY AGENDA: Building Pathways to Equity and Economic Prosperity

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A CALL TO ACTION AND PARTNERSHIP  
FROM NEW JERSEY'S COMMUNITY COLLEGES

MARCH 2024



## About the New Jersey Council of County Colleges

Governed by the presidents and trustees of the state's 18 community colleges and enshrined in state law, the New Jersey Council of County Colleges (NJCCC) supports New Jersey's community colleges and the more than 230,000 students they serve annually across 49 locations by fostering collaboration and developing solutions that expand access to college, promote equity and student success, and create a skilled workforce to drive economic growth. NJCCC brings together the state's community colleges to build a world-class, flexible higher education and workforce development system that can respond to the needs of local communities and employers while having statewide reach and impact. NJCCC promotes innovation and policy changes to help New Jersey's community colleges in their efforts to achieve academic, social, and economic mobility for all residents. The Council's New Jersey Community College Consortium for Workforce and Economic Development builds statewide industry, education, and labor partnerships that align education and training with the needs of a changing economy.

# CONTENTS

- Executive Summary ..... 4
- Call to Action / Introduction..... 10
- Current Context ..... 12
- New Jersey’s 18 Community Colleges: Engines of Opportunity ..... 15
- Action Pillars ..... 16
  - Pillar 1: Helping All High School Students Access Pathways to Postsecondary and Career Success ..... 17**
    - Atlantic Cape Community College Dual Enrollment Career Cluster Pathways ..... 17
    - Essex County College Pre-College Readiness Model ..... 19
    - Ocean County College College Readiness Now ..... 20
    - Passaic County Community College Biotech Innovation Center High School ..... 21
    - Sussex County Community College Early College Advancement ..... 22
  - Pillar 2: Fostering Student Success and Completion in Postsecondary Education and Training ..... 23**
    - Brookdale Community College Caroline Huber Holistic Wellness Center ..... 24
    - Hudson County Community College Hudson Scholars ..... 25
    - Middlesex College Center for Justice-Impacted Students ..... 26
    - Union College of Union County, NJ Project Achievement and Inspire the Future ..... 27
  - Pillar 3: Building Transparent, Seamless, and Stackable Pathways That Respond to the Changing Economy ..... 29**
    - Camden County College Diversity and Social Justice Program..... 30
    - Rowan College at Burlington County 3+1 with Rowan University..... 31
    - Bergen Community College Direct Support Professionals Pilot ..... 32
    - County College of Morris Embedded Industry Credentials ..... 33
    - Raritan Valley Community College Aseptic Processing and Biomanufacturing Center for Workforce Innovation..... 34
    - Salem Community College Scientific Glass Technology Program ..... 35
    - Warren County Community College Drone Certificate and Degree Programs ..... 36
  - Pillar 4: Helping Adults Attain the Credentials They Need for Career Mobility and Labor Market Success ..... 38**
    - Mercer County Community College Registered Apprenticeship with Trenton Water Works ..... 39
    - Rowan College of South Jersey Partnership with Gloucester County Workforce Development Board..... 40
- Call to Action: Next Steps ..... 44

# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

We are in a moment of complex and rapid economic, social, technological, demographic, and climate changes.

New Jersey's economy is evolving toward higher value-added industries that rely on new knowledge, technologies, and innovation to drive productivity, and entry to good jobs in these industries increasingly requires postsecondary education, either two- or four-year college degrees or other credentials. We must prepare all New Jerseyans for technologies that are changing how we live, work, and learn. Our workers also need analytical, creative thinking, and other “robot-proof” human skills. To meet these needs, New Jersey's community colleges are committed to reimagining curricula, creating new academic and career pathways, and partnering with employers and other stakeholders to build a strong economy with bridges for students to family-sustaining careers.

Each year, **more than 230,000 New Jerseyans turn to their local community colleges, including more than 4 in 10 of all undergraduate students and over half of undergraduate students in public colleges and universities. These students form the core of New Jersey's skilled and educated workforce and are essential to the success of the state's innovation economy. Community college graduates power the state's key industries, including health care, technology, infrastructure, renewable energy, manufacturing, and supply chain management. Many of the teachers, nurses, police officers, firefighters, and other first responders who live and work in our communities are community college graduates.** Increasingly, more New Jersey residents will need to earn a postsecondary degree or credential that is aligned with the needs of employers in order to contribute to the rapidly evolving knowledge economy. Community colleges offer a unique value proposition to fill this need, based on access, quality, affordability, and innovation.

As New Jersey's community colleges lay the groundwork for our evolving economy, we must recognize that economic opportunity is not equally available to all New Jerseyans, with disparities persisting along racial, ethnic, and gender lines. Currently, 60% of New Jersey adults have a postsecondary credential or degree, but stark disparities exist: only 37% of Black and 30% of Hispanic residents have an associate degree or higher, compared to 59% of white and 80% of Asian and Pacific Islander residents. While we know that education alone is not a guarantee of equitable economic success, **postsecondary education—bolstered by efforts to reduce occupational, housing, health care, and other forms of segregation—is a critical component of broader strategies to achieve equity.** New Jersey community colleges, which educate higher shares of Black and Hispanic students than four-year colleges, must lead the way forward.

Disproportionately from marginalized and low-income backgrounds, New Jersey community college students are often the first in their families to attend college. In addition to high school students, community colleges serve older and working learners, student parents, refugees, immigrants, justice-

impacted individuals, unemployed and underemployed individuals, individuals with disabilities, and veterans. **Helping this incredibly diverse array of students achieve academic, social, and economic mobility is the core mission of New Jersey's community college system.**

In recent years, New Jersey's community colleges have made extraordinary progress toward achieving this core mission, individually and collectively, undertaking new modes and fields of instruction; new partnerships with high schools, four-year colleges and universities, nonprofits, unions, and businesses; and new models to support student progress and completion in earning credentials and degrees. To strive toward continuous improvement, New Jersey's community colleges developed a performance-based funding formula that was accepted by the State of New Jersey in 2021. This formula is now used to distribute state investment to community colleges in a manner that rewards postsecondary access, equity, and student success. New Jersey's community colleges are also committed to using data to better inform decisions and investments at all levels.

The progress has been considerable, yet our community colleges recognize that there is more work to do.

# ACTION PILLARS

To address urgent equity concerns and meet our core mission in a changing world, New Jersey's community colleges together are committed to the following action pillars. Some call for new legislation or funding, while others advocate for new partnerships between community colleges and with external stakeholders. Many can be undertaken by community colleges themselves, reinforcing and building on progress they are already making. These action pillars represent our collective priorities and will shape our focus in the years ahead. We believe implementing these strategies is the best route to equitable academic, social, and economic mobility for all New Jerseyans and economic prosperity for our communities.

## PILLAR 1: Helping All High School Students Access Pathways to Postsecondary and Career Success

**STRATEGY 1:** Ensure all high school students have the opportunity to earn at least six college credits while in high school

**SOLUTION:** Create a consistent statewide dual enrollment program built around community colleges, providing all high school students an opportunity to achieve a minimum of six college credits, entirely free of charge for low-income and historically underserved populations.

**STRATEGY 2:** Ensure all high school students know their options and have a plan for further education and a career

**SOLUTION:** Support high school-community college partnerships, navigators, guidance, and college readiness.



## PILLAR 2:

### Fostering Student Success and Completion in Postsecondary Education and Training

#### STRATEGY 1: Commit to making community college tuition-free for more New Jerseyans

◆ **SOLUTION:** Ensure individuals with adjusted gross household incomes of \$125,000 and lower can attend a New Jersey community college tuition-free through an expansion of the Community College Opportunity Grant (CCOG) program.

#### STRATEGY 2: Launch an expanded, evidence-based Community College Student Success Initiative

◆ **SOLUTION:** Invest in a statewide student success initiative targeting low-income and underrepresented students, student parents, justice-impacted students, students with disabilities, veterans, and others.

#### STRATEGY 3: Commit to broader, sustained partnerships to address the basic needs of students

◆ **SOLUTION:** Support collaborative efforts of community colleges, state agencies, local social service agencies, employers, and community-based organizations to address students' basic needs.

## PILLAR 3:

### Building Transparent, Seamless, and Stackable Pathways That Respond to the Changing Economy

#### STRATEGY 1: Revitalize general education

◆ **SOLUTION:** New Jersey community colleges, in collaboration with four-year institutions, should refocus general education on contemporary essential skills such as innovation; design thinking; collaboration; creativity; analytical thinking; resilience; empathy; diversity, equity, and inclusion; social influence; and digital, artificial intelligence (AI), and cyber skills.

◆ **SOLUTION:** New Jersey community colleges, in partnership with state leaders, technologists, and other stakeholders, must address the implications of AI for students, staff, and faculty.


#### STRATEGY 2: Launch applied baccalaureate programs in high-demand occupations at community colleges

◆ **SOLUTION:** Allow community colleges to offer applied baccalaureates tied to local labor market demand.


#### STRATEGY 3: Streamline transfer pathways


◆ **SOLUTION:** Ensure that all credits earned as part of an associate degree will transfer to a public four-year institution in New Jersey and that community college students have the transfer support they need.

**STRATEGY 4:** Ensure all community college students can complete a high-quality, paid internship work experience

 **SOLUTION:** Expand and make more flexible the state’s Career Accelerator Internship, guaranteeing all CCOG students access to funds for high-quality paid internships.

**STRATEGY 5:** Embed industry-valued workforce credentials in community college programs

 **SOLUTION:** New Jersey community colleges should partner with the New Jersey Department of Labor and Workforce Development to develop and maintain an Industry-Valued Credential List to guide community college efforts.


 **SOLUTION:** Identify funding for low-income students to cover non-tuition-related costs of embedded industry credentials and certification exams.


