



# Framework for the Future of New Jersey's Community Colleges

October 2019





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## Introduction

In a rapidly changing world and intensely competitive global economy, New Jersey's community colleges are critical institutions of higher education and economic opportunity, able to reach a significant proportion of the state's population and offer affordable, high quality education that serves the complex needs of students, employers, and local communities. Many of New Jersey's 18 community colleges were created 50 years ago, and now enroll over 325,000 students at over 60 campuses, making them the largest provider of higher education in the state. New Jersey's community colleges are uniquely positioned to help the economy grow, industries thrive, and people succeed in an era of rapid economic, social, and technological change.

New Jersey's future and that of its residents depends on a **strong network of community colleges**, uniquely able to assist residents to obtain the skills and knowledge they will need to thrive and succeed. This report, which sets out a framework for the future of New Jersey's community colleges, was developed by the New Jersey Council of County Colleges, working with the state's 18 community colleges, and is aligned with *New Jersey's Plan for Higher Education* developed by the Office of the Secretary of Higher Education. This bold vision is based on input from over 600 community college leaders and stakeholders through more than 25 meetings, a statewide Leadership Summit, and through online comments from members of the community college community, including students, alumni, trustees, faculty, staff, and others.

At the heart of this vision is a commitment from the state's community colleges to playing a critical role in **increasing the number of New Jerseyans who have earned a post-secondary credential or degree** so that the state can meet its ambitious goal of 65% post-secondary attainment by the year 2025. Community colleges will focus on expanding opportunities for all New Jerseyans in order to close equity and opportunity gaps by race, ethnicity, and geography. Continued and expanded financial support from state and county governments is critical to this broad and ambitious effort.

### The New Jersey Council of County Colleges will build broad, comprehensive partnerships with

- state and local government agencies
- employers and industry associations
- high schools
- four-year colleges and universities
- libraries
- social services organizations
- labor unions
- community and faith-based organizations
- foundations

### and others in order to:

1. Increase access to post-secondary education for more New Jerseyans;
2. Support the success of students;
3. Ensure access to valuable and relevant learning; and
4. Expand the role of community colleges as community engines for social and economic mobility, for entrepreneurial success, and for sustained economic development.

## Section 1: Imperatives for New Jersey's Future

Not long ago, and within the lifetime memory of many New Jerseyans, earning a high school diploma enabled many people to secure a good, stable job in a manufacturing-dominated economy. This was the post-World War II American dream, spawned by the Industrial Revolution and two World Wars. In today's economy, more and more jobs require a post-secondary degree or credential. Without this vital post-secondary education, the American dream is becoming out of reach for too many people.

The state economy shares the nation's 50-year shift in employment away from goods-producing industries to private service-producing industries, a transformation reflected in new job titles, skill sets, job descriptions, and tools. The growth of the service industry and the integration of technology across the economy is prompting the wholesale restructuring of leading industry sectors, such as health care, finance, manufacturing, and retail trade. Mathematical algorithms, software applications, social media and networking, the Internet of Things, and artificial intelligence are now transforming the nature of work from the factory floor, to small businesses, and to the board rooms of the state's largest companies. These technologies, and others, have changed the way we work, learn, and live and have transformed internal business operations in every industry. Technological advances have enabled the rise of a highly integrated global economy that has further increased the pace of change in the labor market.

Amid these changes, too many New Jerseyans are struggling, despite a relatively strong labor market and economy. Nearly four in 10 households (38.5%) in New Jersey are struggling to make ends meet each day. Many of these households include an adult who is employed, but they do not earn enough to afford basic necessities, such as housing, child care, transportation, and health care. The United Way of Northern New Jersey has identified these households as Asset Limited, Income Constrained, Employed (ALICE).<sup>1</sup>

Responding to this rapidly changing world will require innovative public policy and strategic investments in the future. Five imperatives will be central to a broader strategy to ensure that more New Jerseyans are prepared to thrive and adapt and to ensure that the state has a skilled workforce to propel economic growth.

<sup>1</sup> United Way of Northern New Jersey, "ALICE: A Study of Financial Hardship in New Jersey," [http://www.unitedwaynnj.org/ourwork/alice\\_nj.php](http://www.unitedwaynnj.org/ourwork/alice_nj.php)

## IMPERATIVE 1: Increase the Number of Individuals who have Earned Post-Secondary Credentials and Degrees

For almost its entire history, New Jersey's highly educated residents have been the state's most important economic advantage. For many years, New Jersey ranked near the top of all states in the percentage of adults with a post-secondary education. New Jersey now ranks 7th in the country and risks falling further behind other states without concerted action.

New Jersey's status as a high-tech, high-wage state cannot be sustained over the coming decade without a skilled workforce to support it. As a result of the growth of high-skill and middle-skill jobs fueled by technological change and a global economy, state leaders, informed by the work of labor economists and other experts, have concluded that New Jersey must increase the percentage of adults with a post-secondary degree or credential from the current 52% to at least 65% by the year 2025.

## IMPERATIVE 2: Prepare Residents for Change

Technological and societal change will likely be a constant in the years ahead. While individuals will need credentials and degrees that prepare them for specific jobs and careers, they will also need to have the essential skills needed to thrive and adapt to change in the economy and in society. These fundamental competencies include critical thinking, problem-solving, verbal and written communication, the ability to work on diverse teams, the ability to always learn, a broad knowledge of the world, and respect and understanding of a diverse society – all necessary for the complex world of work and to be well-rounded members of our democracy.

## IMPERATIVE 3: Ensure Access to Life Long Learning

The average American worker will change jobs regularly before retirement. Some of these job changes will involve whole new careers, as new occupations are created and current occupations transformed and destroyed. To adapt to this evolving world of work, individuals will need to keep learning, and education will be essential. People will need to be skilled at being life-long learners, and have the flexibility, resources, and options to return to education throughout their lives and careers to learn the skills needed to change jobs and successfully navigate the new world of work.





## IMPERATIVE 4: Focus on Equity

New Jersey has significant inequities in post-secondary education attainment by race, ethnicity, and geography. While 52% of New Jerseyans have earned a post-secondary degree or credential, only 31% of African-Americans and 24% of Hispanic residents have had the same access to post-secondary education.<sup>2</sup> Over 60% of adults in Morris, Somerset, and Hunterdon counties hold post-secondary credentials, while less than 35 percent of adults in Cumberland, Salem, and Passaic counties hold post-secondary credentials. Addressing these disparities is a moral imperative and an economic necessity.

## IMPERATIVE 5: Build Broad Partnerships

No single institution will be able to adequately prepare individuals for the changing world by itself. New partnerships and closer, more dynamic and creative collaborations with state and local government agencies, employers and industry associations, high schools, four-year colleges and universities, libraries, social services organizations, labor unions, community and faith-based organizations, foundations, and others are essential. These ever-evolving collaborations will demand significant investments and will be best served by continual assessment, promoting high levels of institutional effectiveness.



*To respond to this rapidly changing world will require innovative public policy and strategic investments in the future.*



<sup>2</sup> *The Lumina Foundation*, "A Stronger Nation: Learning Beyond High School Builds American Talent," <http://strongernation.luminafoundation.org/report/2019/#nation>

## Section 2: A Strong and Solid Foundation

Every day, New Jersey's community colleges work to respond to these imperatives. We are building on a solid foundation and a statewide reach. New Jersey's strong network of **comprehensive, open door, and affordable** community colleges respond fully to the educational, economic, cultural, and community needs of their respective counties. New Jersey's comprehensive community colleges prepare students to enter four-year institutions, train them to assume skilled positions in New Jersey's workforce, and offer many other programs that enrich the quality of life for the state's residents. Community colleges offer a wide variety of associate degree programs including both transfer and occupational curricula, certificate programs in various occupational fields, and noncredit courses that serve students' career or general interests.

New Jersey's community colleges are a critical nexus in the state's education system. The colleges have strong partnerships with the **K-12 sector**, providing dual enrollment programs to ensure that students are better prepared for post-secondary education and are on a pathway to further education.

New Jersey's community colleges enjoy a special relationship with New Jersey's **county-based vocational technical schools**, working in collaboration to prepare students for careers in the innovation economy.