**STRATEGY 6:** Build collaboratively designed statewide and regional pathways connecting students to credentials, degrees, and lifelong learning

 **SOLUTION:** Make a long-term commitment to the New Jersey Pathways to Career Opportunities Initiative.


## PILLAR 4: Helping Adults Attain the Credentials They Need for Career Mobility and Labor Market Success

**STRATEGY 1:** Fund noncredit programs for low-income students

 **SOLUTION:** Amend CCOG to support low-income students pursuing high-quality, industry-valued credentials.


 **SOLUTION:** Modernize New Jersey’s Workforce Development Partnership Fund and Supplemental Workforce Fund for Basic Skills to create a New Economy Opportunity Skills Fund for community college workforce and literacy programs and to address the impacts of AI in the workplace and prepare New Jerseyans for jobs of the future.

**STRATEGY 2:** Develop a consistent, statewide approach to Credit for Prior Learning (CPL)/Prior Learning Assessment (PLA)

 **SOLUTION:** Develop a statewide CPL/PLA policy to boost awareness and usage of CPL/PLA, addressing transparency, affordability, access, and quality to help more adults complete postsecondary degrees and credentials.



### STRATEGY 3: Reenvision the state's workforce development system centered around community colleges

 **SOLUTION:** Launch an intensive planning effort to build a new “opportunity system” that would:

- Integrate Workforce Development Boards into community colleges to increase strategic coordination on economic development and to better address local labor market needs; and
- Designate community colleges as the preferred provider of postsecondary education, workforce training, and adult literacy.

Through the implementation of these bold policy initiatives, New Jersey community colleges are committed to leading the nation in creating a blueprint for a sustainable future grounded in equity, resilience, collaboration, and opportunity. We seek to build a reality where all New Jerseyans pursuing postsecondary education and workforce training at community colleges have equitable access to robust academic, career, and basic needs supports; state-of-the-art facilities and technology; dynamic, flexible curricula; and work-based learning opportunities that provide clear pathways to credentials of value and connections to family-sustaining careers.

We now seek input and partnership from all stakeholder communities—educational institutions, community and faith-based organizations, employers, unions, the philanthropic community, the Governor’s Office, the State Legislature, state and local government agencies, researchers, and others—to join us in implementing this agenda, building pathways to equity and economic prosperity for all New Jerseyans.

We are eager to work with all who share this commitment to equity and opportunity.



# CALL TO ACTION / INTRODUCTION

New Jersey is at a crossroads. We are in a moment of complex and rapid economic, social, technological, demographic, and climate changes, all of which have implications for our state and its residents. New Jersey's community colleges together believe that this moment calls for a new shared commitment and novel policies and innovations to collectively address both longstanding and emerging challenges.

New Jersey has significantly broadened access to higher education through its College Promise initiative and multiple creative pilot and grant programs. Now, we must build on those initiatives in a comprehensive, coordinated, and sustainable fashion. Without action, New Jersey risks falling behind states across the nation (and countries around the world) that are making strategic investments to build an educated, skilled workforce that will drive economic growth and successfully compete in a global, knowledge-based innovation economy. Without action, New Jersey's deep inequities by race, ethnicity, and geography will further define our state.

New Jersey's community colleges are uniquely positioned to lead this bold Opportunity Agenda. The state's 18 community colleges, which serve more than 230,000 students of all backgrounds and ages throughout the state, are well positioned to build a flexible system that can respond to the needs of local

communities and employers while also collaborating to have statewide reach and impact. In recent years, and as examples throughout this document make clear, **New Jersey's community colleges** have been pioneering a **strategic, entrepreneurial, and equity-focused vision for public higher education**, with:

- new modes and fields of instruction;
- new partnerships with high schools, four-year colleges and universities, nonprofits, unions, and businesses;
- new models to support student progress and completion in earning credentials and degrees—with a relentless focus on equity and becoming student-ready colleges;
- a new state funding allocation formula aligned with statewide priorities to incentivize access, equity, and success; and
- a new commitment to using data to promote transparency, accountability, and common metrics.

New Jersey's community colleges are forging the strong, enduring, and transformative partnerships that will be necessary to meet our state's challenges. To build on this foundation, New Jersey's community colleges now seek to advance this Opportunity Agenda that focuses on four key action pillars:



**Pillar 1: Helping All High School Students Access Pathways to Postsecondary and Career Success;**

**Pillar 2: Fostering Student Success and Completion in Postsecondary Education and Training;**

**Pillar 3: Building Transparent, Seamless, and Stackable Student Pathways That Respond to the Changing Economy; and**

**Pillar 4: Helping Adults Attain the Credentials They Need for Career Mobility and Labor Market Success.**

By implementing these bold policy initiatives, New Jersey community colleges are committed to leading the nation in creating a blueprint for a sustainable future grounded in equity, resilience, collaboration, and opportunity. We seek

to build a reality where all New Jerseyans pursuing postsecondary education and workforce training at community colleges have equitable access to robust academic, career, and basic needs supports; state-of-the-art facilities and technology; and dynamic, flexible curricula and work-based learning opportunities that provide clear pathways to credentials of value and connections to family-sustaining careers.

**We are eager to work with all who share this commitment to equity and opportunity.**



# CURRENT CONTEXT

## Achieving Academic, Social, and Economic Mobility: The Need for More Postsecondary Education for New Jerseyans

New Jersey's economy is evolving toward higher value-added industries that rely on new knowledge, technologies, and innovation to drive productivity, and entry to good jobs in these industries increasingly requires postsecondary education. Even with relatively high minimum wages and a strong labor market, a high school education is not enough for obtaining most jobs that pay family-sustaining wages. Entry to good jobs typically requires either two- or four-year college degrees or other credentials. Given changes in technology, individuals seeking to achieve upward mobility, switch careers, or return to work after a voluntary or involuntary absence from the labor market will generally need to acquire additional skills, either through on-the-job learning or through the completion of further formal education and training—ideally resulting in a portable, stackable, industry-valued credential.

In addition to traditional public and private two- and four-year colleges and universities, New Jersey high school students and adults seeking additional education and training have myriad choices, from boot camps, badges, microcredentials, and certificates offered

by technology companies to online degrees and certificates from museums and libraries. New Jersey's community colleges play a key role as the fulcrum in this broader ecosystem.

While media stories about the public's declining confidence in higher education abound, the 2023 Varying Degrees<sup>1</sup> national survey by New America reports that 85% of respondents believe community colleges are worth the cost (compared to 66% for public four-year colleges), and more than 80% of respondents are comfortable supporting community colleges with their tax dollars. Other research<sup>2</sup> finds that in addition to greater economic security, individuals who have postsecondary credentials have a healthier life, are more likely to vote, and are more engaged in their communities. Recent research from the Heldrich Center for Workforce Development at Rutgers University<sup>3</sup> found higher levels of education have positive returns for individual New Jerseyans, contributing to upward economic and social mobility, as well as for governments and communities, resulting in higher tax revenues. We must help more of our state's residents access and succeed at community college.

## Building an Equitable Future

As New Jersey's community colleges lay the groundwork for the evolving economy, we must recognize that

economic opportunity is not equally available to all New Jerseyans, with disparities persisting along racial, ethnic, and gender lines. New Jersey is among the most diverse states in the nation and growing more so, but we are near the top for income inequality.<sup>4</sup> A 2022 report by the New Jersey Institute for Social Justice<sup>5</sup> found that the median household wealth for white New Jersey families is \$322,500, but it is only \$17,700 for Black and \$26,100 for Latina/o families. Economic inequality is bad for our communities and our democracy.

Currently, 60% of New Jersey's adult population has earned a postsecondary credential or degree. We commend the Murphy Administration for committing to the ambitious goal of increasing this percentage to 65% by 2025, and we must collectively do more to address the stark disparities that exist in these attainment rates. According to the most recent Lumina Foundation's Stronger Nation Report for New Jersey,<sup>6</sup> only 37% of Black and 30% of Hispanic New Jersey residents have achieved an associate degree or higher, compared to 59% of white and 80% of Asian and Pacific Islander residents.

Compounding the challenge, we know that education alone is not a guarantee of equitable economic success: Black families headed by a college graduate have about 33% less wealth than white families headed by an individual who dropped out of high school. Our nation is still struggling with the impacts of historical systemic racism. **Nevertheless, postsecondary education—bolstered by efforts to reduce**

**occupational, housing, health care, and other forms of segregation—will be a critical component of broader strategies to achieve equity.** New Jersey community colleges, which educate higher shares of Black and Hispanic students than four-year colleges, must lead the way forward.

New Jersey community colleges must also address equity for other student populations that have a substantial presence on our campuses, including low-income students, students with disabilities, justice-impacted students, student parents, immigrants, refugees, non-English speakers, LGBTQ+ students, and others.

## **Adapting to Technological Change**

New Jersey must prepare for new technologies that are changing how we live, work, and learn, building on the potential they offer while minimizing the disruption they cause. The year 2023 was hailed the “breakout year” for generative artificial intelligence (AI).<sup>7</sup> In the World Economic Forum (WEF)'s latest Future of Jobs Report, three-quarters of companies surveyed said that in the next five years, they are likely to adopt new AI technologies.<sup>8</sup> WEF estimates that before 2027, 6 in 10 workers will need training,<sup>9</sup> adding that just half of workers today have adequate access to training opportunities. We need new strategies to help New Jerseyans learn to work with AI and other technologies, such as smart robots, immersive virtual and augmented reality, autonomous vehicles, and drones. This need is reinforced by Governor



Murphy and Princeton University’s plans to establish an AI hub in New Jersey, designed to “catalyze innovation in AI technologies” and “drive job growth and economic development across the region.”<sup>10</sup>

Technological skills and digital literacy are necessary but not entirely sufficient for success in the labor market. WEF also reported that AI and big data rank second to analytical and creative thinking for skills most in demand to improve business performance for the 2023–2027 timeframe. There is an emerging consensus that AI will enhance human performance rather than entirely replace it.<sup>11</sup> Some tasks, such as simple decision-making and information collection, may be fully automated, but AI is less likely to take the place of leadership and “imagination skills.” WEF also reported that while the “expectations of the displacement of physical and manual work by machines has decreased, reasoning, communicating and coordinating—all traits with a comparative advantage for humans—are expected to be more automatable in the future.”<sup>12</sup>

With this in mind, we must rethink the humanities and opportunities for experiential learning in ways that will prepare students and working learners to be “robot proof.”<sup>13</sup>

Employers in the key industries that drive our New Jersey economy, such as health care and life sciences, financial services, information technology and cybersecurity, logistics, and advanced manufacturing, report difficulty finding workers with the skills they need. To compete in today’s global, digital economy, these industries rely on innovation and the integration of new technologies and processes. They need workers who can discover, design, create, adapt, and invent as well as produce and execute tasks. Community colleges are ideally positioned to partner with state and local economic development leaders and employers on workforce needs and to build bridges for their students to careers in evolving sectors.