The community colleges also have strong partnerships and articulation agreements with New Jersey's public and independent **four-year colleges and universities**, playing a critical role in baccalaureate degree attainment for students in this state. According to the National Student Clearinghouse, 45% of all students who earned a bachelor's degree from a New Jersey college or university had previously completed courses at a community college. And on average, students who complete their first two years at a New Jersey community college before transferring to a four-year college save an average of \$21,000 in tuition – the most in the country. In short, community colleges are the centralized engine of higher education in New Jersey.

Community colleges play a critical role in meeting the **workforce needs of New Jersey's businesses**. Each community college has a wide array of innovative collaborations with businesses and other partners that help companies upgrade the skills of their employees, provide training to unemployed and underemployed individuals, and address skills gaps across the state. For example, the Council's statewide Community College Consortium for Workforce and Economic Development has trained over 207,000 employees at over 9,000 companies throughout New Jersey since its creation in 2003. The Consortium provides a strong platform for further collaboration among the community colleges and in partnership with employers in the state's key industries.



New Jersey's community colleges are critical to providing **economic mobility**, helping individuals earn high school equivalency degrees, teaching English language skills, and helping individuals improve their basic skills. These efforts provide a pathway to further education and to a career.

And the colleges serve as centers of **life-long learning**, helping individuals to upgrade their skills, and to obtain the skills and education required to prepare for new careers.

The state's 18 community colleges function as a **network of institutions** working collaboratively through the New Jersey Council of County Colleges, a non-profit organization enshrined in state law that works to support and strengthen the state's community colleges. The Council's Center for Student Success supports college efforts to increase the number of students who earn post-secondary degrees and credentials. Since 2008, the number of community college graduates has increased from 15,925 to 23,047, a 45% increase.

New Jersey's community colleges play a significant role in increasing the number of individuals in New Jersey who have earned an **industry-valued post-secondary credential or degree** and can play a critical role in helping the state to meet the goal of 65% of the adult population having earned an industry-valued post-secondary credential or degree by 2025.

Through all of these efforts, New Jersey's community colleges have a **significant economic impact** on the state and on their communities, through increased earnings and productivity of students, through the employment of faculty and staff, through the purchase of goods and services, and through the construction of facilities.



*New Jersey's status as a high-tech, high-wage state cannot be sustained over the coming decade without a skilled workforce to support it.*



## Section 3: Bold Vision for the Future

New Jersey's community colleges are poised to offer an ever-expansive vision of higher education that is **agile, collaborative, and innovative**, and that prepares individuals, at varying stages of their lives and careers, for success in an increasingly diverse society and global economy. We are rooted in our local communities, responding to the local needs of students and employers, while understanding that we live in an increasingly connected global community. We impact our students, counties, and our state, and enable each to compete and thrive in the nation and the world.

Continued and expanded state and county support for community colleges is critical to the ability of the colleges to achieve this bold vision for the future and to maintain quality and affordable post-secondary education.

With state support and collaboration, New Jersey's community colleges will work together in the years ahead, developing **new models of collaboration** and cooperation and **leading partnerships** with state and local government agencies, employers and industry associations, high schools, four-year colleges and universities, libraries, social services organizations, labor unions, community and faith-based organizations, foundations, and others in order to:



## Priority 1: Increase access to post-secondary education for all New Jerseyans

In the years ahead, New Jersey's community colleges will work to build a broad partnership of state government, educational institutions at all levels, community organizations, and others to ensure that more New Jersey residents have the opportunity to enroll in post-secondary degree or credential programs. With a focus on achieving New Jersey's ambitious attainment goal, New Jersey's community colleges will build on existing efforts and a long commitment to being open access institutions and will:

- ✓ **Partner with high schools** to improve college and career readiness, to provide essential student support interventions (financial aid literacy, career explorations, intentional advising), and to design robust, clear academic and technical pathways for all students;
- ✓ Serve **adults** by adopting comprehensive and fair prior learning assessment protocols to provide college credit for learning gained outside the college classroom, by establishing academic and technical pathways that serve in-demand sectors and occupations (including stackable credentials and industry-recognized badges), and by redesigning both curricula frameworks and support services to better promote retention and completion;
- ✓ Focus on partnering with a wide range of institutions to close **equity and opportunity gaps** and regional disparities in post-secondary educational attainment;
- ✓ Work to reduce the **financial barriers** to a post-secondary education through the continued support of the Federal Pell Grant program, the expansion of New Jersey's Community College Opportunity Grant program, and through support for state Tuition Aid Grants and the Equal Opportunity Fund program; and
- ✓ Address both the out-migration of high school graduates and affordability by offering **specialized baccalaureate degrees in response to local workforce needs** and credentials that support crucial, unmet labor market needs of the state's employers.

*Without some postsecondary education, the American Dream is too quickly and easily becoming a distant memory for too many people.*



## Priority 2: Support the success of students

Community colleges have long been focused on making sure that students who enroll have the supports needed to succeed and to complete their degrees or credentials. Community colleges, building on efforts to implement guided pathways for students, will:

- ✓ Strengthen **career advising services** for potential and current students through partnerships with high schools, employers, workforce development organizations, libraries, and community and faith-based organizations;
- ✓ Expand and strengthen **student supports**, including first-year initiatives, advising, and program maps that will support completion of credentials and degrees;
- ✓ Expand and strengthen the use of **open use digital textbooks** and other advances to reduce financial barriers for all students;
- ✓ Expand partnerships with government and community and faith-based organizations in order to expand the **social services** that are available to students to reduce food and housing insecurity, increase access to child care and health care, mental health services, and solve transportation barriers; and
- ✓ Re-imagine a **transfer** culture so that all residents are offered accelerated, affordable, and agile pathways to public and private four-year in-state colleges and universities.



*New Jersey's community colleges are poised to offer an ever-expansive vision of higher education that is agile, collaborative, and innovative.*



### Priority 3: Ensure access to valuable and relevant learning

Community colleges have long provided an affordable and high quality education that prepares students for further education and transfer to a four-year college or university, or for a job and career. Community colleges are committed to ensuring that students, whether they are in credit bearing degree programs or noncredit credential and occupationally-focused programs, are prepared for their lives and careers and will:

- ✓ Build on the unique strengths of community colleges by allowing students the opportunity to obtain critical-thinking and problem-solving skills, to learn essential knowledge, and **to prepare to be engaged in a rapidly changing democracy and participants in increasingly diverse communities;**
- ✓ Insist that students have the opportunity to obtain the skills that will enable them to obtain a **family-supporting career;**
- ✓ Build partnerships with employers to assist them to **upgrade the skills of their current employees** through tuition-assistance programs;
- ✓ Continue to expand the role of community colleges in providing **life-long learning opportunities** for individuals at various stages of their lives and careers;
- ✓ Strengthen **work-based learning** opportunities for students, including internships, apprenticeships, and service-learning opportunities;
- ✓ Lead the development of **industry-focused collaboratives** that bring together community colleges, employers, and other education partners to identify industry needs, develop new credit-bearing credentials and pathways, expand apprenticeship programs, and provide outreach to employers and students in order to tackle urgent skilled worker shortages, and to support long-term economic development efforts;
- ✓ Integrate credit and noncredit programs by building new **credit/noncredit pathways** that allow students in workforce programs to transition to credit-bearing degree programs and allow credit students to earn industry-valued credentials;
- ✓ Expand **industry-valued credit-bearing credential programs;** and
- ✓ Further review the changing workforce needs of employers, the future of work, and innovations in higher education, and consider the implications of **competency-based education** for the delivery of higher education through community colleges, which would allow students to advance based on their abilities to master skills and competencies at their own pace.

## Priority 4: Serve as community engines

Since their founding, community colleges have played a central role in their local counties and the cities where they are located, acting as centers for community gatherings, arts, civic engagement, and contributors to the economic development of their communities. Community colleges will continue this cherished tradition and will:

- ✓ Serve as **centers of community and civic engagement** by involving students in the issues and priorities impacting their communities and by being places for communities to gather, collaborate, and interact;
- ✓ Promote **innovative public-private partnerships**, opening the campuses to a broad range of stakeholders; and
- ✓ Imagine their own campuses not only as well documented engines of economic development – and an exceptional return on investment – but as **incubators of innovation**, as laboratories of entrepreneurial experiment, as communal maker spaces, and as campuses that invent products, services, and businesses.