## Addressing Climate Change

In another milestone, thanks largely to climate change, 2023 was the hottest year ever recorded. Moving forward, New Jersey community colleges must play new roles in preparing students to understand and address climate change. This includes helping students wrestle with the ethical, racial, and social justice impacts of climate change, as well as equipping them for emerging green economy climate jobs and careers.

# NEW JERSEY'S 18 COMMUNITY COLLEGES: ENGINES OF OPPORTUNITY

Each year, **more than 230,000 New Jerseyans turn to their local community colleges, including more than 4 in 10 of all undergraduate students and over half of undergraduate students in public colleges and universities.**

**These students form the core of New Jersey's skilled and educated workforce and are essential to the success of the state's innovation economy. Community college graduates power the state's key industries, including health care, technology, infrastructure, renewable energy, manufacturing, and supply chain management. Many of the teachers, nurses, police officers, firefighters, and other first responders who live and work in our communities are community college graduates.** Increasingly, more New Jersey residents will need to earn a postsecondary degree or credential that is aligned with the needs of employers in order to contribute to the rapidly evolving knowledge economy. Community colleges offer a unique value proposition to fill this need, based on access, quality, affordability, and innovation.

Our community college students are disproportionately from marginalized and low-income backgrounds, and many are the first in their families to attend college. New Jersey community colleges educate higher shares of Black and Hispanic students than four-year colleges; 14.3% of community college

students in credit programs are Black, and 27.6% are Hispanic. Given their diverse populations, it is not surprising that most of New Jersey's community colleges are designated Minority and/or Hispanic Serving Institutions.

Recent 2023 data show slight increases nationally in community college enrollment, including growth in dual-enrolled high school students and first-year college students.<sup>14</sup> Over half (57%) of New Jersey community college students in credit programs attend part time, and close to a third (29%) are over age 25. In addition to traditional high school-aged students, community colleges serve:

- older and working learners,
- adults who have previously earned some credits but stopped out or left before completing a credential or degree,
- student parents,
- non- and limited-English speakers,
- refugees,
- immigrants,
- justice-impacted individuals,
- unemployed and underemployed individuals,
- individuals with disabilities, and
- veterans.

Many of these students have pressing academic, financial, and basic support needs, including tutoring, child care,

housing, food, transportation, and mental health assistance. **Helping this incredibly diverse array of students achieve academic, social, and economic mobility is the core mission of New Jersey’s community colleges.**

In recent years, New Jersey’s community colleges have made extraordinary progress toward achieving this core mission, individually and collectively. To strive toward continuous improvement, New Jersey’s community colleges developed a performance-based funding formula that was accepted by the State of New Jersey in 2021. This formula is now used to distribute state investment to community colleges in a manner that rewards postsecondary access, equity, and student success. New Jersey’s community colleges are also committed to using data to better inform decisions and investments at all levels.

Not long ago, New Jersey’s community colleges focused primarily on their role as transfer institutions, helping undergraduates complete the first two years of education en route to a four-year college or university. Although the transfer function remains vital, New Jersey community colleges now also play a more comprehensive role as strategic actors in economic and workforce development, in educating adult and working learners, and in serving as a resource for lifelong learning. Employers are increasingly turning to their local community colleges to help them solve their workforce challenges through a range of creative and dynamic partnerships.

The progress has been considerable, yet our community colleges recognize that there is more work to do.

## ACTION PILLARS

We need a transformative vision for agile community colleges that can respond to employers’ current and future skill needs—human and technical—while educating individuals to be resilient, lifelong learners. To address urgent equity concerns and meet our core mission in a changing world, New Jersey’s community colleges together are committed to the following action pillars. Some call for new legislation or funding, while others advocate for new partnerships between community colleges and with external stakeholders. Many can be undertaken by community colleges themselves, reinforcing and building on progress they are already making. These action pillars represent our collective priorities and will shape our focus in the years ahead. We believe implementing these strategies is the best route to equitable academic, social, and economic mobility for all New Jerseyans and economic prosperity for our communities.



## PILLAR 1: Helping All High School Students Access Pathways to Postsecondary and Career Success

In order to ensure that more New Jerseyans are on a path to family-sustaining careers, that we have an educated, skilled workforce to support economic growth, and that we close equity gaps, New Jersey must implement innovative efforts to help all high school students get on a path to earning a postsecondary credential or degree. High schools must have the resources to help all students understand the need for a postsecondary credential or degree, to prepare and inspire all students to attend college, and to provide all students with academic, career, and financial aid guidance.

New Jersey community colleges have deep local roots and strong existing collaborations with both comprehensive and county vocational-technical high schools. With support from the state and together with local school districts, community colleges have multiple opportunities to establish closer partnerships with high schools, ensuring all students are aware of the wide range of postsecondary opportunities and resources that are available to them.

**STRATEGY 1: Ensure all high school students have the opportunity to earn at least six college credits while in high school**

The comprehensive 2022 report of New Jersey's Dual Enrollment Study Commission

## PILLAR 1 COLLEGE EXAMPLES

### Atlantic Cape Community College Dual Enrollment Career Cluster Pathways

Atlantic Cape Community College (ACCC) has launched an initiative to put Atlantic and Cape May County high school students on a path to postsecondary education and career goal attainment. Through this project, ACCC is building the curricular framework to allow for equitable access to dual enrollment courses across districts, provide academic counseling and career guidance in high schools to increase student awareness of the existing postsecondary educational pathways available, and utilize innovative ways to fund dual enrollment tuition to remove barriers and increase participation in dual enrollment.

The project will focus on career cluster pathways that align with the local economy in Health Science, Computer Science/Information Technology, Business, and Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics/ Environmental Science. Outcomes will be measured by: tracking the number of high school students who successfully create individualized postsecondary educational/career plans and earn college credits before high school graduation, forging partnerships with local employers to increase work-based learning opportunities, enhancing curricula to allow for industry-valued credential attainment, and growing overall participation in dual enrollment by providing tuition subsidies.



outlines the benefits of dual enrollment for high school students, including helping them prepare for the academic demands of higher education, improving “college and credential access, affordability, and completion.”<sup>15</sup> The report cites national research showing students who take advantage of dual enrollment are “more likely to earn higher grades in high school, graduate from high school, attend an institution of higher education, and successfully earn a postsecondary degree.” Dual enrollment can help high school students have enhanced awareness of college and career pathways and increase their belief that they belong on a college campus. There are also financial benefits for students who achieve multiple credits they can put toward their postsecondary degree or credential, reducing their time to completion.


The report cites statistics showing that only 8.2% of Black, 9.8% of Hispanic, and 9.3% of economically disadvantaged 9th-

through 12th-grade high school students enrolled in at least one dual enrollment class in the 2020–2021 academic year, compared to 18.9% of white and 23.3% of Asian, Native Hawaiian, or Pacific Islander students. The percentages are lower still for students experiencing homelessness (7.2%), students with disabilities (5.5%), students in foster care (4.8%), students who are migrants (3.3%), and students who are English language learners (3.1%). The Commission points to multiple barriers to participating in dual enrollment, such as tuition costs, transportation, inadequate staffing, a misperception that dual enrollment is only for high-achieving students, a lack of guidance, and limited awareness of the opportunities that exist. New Jersey is one of 22 states that does not operate a state-level dual enrollment program and does not provide state-level funds to cover dual enrollment costs.

Although the Commission calls for “an innovative pilot program that allows for immediate expansion of dual

enrollment opportunities, particularly for low-income students,” and the Fiscal Year 2024 budget set aside \$600,000 for such a pilot, it is urgent that New Jersey does more. New Jersey should ensure opportunities are available in academic and career and technical pathways, including programs that result in industry-valued credentials that translate and stack to college credits. It is critical that opportunities are available outside of traditional advanced math and English coursework and that opportunities are open to students who may not be on honors or accelerated paths. New Jersey should also develop a statewide methodology to approve courses similar to those currently used for general education course approval, with plans for the universal acceptance of dual enrollment credits by New Jersey’s public four-year institutions.

New Jersey could learn from other states that have made strides in expanding dual enrollment. As part of a comprehensive strategy to strengthen career pathways, California recently made significant investments to ensure that by 10th grade, students explore college and non-college career pathways, and that regardless of whether their ultimate pathway necessitates a college degree, through dual enrollment, high school students have opportunities for on-campus college experiences and the prospect to graduate with 12 college credits.<sup>16</sup>

 **SOLUTION:** New Jersey should rapidly move to support a consistent statewide dual enrollment program built around community colleges, enabling all high school students an opportunity to achieve a minimum of six college credits, entirely free of charge for low-income and underrepresented populations.

## Essex County College Pre-College Readiness Model

Pre-college readiness programs offered at Essex County College (ECC) are directly addressing the New Jersey Council of County Colleges’ (NJCCC) priority of putting high school students on a path to postsecondary success.<sup>17</sup> New Jersey’s Dual Enrollment Study Commission determined that Black, Hispanic, and economically disadvantaged students are vastly underrepresented among high school students currently benefitting from dual enrollment programs in the state. ECC is leading the charge in providing equitable dual enrollment opportunities to close equity gaps for underrepresented groups. A large majority (89%) of students benefitting from ECC’s programs are either Black (55%) or Hispanic (34%).