*Community colleges have long provided an affordable and high quality education that prepares students for further education.*



## Section 4: Vision 2028 Initiatives

In the months and years ahead, the New Jersey Council of County Colleges and the state's community colleges will take actions, both together and as individual colleges, to achieve this vision. As a first step in 2019 and 2020, the New Jersey Council of County Colleges will build and lead statewide partnerships to improve and expand career and credential pathways; strengthen the delivery of innovative learning to assist students to gain essential skills, knowledge, and abilities; improve and expand educational and support services for adult learners; and facilitate social service supports for students. Four initiatives, launched with the release of this report, will serve as the initial foundation for broader efforts to reach the State of New Jersey's goal of having at least 65 percent of working adults holding a post-secondary credential or degree by 2025.

With the input and support of a broad array of partners, we can all work collectively to ensure we are helping the people of this state obtain the post-secondary credentials and degrees they will need to thrive in the economy, and ensure that economic mobility is available to more New Jerseyans.



*In 2019 and 2020, the New Jersey Council of County Colleges will build and lead statewide partnerships to improve and expand career and credential pathways.*





## Initiative 1: Expanding Pathways That Lead to Credentials and Careers

New Jersey residents, at various stages of their lives and careers, must have seamless access to higher education through our community colleges, and should have clear paths that lead to jobs and careers that provide family-sustaining wages.

In the coming year, New Jersey's community colleges will launch a broad effort to promote the earning of stackable, industry-valued credentials by designing and offering robust and inclusive *pathways*, that are continuously assessed, that incorporate high school collaborations, that allow for seamless transitions between noncredit and credit courses, and that include innovative partnerships with four-year institutions. This effort, which will be organized around the state's key industry sectors, will nurture and strengthen the essential links between employers, industry associations, labor unions, workforce development boards, high schools, and four-year institutions and will provide an adaptive framework that will strengthen the collaboration among New Jersey's community colleges.

This effort will focus on the development of **Credential and Career Pathway Collaboratives** that will be guided by an industry-specific employer leadership group and informed by cutting-edge labor market data and information. The collaboratives, to be created in industries such as advanced manufacturing, health care, culinary and hospitality, and technology, will bring together community colleges and affiliated partners, including industry associations, key employers, high schools, workforce development boards, and four-year institutions. Each collaborative will coordinate closely with state government agencies and will work closely with the New Jersey Apprenticeship Network, ensuring that work and learn models are incorporated into pathways.

Each collaborative will map existing credential and career pathways across the state and develop an inventory of existing degree and certificate programs, noncredit training, capacity (equipment/facilities/credentials), and partnerships in participating community colleges. Each collaborative will develop detailed "maps" of at least two to three pathways, starting with dual enrollment programs and career and technical education programs in high schools, on to community college, and continuing to a four-year college or university. These "maps" will be based on existing pathways in current use, on models from other states, and on information and data that document industry need. Maps will include pathways between credit and noncredit programs, include multiple on ramps and exits for learners, will incorporate registered apprenticeship models, will adopt accepted prior learning assessment standards when appropriate, and will practice continual outcomes assessment to perfect pathway models.

As part of this comprehensive and collaborative effort, community colleges will explore and assess alternative delivery methods (online, hybrid); assess opportunities for “affinity programs” – serving specific student cohorts (by company, union, or other affiliation); analyze the need for incubator/entrepreneurial/maker spaces on community college campuses; investigate opportunities for campuses on alternative sites (for example, nursing programs co-housed or co-located at health care campuses); and study the demand/need for a range of four-year applied/technical programs housed at community colleges.

Each collaborative will identify necessary resources to implement the pathways and pursue funding opportunities, develop new curricula when needed (to be shared among participating community colleges); design and execute brand messaging to recruit and enroll learners; and implement programs and partnerships. Finally, each collaborative will develop and implement a coordinated outreach campaign to employers, key stakeholders, and potential students.

### Each Pathway Collaborative will:

- ✓ Engage employers
- ✓ Identify key credential pathways
- ✓ Map existing programs and pathways
- ✓ Collaborate to build new pathways
- ✓ Communicate pathways to students and employers

#### Focus Areas:

- Dual enrollment
- Prior learning assessments (PLA)
- Industry valued credentials
- Credit/noncredit pathways

#### Focus Industries:

- Advanced Manufacturing
- Health Care
- Technology
- Transportation / Logistics
- Construction / Utilities
- Culinary / Hospitality
- Biotechnology / Pharmaceuticals / Medical Technology
- Other industries to be identified

#### Key Partners:

- Industry Associations/ Employers
- Labor Unions
- High Schools
- Colleges and Universities
- State Government

## Initiative 2: Strengthening the Delivery of Innovative Learning of Essential Skills and Abilities

To achieve family supporting careers and to be prepared to thrive in a rapidly changing economy and democracy, New Jerseyans must have the ability to think critically, to solve problems, to work in teams, to communicate effectively, to be engaged in their communities and society, to be entrepreneurial, and must have a broad knowledge of the world around them. Community colleges must continue to prepare all learners to be successful in their lives and careers by broadening their perspectives so that they can adapt and thrive in a rapidly changing world and innovation economy, and by equipping them to fulfil their civic duties as responsible members of a diverse democracy.

The New Jersey Council of County Colleges and the community colleges will launch an effort, working with a variety of partners including employers, academic experts, state leaders, students, and community college leaders, to further define and identify the essential skills, knowledge, and abilities that all New Jerseyans should possess. The Council and colleges will then identify and implement innovative strategies to assist more students to obtain these skills, knowledge, and abilities. These strategies will include classes and academic programs, work-based learning, and extra-curricular activities and engagements and will be designed to reach all students, including those in credit or noncredit programs.

This effort will focus on the arts, the liberal arts, and the humanities and the role that these disciplines and courses play in providing people with valuable and relevant skills, knowledge, and abilities needed to think creatively, to solve problems, and to be successful in work and in life. This effort will build on the critical role that New Jersey's community colleges play as local arts and cultural engines.

This effort will also focus on expanding the civic engagement of students so that students can contribute to their communities and can respect and appreciate people who are different from themselves.

Finally, this effort will focus on the importance of entrepreneurship and entrepreneurial skills so that students can start and manage new businesses, obtain the skills needed to contribute to the success of the organizations and companies that employ them, and to manage their own careers in a rapidly-changing economy.

### The Essential Skills Initiative will:

- ✓ **Further refine the identification of essential skills**
- ✓ **Identify effective strategies for delivering and mastering these essential skills**
- ✓ **Implement new efforts**

#### Essential Skills:

- Problem solving
- Critical thinking
- Teamwork
- Communication
- Entrepreneurship

#### Key Partners:

- Industry Associations
- Arts, Culture, and Humanities Organizations
- Civic Engagement Organizations
- High Schools
- Colleges and Universities
- State Government
- Academic Experts

### Initiative 3: Connecting Adults to Opportunity

Currently, more than 3 million New Jersey adults have not completed high school, have no education beyond high school, or have obtained some college credits but no credential, certificate, or degree. In an economy that requires more skilled employees, these individuals will have reduced opportunities for a family-supporting career. Adults with a post-secondary credential or degree will have a far better chance of having a family supporting career in today's economy.

The New Jersey Council of County Colleges and its Center for Student Success, the state's community colleges, and numerous partners will lead an effort to identify and then implement effective strategies for increasing the number of adults in New Jersey who earn post-secondary credentials, certificates, or degrees. This initiative will work to build new and strengthen existing partnerships with state and local government, businesses, workforce development organizations, community and faith-based organizations, and others to increase the number of adults who get on, stay on, and finish the path to complete industry-valued, post-secondary credentials, certificates, and degrees. A special focus will be placed on the unique needs of working adults, those with some college credits but no degree or credential, adults with disabilities, immigrants and refugees, veterans of the military, and individuals who are incarcerated or formerly incarcerated.

*Adults with a post-secondary credential or degree will have a far better chance of having a family supporting career in today's economy.*



Adults face a range of barriers when attempting to earn a post-secondary credential. Some adult learners have been out of educational systems for a while and need transitional assistance such as advising, coaching, and tutorials. Adult learners also face situational barriers when studying at community colleges. Adult learners often have the responsibilities of satisfying the immediate needs of their families, responsibilities of being a spouse and an employee, multiple financial responsibilities, and limited time to devote to college. These barriers impose significant challenges for adult students who often struggle to find the time to attend face-to-face classes, avail themselves to services such as libraries, advising, and tutoring to complete assignments on time, and to study for exams.