In addition, ECC’s innovative model is designed to benefit students regardless of their parents’ financial resources, with student participation funded by school districts as opposed to parents who may, or may not, be able to afford the additional expense. This past year, ECC’s dual enrollment and pre-college programs served over 1,000 students across 18 participating high schools, more than doubling the number of students served by the program over the past five years. At ECC’s 2023 commencement, 107 graduating high school students from Essex County were awarded associate degrees along with their high school diplomas, putting them on an accelerated path to postsecondary success.

## Ocean County College College Readiness Now

As part of its College Readiness Now collaboration with Ocean County high school districts, Ocean County College (OCC) introduces first-generation, low-income, at-risk high school students to the college experience via introductory meta-major survey courses. Participating students who successfully complete their college readiness portions of the program are able to enroll in introductory survey meta-major courses, including introductory courses in Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics; Health Professions; and Energy. OCC provides students access to a meta-major survey course from one of the following OCC degree/certificate programs: American Sign Language, Artificial Intelligence, Business, Computer Science, Cybersecurity, Engineering, Environmental Sustainability, Hospitality and Tourism, and Industrial Hygiene.

Through College Readiness Now, OCC also offers traditional college-ready programs, including summer bridge, boot camps, and semester-long programs for students who are not yet college ready, and accelerated learning programs, which enable students who are not yet college ready to enroll in a college credit-bearing course while also being provided with additional supports. While accelerated learning programs primarily serve students who are not yet college ready, OCC has found that in some cases, it may be advantageous to also include college-ready students in the course, and college-ready students can earn college credits if taking a course with other students who are not yet college ready.

## STRATEGY 2: Ensure all high school students know their options and have a plan for further education and a career

New Jersey high school students do not receive consistent guidance and information. As a result, too many students are unaware that they could afford to attend college and have not been encouraged to consider college. New Jersey's College Promise programs,<sup>18</sup> including the Community College Opportunity Grant (CCOG) and the Garden State Guarantee, effectively provide a tuition-free college education to low-income students. To learn whether they are eligible for these and additional state and federal resources, most students must complete the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA). However, trends in FAFSA completion nationwide indicate that the students who most need financial aid are the least likely to complete the form.<sup>19</sup> New Jersey's FAFSA completion rate is well above the national average, with 64% of the state's more than 102,000 high school seniors from the Class of 2023 completing the form.<sup>20</sup> The 36% of New Jersey high school seniors who did not fill out the FAFSA are missing an opportunity.

**Universal FAFSA Completion** - A successful strategy to help more high school students connect to postsecondary education is to support universal FAFSA completion, as Alabama, California, Connecticut, Louisiana, New Hampshire, and Texas have done, and which New Jersey is about to pilot. Any state policy would need clear, no-questions-asked opt-out waivers to protect students for whom FAFSA completion would create a burden, which could include students in foster

care, justice-impacted students, immigrants, and refugees. States that have adopted universal FAFSA have shown increases in completion and college attendance. In Louisiana, three years after making FAFSA completion a graduation requirement, the state's completion rate increased by more than 24% (it is now the highest in the United States), and more high school students are immediately enrolling in college. Louisiana also reported equity gains, with more students of color and students from low-income households completing FAFSA.<sup>21</sup> New Jersey's community colleges can play a role in supporting FAFSA completion in partnership with local high schools and community-based organizations.

**High School Navigators, Guidance, and College Readiness** - Too many New Jersey high school students leave school unprepared to attend college—a situation that will be exacerbated by COVID learning loss.<sup>22</sup> The College Readiness Now program, established in 2013, provides \$1 million annually to community colleges. According to the *College Readiness Now VIII – Final Report: Summary of Activities and Impacts*, 17 of New Jersey's community colleges partnered with 140 high schools to help students strengthen academic skills in English and math. Approximately 2,000 students deemed not yet ready for college-level work enrolled

## Passaic County Community College Biotech Innovation Center High School

Passaic County Community College (PCCC) and the Passaic County Vocational School District will use \$25 million in **Securing Our Children's Future Bond Act** grant funding to construct a new 68,000 square-foot facility that will connect 800 students in grades 9 to 12 to high-skill, high-wage career opportunities in the region's biotechnology industry. This facility, known as the **Biotech Innovation Center High School (Biotech Center)**, will strategically align the Passaic County Vocational School District with PCCC's Public Safety Academy, forming the region's first high school to college dual credit degree program and resulting in a debt-free college education.

The Biotech Center will support a new career and technical education program in Biotechnology. Students will have the opportunity to earn an associate degree in Biotechnology and will earn industry-valued credentials. The project's significant features will include the following:

- **Dual credit:** Students will earn 60 college credits through dual enrollment coursework leading to an associate degree.
- **Employer engagement and work-based learning:** Employer partners will sponsor work-based learning experiences, ensuring that students learn in-demand skills.
- **DNA Learning Center NJ (DNALC NJ):** Operated by DNALC of Cold Spring Harbor Laboratory and InnovATEBIO—the National Science Foundation's National Biotechnology Education Center—DNALC NJ will become part of the Biotech Center.<sup>23</sup>
- **Hands-on learning opportunities:** Through hands-on learning, students will benefit from a continuum of research, career, workforce readiness, and civic engagement skills.

The first 150 ninth-grade students enrolled in September 2023 with building completion scheduled for 2024.


## Sussex County Community College Early College Advancement

Located in a small county with only nine high schools, Sussex County Community College is at an advantage in creating a very close partnership with all schools throughout the region. Creative initiatives to help all high school students get on a path to postsecondary success include helping math-avoiding students by working to align mathematics curricula between the college and high school, creating on-campus early college programs with county technical school partners to advance students and share facilities usage, and providing an opportunity for industry-valued credentials like electrical line worker to high school students with a pathway to degree completion at the college.

Sussex County Community College's Early College Advancement offers high school students two paths: Concurrent Enrollment programs that take place at the high school, and Jump Start, which allows high school students to study on the college's campus.<sup>24</sup> Both offer students the chance to complete many college general education courses at a fraction of the usual cost. Sussex County Community College is now in the final phases for National Alliance of Concurrent Enrollment Partnerships accreditation for dual enrollment in the high schools, which will ensure that local high school students experience a seamless transition to college and teachers benefit from meaningful, ongoing professional development.

in 75 math and/or English college readiness programs. Of those enrolled, 60% were living at or below the poverty line. After completing the program, 59% of participants achieved college-ready status in math and/or English. Students who did not become fully college-ready significantly moved up in the developmental education course sequence in math and/or English, reducing the number of developmental education courses they will need to take upon enrolling in college. These results of the College Readiness Now program are especially important in light of a recent longitudinal data analysis on developmental education from the New Jersey Statewide Data System, which found that graduation rates and post-graduation earnings are better for students who do not enroll in remedial courses.<sup>25</sup> The report also explored racial disparities in participation in remedial coursework impacting African-American and Hispanic students.

**Personalized Acceptance Letters** - As open-access institutions, community colleges accept all who apply. New Jersey high schools should work closely with community colleges to ensure that all high school seniors receive personalized admissions letters confirming they have been automatically accepted and that include contact information regarding enrollment and financial aid. The goal is to eliminate barriers to higher education. Based on experience in New York State, "personalized letters to high school seniors and their parents has been demonstrated to help students make the decision to enroll."<sup>26</sup> Ideally, New Jersey would include CCOG and other scholarship and financial aid information in these acceptance letters.

 **SOLUTION:** New Jersey should make a sustained investment in creative partnerships between high schools and community colleges to fund navigators, guidance, and college readiness.



## PILLAR 2: Fostering Student Success and Completion in Postsecondary Education and Training

It is not enough to enroll students in postsecondary programs: we must ensure that more students earn a credential or degree. New Jersey's community colleges serve an incredibly diverse population of students with multiple goals. Many intend to complete an associate degree and/or transfer to a four-year institution; others seek to complete one or more credit or noncredit courses, sometimes culminating in a certificate and often geared to career advancement. Many students face exceedingly difficult life circumstances that can interfere with their plans. While in school, most New Jersey community college students have full- or part-time jobs. A 2019 survey of New Jersey community college students found that over two-thirds (68%) of students were employed, with 25% working 30 hours per week or more.<sup>27</sup> The same survey noted that among those respondents who reported experiencing basic needs insecurity, 70% could not afford child care, 44% faced housing insecurity, 39% were coping with food insecurity, and 14% were homeless.


## PILLAR 2 COLLEGE EXAMPLES

### Brookdale Community College Caroline Huber Holistic Wellness Center

The Caroline Huber Holistic Wellness Center<sup>28</sup> is located on Brookdale Community College's main campus in Lincroft and provides access to mental health and social services, as well as student basic needs through the college's Nutrition Hub. Brookdale partners with agencies throughout the county (e.g., Lunch Break, Preferred Behavioral Health, Parker Family Medical, RWJBarnabas Health, etc.) that schedule time to be on campus to meet with students, employees, and members of the community who need to access services. A county social worker is present full time to assist as well. The Center includes space for private visits, conference rooms, and a meditation room that students, employees, and clients can visit for quiet meditation or prayer. The Center's services also involve programming such as yoga, meditation, and lectures centered on holistic well-being and thriving. All services are available for students, employees, and community members at no cost.

### STRATEGY 1: Commit to making community college tuition-free for more New Jerseyans

While the cost of attending a community college is far lower than the cost of attending a four-year college or university, the cost of attending college in addition to basic life expenses is out of reach for too many New Jerseyans. The CGOG program has allowed thousands of students to attend community college and to earn degrees and credentials.

 **SOLUTION:** Ensure individuals with adjusted gross household incomes of \$125,000 and lower can attend a New Jersey community college tuition-free through an expansion of the CCOG program.

### STRATEGY 2: Launch an expanded, evidence-based Community College Student Success Initiative

All of New Jersey's 18 community colleges have prioritized student success, and each has enacted a variety of strategies to support student retention and completion. To help more New Jersey community college students succeed in meeting their education and career goals and improve retention and graduation rates, New Jersey should launch a new statewide effort drawing on several evidence-based models that have demonstrated success for low-income, first-generation, and other traditionally underrepresented students.