Simply stated, New Jersey will only reach its 65% by 2025 goal if more adults return to community college and successfully complete post-secondary credentials. New Jersey's community colleges, led by the Council's Center for Student Success, will launch the Connecting Adults to Opportunity Initiative. The first six months of this initiative will be dedicated to building partnerships with employers, government, community and faith-based organizations, and others and to developing a plan for future action.

To inform this plan, the Center for Student Success will identify the barriers that prevent adult learners from getting on, staying, and completing a path to a post-secondary credential; analyze data on current adult learners; and seek input from adults themselves, academic researchers, experts, and possible partners. The Center for Student Success will identify current practices and policies in use for recruitment/outreach, delivery, and support services for adult learners, and will identify New Jersey-based best practices, policies, and innovative solutions community colleges have developed and implemented that support adult learners. The action plan will also include recommendations to state government leaders to shape policy to assist adult learners. Finally, the action plan will include recommendations for partners to support this effort in a holistic fashion. Following the development of the action plan, the New Jersey Center for Student Success will use professional development, convenings, coaching, and collaborative initiatives to support New Jersey's community colleges in this effort.

## The Connecting Adults to Opportunity Initiative will work to

✓ **Increase the number of adults who get on, stay on, and finish the path to complete industry-valued, post-secondary credentials, certificates, and degrees to ensure that 65 percent of New Jerseyans in the workforce hold a post-secondary credential by the year 2025.**

### Key Tasks:

- Develop a strategic action plan based on analysis and best practices and expansion of partnerships
- Support college efforts through professional development
- Build statewide partnerships to support college efforts

### Key Partners:

- State Government
- Employers and Industry Associations
- Workforce Development Organizations
- Community and Faith-based Organizations

## Initiative 4: Connecting Students to Social Service Supports

Non-academic issues, such as food insecurity, housing instability, lack of reliable transportation, child care, health care, and mental health services create significant barriers for too many community college students. Federal- and state-based financial aid programs help thousands of students with the cost of tuition and fees, but too many people living at or below the poverty level do not have the financial resources to cover basic necessities so that they can obtain a college education. For students currently enrolled in community colleges, these same non-academic issues create significant barriers for successful credential, certificate, and degree completion.



Much attention is now being paid to the issues of hunger among college students. A national study conducted by the Wisconsin HOPE Lab in 2015<sup>3</sup> reported that half of community college students struggle with food insecurity. Student hunger was cited as the third most important issue impacting college students, according to a study by the National Association of Student Personnel Administrators (NASPA).<sup>4</sup> Hunger-Free New Jersey reports that there are generally two types of college students who face hunger insecurities: students who come from low-income households where the cost of education means little money remains for meals; and adult students who have families and are trying to earn a credential to improve their place in the workforce.<sup>5</sup>

Community colleges and state government have begun efforts to reduce hunger among students. Many community colleges have created on-campus food pantries to assist hungry students. Some community colleges have trained their food pantry staff in needs assessment, so that those staff members can introduce students to other short-term services, such as transportation vouchers and child care subsidies — and to long-term services — like public benefits referrals, financial literacy classes, and financial coaching — that could help them persist, complete, and achieve financial stability while trying to complete a post-secondary credential. In November 2018, the New Jersey Department of Human Services<sup>6</sup> took a bold first step by announcing that community college students enrolled in Perkins-eligible programs are now eligible to apply for the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP). New Jersey should build on this bold step forward and expand access for community college students to child care subsidies, Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) and general assistance, housing and transportation assistance, mental health services, health care, and child support services.

<sup>3</sup> Goldrick-Rab, S., Broton, K., and Gates, C. (n.d.) Clearing the path to a brighter future: Addressing barriers to community college access and success. Association of Community College Trustees: Washington, D.C.

<sup>4</sup> Kruger, K., Parnell, A., and Wesaw, A. (2016) Landscape analysis of emergency aid programs. National Association of Student Personnel Administrators. Washington, D.C.