For over half a century, the **New Jersey Educational Opportunity Fund (EOF)** has provided eligible students with grants and intensive, holistic support services, including advising, counseling, tutoring, supplemental instruction, leadership development, and



summer or pre-first year bridge program experiences. According to data from the most recent (April 2023) EOF progress report, 4,053 New Jersey community college students participated in EOF in the 2021–2022 academic year.<sup>29</sup> The largest proportion of EOF students (70%) are Black and Hispanic, compared to 12% who are white and 8% who are Asian. EOF community college students outperform their non-EOF peers. Five years after initially enrolling in EOF, the 2017 cohort showed completion rates that were close to 10% higher than non-EOF students.

Since its launch in 2007, **City University of New York (CUNY)’s Accelerated Study in Associate Programs (ASAP)** has served approximately 88,000 CUNY students.<sup>30</sup> CUNY ASAP, which has been successfully replicated in five other states to date, includes financial resources, structured pathways to build academic momentum, and comprehensive support services (advising, tutoring, career development, and early community engagement opportunities). A rigorous external evaluation conducted by MDRC found that ASAP students graduate at twice the rate of non-ASAP students.<sup>31</sup> Further evaluation has found that this impact holds across all examined subgroups and cohorts. The Center for Benefit-

## Hudson County Community College Hudson Scholars

In 2021, Hudson County Community College (HCCC) launched Hudson Scholars.<sup>32</sup> Drawing on promising aspects of both the New Jersey Educational Opportunity Fund and the City University of New York’s Accelerated Study in Associate Programs, the pillars of Hudson Scholars are:

- Personal and intensive academic advising, coaching, and mentoring;
- Financial stipends awarded for achievement of specific monthly academic milestones;
- High-impact educational experiences such as undergraduate research; internships; field trips; student leadership; attendance at museums and Broadway plays; visits to corporate, industrial, health care, and other organizations; and many others; and
- Systemic use of a faculty early alert system to inform advisors, mentors, and coaches of concerns and student accomplishments as soon as they surface.

Hudson Scholars students meet regularly with academic counselors who have caseloads that are 80% smaller than other advisers. Counselors monitor academic progress, help students set academic and career goals, and connect students to academic and basic needs resources to help them persist.

Hudson Scholars students complete an associate degree within two years at three times the historical rate for students of the same academic profile. Among traditionally underserved and underrepresented groups, fall-to-fall retention of Hudson Scholars Latino students was 46% greater than the retention rate of HCCC Latino students historically, and African-American student retention was 83% greater. Increased retention of Hudson Scholars students has produced annual tuition and financial aid revenue that has exceeded the costs of the program, making the Hudson Scholars program model financially self-sustaining. More than 2,300 students are currently enrolled in Hudson Scholars, and HCCC will scale the program to all students over the next several years.

## Middlesex College Center for Justice-Impacted Students

The Center for Justice-Impacted Students at Middlesex College<sup>33</sup> was founded in 2021 to advance higher educational opportunities for justice-impacted students, both in carceral settings and on campus. The Center grew from Middlesex College's longstanding relationship with the Middlesex County Juvenile Detention Center, and it then expanded to include programming for the Camden County Juvenile Detention Center, a liberal arts associate degree pathway program for students incarcerated within New Jersey Juvenile Justice Commission facilities, and programming for on-campus justice-impacted students.

Students receive academic support from a student success coach, receive access to a minimum of two office hours per class per week from each of their professors, have the opportunity to participate in a weekly policy reform advocacy program funded by the Annie E. Casey Foundation, and receive extensive reentry support as they approach their release dates.

For justice-impacted students on campus, the Center oversees the Justice Scholars Program, which supports reentry for formerly incarcerated students as well as offers support to students on parole or probation, students who have prior histories of arrest or adjudication, and students who have immediate family members who were or are incarcerated. Justice Scholars earn a \$500 stipend each semester for participation in the program, and they participate in a pre-semester student orientation fostering college readiness, leadership development, networking, and opportunities to collaborate with currently incarcerated students on policy reform efforts.


Cost Studies of Education concluded that CUNY ASAP was cost effective and delivered a high return to taxpayers. The annual cost per student (beyond CUNY full-time equivalent allocations) is currently \$3,440. Starting in the fall of 2023, a team of New Jersey higher education leaders from the New Jersey Office of the Secretary of Higher Education, the Higher Education Student Assistance Authority, and NJCCC are participating in a CUNY ASAP Learning Community.

Each of New Jersey's community colleges has launched initiatives to drive increased success on their campuses, with data demonstrating their progress in closing equity gaps and improving retention and graduation rates. Nine colleges belong to the Achieving the Dream network and credit the program with improving their student outcomes.<sup>34</sup> Union College of Union County, NJ has been a finalist and semi-finalist in the Aspen College Excellence program due to its efforts to increase the graduation rates of students, with a focus on minority students.<sup>35</sup> Hudson County Community College has expanded on EOF and integrated aspects of ASAP into its Hudson Scholars program, which received the 2023 National Bellwether Award.<sup>36</sup>

The state's annual investment in a \$5 million Student Success fund has allowed colleges to experiment with initiatives to promote success, with a focus on students receiving support from the CCOG program. We must build on the momentum generated by these various initiatives.

New Jersey should also explore strategies to assist student parents, including two-

generation strategies<sup>37</sup> that engage entire families by providing holistic supports that recognize parent and caregiver needs are interconnected to a child's development. Single mothers<sup>38</sup> account for close to 1 in 10 undergraduate students in the United States, most with incomes at or near the poverty line; a new pilot<sup>39</sup> is encouraging more community colleges to host Head Start providers on campus.

 **SOLUTION:** New Jersey should invest in a statewide student success initiative that would enable the 18 community colleges to provide intensive and robust evidence-based supports to all students who need them. This would include supports targeted to particular populations, including student parents, justice-impacted students, students with disabilities, veterans, and others.

### **STRATEGY 3: Commit to broader, sustained partnerships to address the basic needs of students**

In 2022, the New Jersey Office of the Secretary of Higher Education released a New Jersey Students Basic Needs Support Playbook,<sup>40</sup> which recognizes that “if students are struggling to meet their basic needs, their focus will (and must) be on survival and not on learning, credential completion, or other measures of academic success. Research on students’ basic needs consistently demonstrates negative impacts on every facet of a student’s college experience including academic performance, peer engagement, their sense of belonging on campus, and their mental and physical health.”

## **Union College of Union County, NJ Project Achievement and Inspire the Future**

Union College of Union County, NJ is a Minority Serving and a federally designated Hispanic Serving Institution intently focused on transforming the local community, one student at a time. Based on the data, Union College recognized that the African-American/Black male graduation rate was not appreciably increasing despite the overall consistent climb in graduation rates. Union College, in turn, has aggressively addressed the equity gap for underrepresented and low-socioeconomic students for a decade.


Two of Union College’s programs that advance student success and social justice include Project Achievement and Inspire the Future.<sup>41</sup> Project Achievement is a Black male mentorship program that reinforces students’ sense of belonging by connecting Black males to professional Black male mentors. Project Achievement provides proactive academic advising, tuition assistance, linkages to Historically Black Colleges and Universities, and life skills development. Intrusive advising led to a Project Achievement graduation rate increase from 5% in 2014 to 32% in 2023.

Inspire the Future is a student success program that supports Latino/a students via career service opportunities, workshops, and various social engagement events related to personal and professional development. The graduation rate for Hispanic students increased from 6.9% in 2014 to 32.6% in 2023. Additionally, the college’s foundation works closely with the financial aid office and student advisors to distribute over a million dollars annually to provide cohort students with completion scholarships.

With a goal of helping more New Jersey college students complete higher education, New Jersey has launched an array of innovative grant programs devoted to assisting two- and four-year college students with mental health, housing, food insecurity, and other resources to meet other basic needs.

NJCCC has also engaged in efforts to promote community college student wellness and mental health. In 2022, NJCCC launched a partnership with the Mental Health Association in New Jersey to strengthen mental health services on campus by providing evidence-based training to faculty, staff, and students in suicide prevention and Mental Health First Aid.

In the fall of 2023, with support from The Tepper Foundation, NJCCC launched a pilot initiative that will provide support to New Jersey community colleges to expand their ability to address students' basic needs. Six colleges will receive coaching and technical assistance to implement a comprehensive approach to strengthen their current services, outreach, campus community awareness, and ultimately to help more students get the help they need to succeed. The initiative will engage all 18 colleges in learning opportunities.

 **SOLUTION:** New Jersey state agencies, local social service agencies, community colleges, employers, and community-based organizations should continue to work together to build new partnerships to address students' basic needs.





## PILLAR 3:

### Building Transparent, Seamless, and Stackable Pathways That Respond to the Changing Economy

New Jersey community colleges are working to build a more flexible and contemporary higher education system that recognizes students take many different and unique journeys to postsecondary credentials and degrees and need transparent pathways that can be accessed in myriad ways. These pathways should seamlessly stack to higher levels of education. Community colleges are experimenting with new ways to deliver the essential core skills, competencies, and knowledge New Jerseyans need to prosper in a changing global economy, equipping them to be engaged citizens, productive workers, lifelong learners, and global leaders.

Pathways should offer students a clear map with readily identifiable steps they can build on throughout their academic and career journeys, including connecting noncredit workforce education and short-term credentials to credit programs and degrees. There is a growing realization that to better serve both students and employers, community colleges need to reduce or eliminate the divide between their credit and noncredit programs and ensure that credentials obtained along the way can stack to other certificates and degrees. Students and working learners who start in noncredit program should have a clear, seamless pathway to additional education in credit-based programs leading to associate degrees.

## PILLAR 3

### COLLEGE EXAMPLES

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#### Camden County College Diversity and Social Justice Program

Camden County College's (CCC) Diversity and Social Justice Associate in Arts degree<sup>42</sup> provides students a multidisciplinary introduction to the study of underrepresented groups and social justice frameworks. Students approach the study of diversity and social justice through analysis of the sociohistorical and contemporary forces underlying systemic inequality in the United States. Since its inception in 2022, the Diversity and Social Justice program has evolved with CCC as the only community college in southern New Jersey to offer such a degree.

The program is intended primarily for transfer, and four-year partner institutions have responded with interest in degree articulation. Two noteworthy transfer explorations are currently in progress. The first involves transfer to Rutgers University, in which graduates may enroll in and earn a Bachelor of Arts in Labor Studies and Employment Relations. A second transfer initiative is a "2+2+1" opportunity at Rowan University, whereby students earn a Bachelor of Arts in Africana Studies or History in two years. Likewise, a Master's degree in Diversity and Inclusion at Rowan University entails one year of post-baccalaureate study.

Through these and other innovative transfer pathways, CCC graduates will be able to pursue careers in fields such as: Public Policy, Social Work, Education, Business, Law, and Public Health.

Based on a RAND summary of lessons learned from stackable credential efforts in California, Colorado, Ohio, and Virginia,<sup>43</sup> there is evidence that short-term credentials are serving as an on-ramp to degrees for many community college students: between 32% and 43% of those who earn a certificate go on to reenroll and stack credentials, and most of those go on to earn a degree. The RAND review also pointed to some evidence that individuals from historically underserved communities are stacking credentials, though the findings are mixed. As students of color comprise a higher proportion of those who complete certificates than those who complete degrees, building equity- and economic mobility-focused pathways is critical. RAND research also notes that students who attend community colleges may be "geographically constrained," making it important to review opportunities available in different regions.

In an era where most individuals will need additional education throughout their careers to keep up with changing employer skill needs, and where adults may find short-term programs more accessible, New Jersey community colleges must expand their efforts to intentionally build seamless pathways, and state and college policies should recognize all students need access to academic and career advising, as well as financial and basic needs supports, regardless of the program they are attending.

As New Jersey continues to build out seamless and stackable pathways, the state should consider a broad commitment to credential transparency (making more information on degrees and credentials

available to the public) and should investigate developing digital Learning and Employment Records (LERs).<sup>44</sup> LERs, which are being developed in states across the country, could help students and workers document granular skills and competencies whether they were gained through formal or informal school or work opportunities. North Dakota has begun to offer college and high school students access to blockchain-based “digital wallets”<sup>45</sup> that will include verifiable diplomas, transcripts, and other credentials, which in turn contain links to the skills and standards reflected in each completed course. NJCCC will coordinate with the newly established Center for Career Relevant Education and Talent Evaluation of New Jersey (CreateNJ) at Thomas Edison State University to advance these priorities.

### STRATEGY 1: Revitalize general education

Technological, social, climate, and economic changes are having significant impacts on the skills that New Jerseyans will need to succeed and thrive in a diverse society and global economy. This includes the need for a general education curriculum that addresses the strategic, ethical, and equity issues tied to both artificial intelligence and climate change. Both topics have monumental implications for campus administration, facilities, and operations; teaching and learning; the student experience; and community engagement.

On December 18, 2023, Governor Murphy and Princeton University announced plans to establish an AI hub in New Jersey.<sup>46</sup> Earlier in the month, the Governor issued Executive Order No. 346<sup>47</sup> to create an AI Task Force

### Rowan College at Burlington County 3+1 with Rowan University

Rowan College at Burlington County (RCBC), in partnership with Rowan University, was the first community college in this part of the nation to launch a 3+1 program,<sup>48</sup> which has created transparent, seamless pathways for students that respond to the changing economy. Students earn both associate and Bachelor's degrees—90 credits taught by community college faculty (at community college tuition) and 30 credits from university faculty. Students complete the entire path on RCBC's Mount Laurel campus or online.

Since the first junior-year course in 2017, more than 1,100 graduates have saved over \$33.5 million in tuition. All four years combined cost less than what most universities charge for a single year. Students have a clear map outlining what they should take each semester. Students in the 3+1 program have had a higher retention rate—94% from spring to fall 2023.

This program serves all students, whether recent high school graduates or those who earned an associate degree several years ago.

RCBC's successful 3+1 program continues to grow, with an increase in the number of juniors every semester.

## Bergen Community College Direct Support Professionals Pilot

New Jersey, like most of the nation, faces a crisis-level shortage of Direct Support Professionals (DSPs) who provide critical services to individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities. With support from the Office of the Secretary of Higher Education, Bergen Community College (BCC), together with Rowan College of South Jersey and NJCCC, created a DSP program through its workforce development division. This program creates a solution for the state's DSP workforce while creating a clear pathway for students to earn credentials and begin coursework toward the Associate of Applied Science degree in Sociology.

As part of the program, BCC is engaging with employers to solidify 60-hour work-based learning experiences for this unique paid fellowship program. Employers who need DSPs to work in group homes across the state are eager to hire BCC's students and increase wages due to the tremendous workforce needs for DSPs. Employers will also work with BCC to build out professional development pathways for these students as they continue their education.

Key to the program is BCC's ability to bridge credit-bearing courses and workforce learning experiences. This stackable pathway will help students to be successful in the continually changing economy while encouraging them to continue to attain higher levels of education.

BCC also operates a Center for Adult Transition<sup>49</sup> to provide individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities and their families with access to community-based resources in the areas of postsecondary education, skills training, and opportunities to earn industry credentials leading to meaningful employment. The Center supports successful transition outcomes for adults with intellectual and developmental disabilities in collaboration with the Division of Developmental Disabilities, Division of Vocational Rehabilitation Services, Bergen County Special Services, Rutgers School of Public Health's Community Living Education Project, as well as other adult transition programs throughout the state.

responsible for studying the impacts of AI on society and developing plans for its ethical use, training the state workforce, and exploring strategies for how AI can contribute to economic and job growth. New Jersey's community colleges will be part of these critical discussions. It will be imperative, as noted by Complete College America, to ensure that AI tools and technologies are available and implemented in ways that enhance equity for low-income and traditionally marginalized populations—such as those who attend community colleges—rather than risk “amplifying unequal privilege” in higher education.<sup>50</sup>

 **SOLUTION:** New Jersey's community colleges, in partnership with the state's four-year colleges and universities, must revitalize general education and the humanities to focus on contemporary essential skills such as innovation; design thinking; resilience; collaboration; creativity; analytical thinking; empathy; diversity, equity, and inclusion; social influence; AI; digital; and cyber skills.

 **SOLUTION:** New Jersey's community colleges, in partnership with state leaders, technologists, and other stakeholders, must address the implications of AI for students, staff, and faculty.



## STRATEGY 2: Launch applied baccalaureate programs in high-demand occupations at community colleges

Twenty-five states currently allow community colleges to offer at least one community college baccalaureate (CCB) degree program. In many cases, states are building on existing associate degree programs tied to occupations in demand in their local communities. A recent study reported 565 CCB programs at 142 community colleges,<sup>51</sup> 80% of which are in allied health, business, nursing, engineering technology, education, information technology, and security and law enforcement.

Given the diverse population of community college students, CCBs offer a potential strategy to help New Jersey close equity gaps in Bachelor's degree attainment. CCBs are not intended to duplicate the programs of four-year institutions but rather to address local community labor market needs that are not being met. Typically, they cost less<sup>52</sup> than traditional Bachelor's degree programs, and in some cases offer more flexibility in terms of location and modality of study.<sup>53</sup> Analysis of CCB students in Florida and Washington State found average student ages of 31 and 32, respectively, compared to an average age of 22 for upper-division students at state universities; CCBs may be more accessible for working adults and those with families.<sup>54</sup> Research in Florida<sup>55</sup> has also found that CCBs "did not significantly impact bachelor degree production in similar programs at local four-year public or private nonprofit

## County College of Morris Embedded Industry Credentials


County College of Morris (CCM) has created a model pathway in Advanced Manufacturing.<sup>56</sup> Individuals seeking immediate employment in the field, known for family-supporting wages and benefits, complete an eight-week noncredit bootcamp program and enter the workforce immediately on completion. Students completing the bootcamp program in Advanced Manufacturing earn multiple industry credentials, including OSHA 10 and NIMS Level 1. Additionally, college credit in CCM's Mechanical Engineering Technology degree program is awarded on completion of the bootcamp program. CCM manages the interview process with area manufacturers so that each student is ensured interviews with up to five different employers. The employment rate is 93%. Employers are encouraged to hire these entry-level employees as apprentices and CCM supports, as an intermediary, eight U.S. Department of Labor-registered apprenticeships, including Industrial Maintenance, CNC Operator, and Quality Assurance/Quality Control. Approximately 50% of the new hires are hired as apprentices. Upon completion of what is typically a year-long apprenticeship, in addition to receiving their certificate from the U.S. Department of Labor, students are awarded additional credit in the Mechanical Engineering Technology degree program as well as wage increases associated with milestones in their apprenticeship. Students who complete an associate degree, often supported by employer-provided tuition reimbursement, are well-positioned to further advance in their career in Manufacturing.

## Raritan Valley Community College Aseptic Processing and Biomanufacturing Center for Workforce Innovation

The goal of the Center for Workforce Innovation for Aseptic Processing and Biomanufacturing is to build New Jersey's Education and Training Coalition in order to maintain the state's global competitiveness in the Biopharmaceutical, Biomanufacturing, and Biotechnology industries by creating a robust pipeline of skilled entry-level workers to meet critical labor market needs. In addition to Raritan Valley Community College, the initial education partners are Mercer County Community College and Middlesex College and will soon include high schools and four-year colleges and universities. Current industry partners are Johnson & Johnson, Bristol Myers Squibb, Merck, Novartis, Minaris, Roche, Cellares, Legend, Apex, Ferring, Joule, Everest Group, and Horizon Blue Cross Blue Shield. The industry partners will become paying members, and their engagement will be based on their membership level to include seats on the advisory board, Coalition steering committee, and other opportunities.