<sup>5</sup> <https://cfanj.org/hungerfreenj/hunger-in-new-jersey/>

<sup>6</sup> <https://www.nj.gov/humanservices/news/press/2018/approved/20181119.html>



These are important steps but going forward, New Jersey will need a more holistic effort to ensure people have the full complement of resources they need to successfully get on, stay on, and complete a path to a post-secondary credential, and help reach the state's 65% by 2025 post-secondary credential attainment goal. The New Jersey Council of County College and its Center for Student Success will build new and strengthen existing partnerships with state and local government agencies, community and faith-based organizations, and others to expand access to critical social service supports for community college students. The Connecting Students to Social Service Supports initiative will also work to create processes and partnerships to share information to ensure future and current community college students can seamlessly apply for social service supports when they need them.

By increasing the number of people who access social service supports, we can increase the number of students who get on, stay on, and finish the path to complete industry-valued, post-secondary credentials, certificates, and degrees to ensure that 65 percent of New Jerseyans in the workforce hold a post-secondary credential by the year 2025.

Through this initiative, the Center for Student Success will develop a plan for further action. The action plan will identify concrete steps, including professional development for college staff, convenings, student awareness efforts, and collaborative initiatives to support New Jersey's community colleges and our partners in this initiative. The action plan will also include best practices that can be implemented to strengthen partnerships and increase awareness, access, and utilization of social support services, as well as recommendations to state government leaders that shape policy to assist community college students in need of social support services. Finally, the action plan will include recommendations for partners to support this effort in a holistic fashion.

### The Connecting Students to Social Services Initiative will work to:

✓ **Increase awareness, access, and utilization of social service supports for current and potential community college students.**

#### Common Barriers:

- Food
- Housing
- Transportation
- Child care
- Health care
- Mental health
- Substance abuse
- Disabilities
- Technology

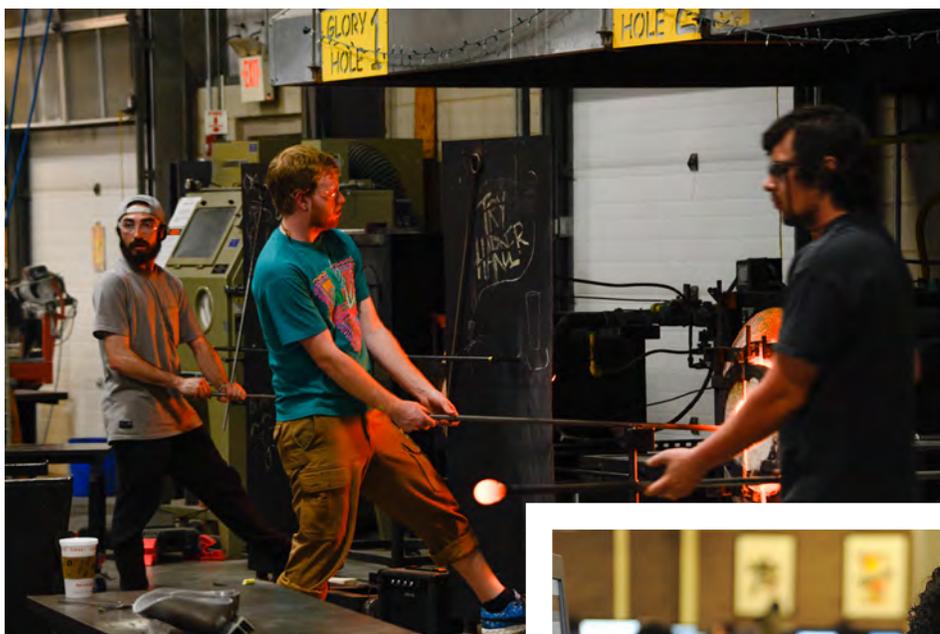
#### Key Partners:

- State Government
- County Welfare Agencies
- Community and Faith-based Organizations



## Section 5: Join the Partnership

Community colleges are well-positioned to play a significant role in addressing many of the challenges and opportunities facing New Jersey. We cannot do this alone. And we need your perspectives, your partnership, and your ideas for innovation, both now and in the years ahead. If you or your organization is interested in partnering with community colleges, please contact the New Jersey Council of County Colleges at [Vision2028@njccc.org](mailto:Vision2028@njccc.org).



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VISION 2028 was made possible thanks to a generous grant from The Prudential Foundation.