The expansive partner network of the Coalition will guide the development of agile academic and workforce training programs designed to create a competitive talent pool and upskill current employees. The member-based Coalition will support and sustain an educational ecosystem anchored in competency-based and work-based learning experiences, credentials, and degrees aligned to industry-required skills and competencies. Coalition members will contribute to the development of a robust suite of credentials, as well as participate in the development of shared marketing campaigns, job shadowing experiences, pre-apprenticeships, apprenticeships, and mentorship programs.

institutions.” It appears that CCBs are serving individuals who would not likely attend four-year institutions.<sup>57</sup>


 **SOLUTION:** New Jersey should allow community colleges to design and deliver applied baccalaureate degree programs that are tied to demonstrated local labor market demand.

### STRATEGY 3: Streamline transfer pathways

New Jersey has done an impressive job of building pathways to help community college students transfer to four-year colleges and universities. As noted in the 2021–2022 Transfer of Credit Annual Report, as a result of New Jersey's comprehensive statewide transfer agreement (known as the “Lampitt Law”), more than 91% of students who completed an associate degree with a minimum of 60 earned credits saw all of their credits accepted by four-year public institutions, up from 65% prior to the Lampitt Law. A 2023 analysis by the U.S. Department of Education<sup>58</sup> noted that nationally, 13% of Title IV students receiving financial aid who begin at community colleges eventually earn a Bachelor's degree within eight years; New Jersey leads the nation at 17.9%, an indication that community colleges are skilled at preparing their transfer students and have developed strong partnerships with four-year institutions.

NJ Transfer,<sup>59</sup> an initiative of the Presidents' Council, provides important

information to students to help inform the courses they take at a community college. However, many students who transfer from a community college to a four-year college or university in New Jersey find that some of the credits earned at community college either are not accepted at all by the receiving institution or the credits are not received in transfer as the equivalent course, with the result that the student must repeat the course at the four-year institution. College credits earned online, while the student was in high school, or through prior learning assessments at community colleges, may not be accepted by four-year colleges and universities.

 **SOLUTION:** Two- and four-year institutions of higher education in New Jersey should work together to ensure that all credits earned at a community college as part of an associate degree will seamlessly transfer to a public four-year college or university in New Jersey and that community college students have the transfer support they need.

#### **STRATEGY 4: Ensure all community college students can complete a high-quality, paid internship work experience**

Work-based learning opportunities such as internships are critical to students building social capital and making connections to the labor market, providing them with experience they can point to when considering careers and searching for jobs. Research<sup>60</sup> has found that first-generation students, Black and Latino/a students, women, and low-income students are less likely to have opportunities for paid internships, and that community college students<sup>61</sup> are less likely than four-year students to access paid work-based learning opportunities.


### **Salem Community College Scientific Glass Technology Program**

Salem Community College (SCC) is world renowned for its Scientific Glass Technology (SGT) program.<sup>62</sup> Scientific glassblowing, particularly flameworking, is expanding exponentially as it is used in the fields of Chemistry and Physics. SCC students learn how to fabricate precision glass apparatus and instruments critical to research and industry. SCC's Associate in Applied Science in SGT is the only degree program in the United States fully devoted to the development of this essential skill, and one of only a few programs globally. Students come from across the nation and around the globe to be part of SCC's world-class, state-of-the-art, SGT program.

In addition to the SGT program, SCC has a Glass Art program that is equally renowned.<sup>63</sup> The faculty includes guest artist and lecturer, Paul Stankard, whose glass paperweights are on display in the finest galleries on the planet, including the Louvre. Many students opt to pursue a dual major—SGT and Glass Art—developing a skill set that is the best of both worlds. SCC is truly the center of the glass-blowing universe. Glass blowers, particularly flame workers, are in high demand throughout the nation and the world. The demand for skilled professional glassblowers far exceeds the supply. A two-year degree in SGT can pay enormous dividends.

## Warren County Community College Drone Certificate and Degree Programs


Warren County Community College's (WCCC) drone program<sup>64</sup> equips students with cutting-edge skills and coveted industry-specific credentials, positioning them for success in the booming drone industry. Through hands-on training and classroom instruction, including access to a state-of-the-art unmanned aircraft system laboratory and outdoor multi-function flight training center, WCCC prepares students to become certified drone pilots, unlocking career opportunities in agriculture, surveying, construction, mining, environmental sciences, commercial package delivery, public utilities/energy, cinematography and photography, search and rescue, and public safety/law enforcement. WCCC's curriculum prepares students to test for multiple professional certifications. For example, students can obtain the Federal Aviation Administration Part 107 Remote Pilot Certificate. WCCC is the only community college in the nation that can offer the Association for Uncrewed Vehicle Systems International-certified practical flight assessments beyond Part 107. WCCC students can pursue industry certifications, one-year certificate degree programs, or a two-year Associate Degree in Applied Science for Unmanned Systems. WCCC's drone program graduates are securing high-paying positions, and the program is contributing to the region's economic growth.

 **SOLUTION:** New Jersey should expand and make more flexible the state's Career Accelerator Internship program, ensuring it is equitably available to low-income community college students. All CCOG students should be guaranteed access to funds for high-quality paid internships, including opportunities on campus, in government, in nonprofits, and with private-sector employers. New Jersey's business community, with support from the New Jersey Office of the Secretary of Higher Education and the New Jersey Economic Development Authority, and with the support of statewide business associations, should commit to expanding internship opportunities for community college students.

### STRATEGY 5: Embed industry-valued workforce credentials in community college programs

New Jersey should expand opportunities to help students achieve credentials that prepare them for the workforce by embedding them in degree programs where feasible. In Tennessee, under the Reimagining the Community College Experience<sup>65</sup> pilot, four community colleges are redesigning their programs so that all students receive intensive career exploration, both pre-college and throughout their program of study. In their first semester of college, every student will earn a workforce-focused certificate aligned with local labor market needs. The pilot colleges are refining pathways so students can stack credentials and work toward associate degrees and beyond.

In Texas, over the past two years, the University of Texas (UT) System has experimented with offering microcredentials. Under the Texas Credentials for the Future initiative,<sup>66</sup> UT has joined with Coursera and its Career Academy<sup>67</sup> and will be providing free access for UT students, faculty, staff, and alumni, enabling them to complete industry certificates from Google, Salesforce, IBM, and other companies.

 **SOLUTION:** New Jersey community colleges should partner with the New Jersey Department of Labor and Workforce Development to develop and maintain an Industry-Valued Credential List to guide community college efforts.


 **SOLUTION:** New Jersey should identify funding opportunities to enable low-income students to cover non-tuition-related costs associated with embedded industry credentials and certification exams.

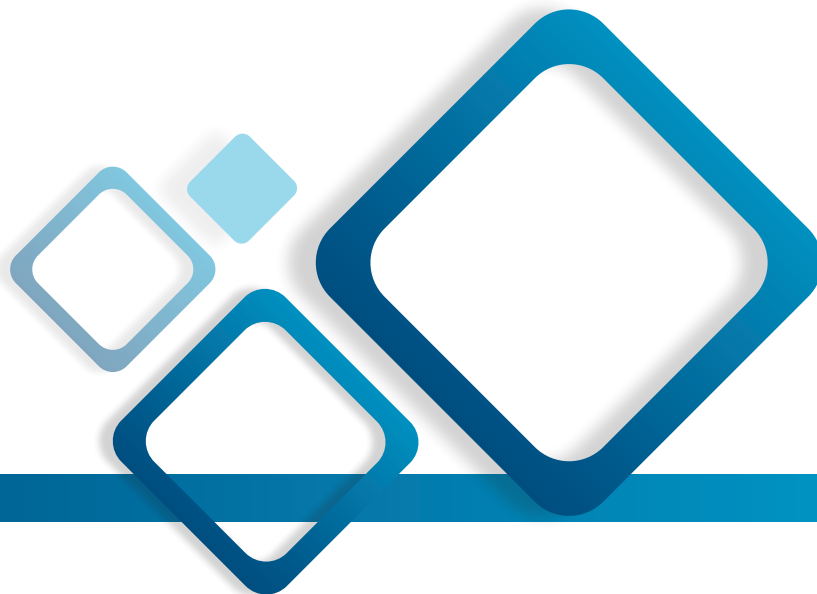
## **STRATEGY 6: Build collaboratively designed statewide and regional pathways connecting students to credentials, degrees, and lifelong learning**

In 2021, New Jersey’s community colleges, in partnership with the New Jersey Business and Industry Association and with support in three state budgets, launched the New Jersey Pathways to Career Opportunities initiative,<sup>68</sup> with the goals of:

- Uniting industry and education experts to solve labor market challenges and build timely and relevant curricula to address skill needs;
- Creating education and career pathways from middle and high school through two- and four-year college and beyond in the four fastest-growing sectors in New Jersey: Health Services, Infrastructure and Energy, Manufacturing and Supply Chain Management, and Technology and Innovation; and
- Ensuring a more resilient, equitable, and fairer economy for all residents by supporting multiple on-ramps to stackable credentials, education, training, and careers.

To date, New Jersey Pathways to Career Opportunities has convened over 1,400 partners in industry collaboratives, developed 10 multi-college virtual Centers of Workforce Innovation, and developed 22 career pathways focused on the earning of industry-valued credentials.

 **SOLUTION:** New Jersey should make a long-term commitment to the New Jersey Pathways to Career Opportunities initiative to assist community colleges to further align curricula to the needs of the changing economy.





## PILLAR 4: Helping Adults Attain the Credentials They Need for Career Mobility and Labor Market Success

To keep up with evolving skills and achieve economic and career mobility, more adult and working learners will need ongoing access to education and training. Some of these needs can be met through short-term nondegree credential programs at community colleges. Many states have developed new programs to provide funding for short-term programs. A recent national analysis<sup>69</sup> identified 59 state-led initiatives to support short-term credentials across 28 states, totaling in excess of \$3.81 billion. Of these initiatives, 27 provide students directly with financial aid to cover program costs, 15 provide funds to institutions so they can provide support and tuition assistance to students, and 6 provide support to institutions for capacity-building and development of short-term credential programs aligned

with the labor market. The analysis defined short-term credentials as those requiring less than one year of full-time study, including credentials awarded by public and private postsecondary institutions for both credit and noncredit programs as well as certificates issued by industry organizations.

Other countries have also made significant and creative investments in helping their citizens skill up. Singapore residents age 25 and older are eligible for a \$500 SkillsFuture<sup>70</sup> credit that can be used for a range of occupational training courses; additional support is available for midcareer adults ages 40 to 60.

To help ensure the quality of nondegree short-term credential programs,<sup>71</sup> many states limit funds to credentials identified

as having value, either because they are recognized by employers or because they lead to wage premiums and opportunities for economic mobility, especially for underserved populations. A recent review of nondegree credential quality frameworks<sup>72</sup> cited the following criteria:

- **Market Alignment:** Is the credential relied upon or prioritized by employers hiring for in-demand, high-wage roles? Is it an industry-recognized credential?
- **Equity:** Are there gaps in credential attainment or other outcomes by race, gender, or other student characteristics?
- **Outcomes:** Are employment, earnings, and pathway progression outcomes connected to a specific credential comparable and reliable? Are the data related to credentials around job placement and earnings defined using the same metrics and consistent definitions? Are the credential attainment data reported reliable? Valid? Audited by a third party?
- **Stackability:** Can the credential be stacked to additional education or training to help people advance in their educational, training, or employment pathway?
- **Learning and Competencies:** Does the credential serve as an appropriate marker for the mastery of competencies that are valued by employers, is it aligned with industry or sector standards, and does it provide the credential holder with the tools to achieve their related career goals?

The New Jersey Department of Labor and Workforce Development recently built new quality assurance standards into the state's Eligible Training Provider List,

## PILLAR 4 COLLEGE EXAMPLES

### Mercer County Community College Registered Apprenticeship with Trenton Water Works

Registered apprenticeship is a proven earn-and-learn model that helps industry meet workforce needs while helping individuals access pathways to careers with family-sustaining wages. Registered apprenticeships generally include a mix of on-the-job training and classroom instruction, with apprentices being full-time paid employees from the start of their program and receiving agreed-upon wage increases as they achieve milestones. MCCC is helping promote registered apprenticeship in New Jersey in several fields, including Health Care.<sup>73</sup> MCCC partners with the Trenton Water Works (TWW)'s Training and Apprenticeship Program (TAP), providing employees with education to prepare them for higher-level jobs in water treatment and distribution operation and maintenance.

TAP is supported by the New Jersey Department of Labor and Workforce Development's Growing Apprenticeships in Nontraditional Sectors grant program, which covers half of the apprentices' salaries. TWW's apprentices receive 290 hours of training, including 180 hours for MCCC's operator prerequisite course, which is taught on-site at TWW headquarters by a water industry executive. The TAP curriculum, which includes Occupational Safety and Health Administration and Federal Emergency Management Agency emergency response training, prepares apprentices to become water system operation or water treatment specialists who are eligible to take related state exams after they complete their required number of work hours. There are currently 14 active apprentices as of January 2024.

## Rowan College of South Jersey Partnership with Gloucester County Workforce Development Board

In April 2023, Rowan College of South Jersey (RCSJ) entered a new and mutually strategic partnership with the Gloucester County Workforce Development Board that embeds the Board and its staff into the organizational structure of RCSJ on the Gloucester campus. This partnership is grounded on both institutions' critical role in expanding economic mobility, preparing individuals to have sustainable careers and opportunities for advancement. RCSJ and the Gloucester County Workforce Development Board have agreed to strengthen coordination, collaboration, and communication in executing a joint mission by merging to create a more efficient, effective, and seamless service delivery model for assisting employers, employees, and job seekers throughout southern New Jersey.

The goals of the partnership include:

- Designing individual and cohort-style workforce training programs that provide pathways to industry-valued, stackable credentials and degrees, increasing the percentage of southern New Jersey residents who have earned a postsecondary credential or degree, while focusing on marginalized adult and youth populations;
- Ensuring employers have a skilled applicant pool to fill vacancies;
- Developing joint marketing and branding services to collectively engage employers, employees, and job seekers;
- Intertwining of funding sources to provide education, training programs, and career pathways that have the benefit of allowable services from both institutions; and
- Establishing metrics to measure the success of each dual-enrolled student/customer of RCSJ and the American Job Center using Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act funding for training or educational programs to meet dual enrollment goals established by the Gloucester County Workforce Development Board.

which is required for any training provider to receive federal or state job training funds.


### STRATEGY 1: Fund noncredit programs for low-income students


State and federal financial aid programs in New Jersey are focused solely on assisting students who attend credit-bearing degree programs. However, community colleges offer a significant number of short-term noncredit programs leading to an industry-valued credential that are not affordable to many students who could benefit from them.

New Jersey's Workforce Development Partnership Fund and the Supplemental Workforce Fund for Basic Skills were established in the 1990s to be a dedicated source of funding for occupationally focused training programs and literacy programs. Funded through payroll taxes, each fund consists of specific sub-programs focused on specific sub-populations (dislocated workers, disadvantaged workers, employed workers, etc.) and with specific legislative requirements. Each year, the state budget diverts significant amounts from each fund to other priorities. For many years, a portion of the state's



commitment to community college operating aid was funded through diversions from the Supplemental Workforce Fund for Basic Skills.

 **SOLUTION:** Amend the CCOG to provide support for individuals pursuing industry-valued noncredit credentials that meet quality standards.

 **SOLUTION:** Modernize New Jersey's Workforce Development Partnership Fund and the Supplemental Workforce Fund for Basic Skills to establish a New Economy Opportunity Skills Fund that could serve as a source of funding for community college workforce and literacy programs and to address the impacts of AI in the workplace and prepare New Jerseyans for jobs of the future.

## **STRATEGY 2: Develop a consistent, statewide approach to Credit for Prior Learning (CPL)/Prior Learning Assessment (PLA)**

Many New Jerseyans start college with knowledge, skills, and competencies they have gained outside of traditional classrooms, including through work; industry training; apprenticeships, internships, or other work-based learning; volunteer and civic opportunities; life experiences; and military training. CPL awards credit to students for validated college-level knowledge, skills, and competencies—wherever they were attained. These can be validated through standardized examinations, faculty-developed challenge tests, portfolio-based and other individualized assessments, and evaluation of noncollege employer or military training by organizations such as the American Council on Education.

Research<sup>74</sup> has found that CPL/PLA is associated with better outcomes for adult learners, including substantially higher completion rates, cost savings, and time savings. CPL/PLA boosted completion rates for low-income adults and Pell Grant recipients, Black and Hispanic adults, and adults attending community colleges. PLA has also been found to improve the confidence of adult learners and can serve as an on-ramp to postsecondary education credentials and degrees, building bridges between noncredit and credit programs. Further, awarding CPL/PLA benefits institutions as well: adult students who earned CPL took on average 17.6 more credits than adults who did not receive CPL. However, PLA is underutilized across the United States: only 1 in 10 adult students earn college credit for their prior learning, and PLA usage is lowest among Black students, female students, and Pell Grant recipients.

Many states have developed policies and laws that support CPL/PLA—including 35 states and the District of Columbia—that require institutions to award credit for military experience.<sup>75</sup> Other state or system-wide policies require institutions to develop transparent policies and practices; to increase the number of students who receive CPL that count toward their degree, certificate, or credential; and to allow state financial aid

to be used for costs related to PLA. Some state systems have evaluated certifications and military training and created a standard crosswalk to college credits for use by all institutions. Virginia’s Credits2Careers website<sup>76</sup> explains how military experience, industry certifications, professional licensure, and prior academic learning can be applied, with a section devoted to helping justice-impacted individuals receive credits.

 **SOLUTION:** New Jersey should develop a statewide policy to improve consistency of CPL/PLA across institutions; boosting awareness and usage of CPL/PLA; and addressing transparency, affordability, access, and quality to help more residents complete postsecondary degrees and credentials.

Areas of focus for a statewide policy could include:

- Ensuring a common approach utilizing best practices for CPL/PLA and ensuring that credits earned through CPL/PLA will transfer to other institutions of higher education,
- Allowing for state financial aid to support CPL/PLA,
- Developing consistent messaging and strategies to ensure that all students and potential students are informed of CPL/PLA opportunities,
- Developing a state CPL/PLA crosswalk for credentials and military training, and/or
- Building a common CPL/PLA website.

### **STRATEGY 3: Reenvision the state’s workforce development system centered around community colleges**

Currently, two parallel systems, both funded by state and federal investments, work to serve individuals who are unemployed and underemployed and to meet the needs of employers. These two systems—the state workforce development system and community colleges—have many connection points, but these vary dramatically from county to county, leaving individuals and employers confused about where to receive the assistance they need.

 **SOLUTION:** New Jersey should launch an intensive planning effort to build a new “opportunity system” that could:

- Integrate Workforce Development Boards into community colleges to increase strategic coordination on economic development and to address local labor market needs;
- Designate community colleges as the preferred provider of postsecondary education and workforce training through the workforce development system; and
- Establish community colleges as the leader of adult literacy programs by utilizing existing funding and in partnership with libraries and community-based organizations. Community colleges should integrate basic and technical/career skills into the literacy training.

**By implementing these bold policy initiatives, New Jersey community colleges are creating a blueprint for a sustainable future grounded in equity, resilience, collaboration, and opportunity.**

**We are eager to work with all who share this commitment.**



## CALL TO ACTION: NEXT STEPS

New Jersey's 18 community colleges are dedicated to aligning our efforts to address urgent equity concerns, help all New Jersey residents achieve academic, social, and economic mobility, and ensure employers have access to the talent they need in a rapidly changing world. We are learning what is possible from innovative and promising examples in New Jersey and beyond, and we have used those examples to craft the action pillars, strategies, and solutions that make up this Opportunity Agenda. We now seek input and partnership from all stakeholder communities—educational institutions, community and faith-based organizations, employers, unions, the philanthropic community, the Governor's Office, the State Legislature, state and local government agencies, researchers, and others—to join us in implementing this agenda, building pathways to equity and economic prosperity for all New Jerseyans.



# New Jersey's 18 Community Colleges



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