

**NEW JERSEY COUNCIL OF COUNTY COLLEGES  
MONDAY, FEBRUARY 23, 2026 6:00 PM  
VIA ZOOM**

**MINUTES**

**I. WELCOME**

**Meeting was Called to Order at 6:00 p.m. - Reading of Public Announcement**

In compliance with the Open Public Meetings Act of the State of New Jersey, advance notice of this Public Meeting of the Council was posted on the Council website on February 19, 2026 and the annual meeting notice was transmitted to the Secretary of State, the Trenton Times, and the Trentonian on November 20, 2025.

**ATTENDEES:**

<u>College</u>	<u>President</u>	<u>Board Chair</u>	<u>Board Alternate/ Other Trustees</u>
Atlantic Cape	Barbara Gaba		
Bergen	Eric Friedman		
Brookdale	David Stout	Barbara Horl	
Camden	Lovell Pugh Bassett		Jessica Purnell
Essex	Augustine Boakye	Arnold Lewis	
Hudson			
Mercer	Deborah Preston		Scarlett Rajski
Middlesex	Mark McCormick		Chrissy Buteas
Morris	Anthony Iacono		
Ocean	Pamela Monaco		
Passaic			
Raritan			Michael Goldberg
Rowan at Burlington			
Rowan at South Jersey			
Salem	Michael Gorman		Dot Hall
Sussex	Cory Homer		
Union	Margaret McMenamin		Brian Campbell
Warren	Will Austin		

There were 21 voting members of the Council who were present during the business meeting, constituting a majority and quorum.

**Council Staff:** Aaron Fichtner, Catherine Starghill, Megan Swieconek, Linda Scherr, Maria Heidkamp, Jacob Farbman, Jessica Britt, Alex Gusciora, and Mikal Jenkins.

**Special Guests:** Jamie Segal (UCNJ), Joanie Coffaro (Middlesex), and Robert Butvilla (Suplee Clooney)

**1. Introduction and Announcements- Chair Jessica Purnell**

- National Legislative Summit Review

**II. Business**

**2. Approval of Minutes**

By motion of Mark McCormick, and seconded by Barbara Horl, the minutes of the of November 10, 2025 Executive Committee meeting; November 17, 2025 Council meeting; and December 15, 2025 Executive Committee meeting; January 12, 2026 Executive Committee meeting; and January 16, 2026 Council meeting were approved without amendment. Will Austin abstained.

**3. Acceptance of Council Financial Statements**

By motion of Barbara Gaba, and seconded by Brian Campbell, the Council accepted the financial statements for November 2025, December 2025, and January 2026.

**4. Report on Temporary Investments**

The Council currently keeps its cash reserves in an account with Spencer Savings Bank. The Council is also enrolled in the NJ Cash Management Fund. As of January 31, 2026, the Council's NJ Cash Management Fund holdings are \$3,341,987.

**5. Action: Appointment of Legal Counsel**

By motion of Brian Campbell, and seconded by Margaret McMenamin, the Council appointed Scarinci Hollenbeck as legal counsel, and resolved to rotate legal counsel at least every three years. Eric Friedman abstained.

**6. Action: Acceptance of Audited Financial Statements of the NJ Council of County Colleges for the Year Ended June 30, 2025**

By motion of Barbara Horl, and seconded by David Stout, the Council accepted the NJCCC's FY2025 Audited financial statements.

**7. Action: Proposed Modifications to the Funding Distribution Model for State Operating Aid to the New Jersey's Community Colleges**

Fichtner presented the modifications to the funding formula, recommended by the Council's Collaborations Operations Committee by a vote of 4-1 on February 12, 2026, and approved by the Council's Executive Committee unanimously on February 16, 2026.

By motion of Margaret McMenamin, and seconded by Augustine Boakye, the Council approved the modifications to the funding distribution model for state operating aid to NJ Community Colleges. Will Austin and Cory Homer voted No. (Note: Brenden Rickards previously voted No during the vote of the community college presidents, but could not be in attendance for the Council meeting). The new funding distribution model will be transmitted to the Office of the Secretary of Higher Education and the New Jersey State Treasurer.

### III. **Strategy**

#### 8. **Economic Impact of New Jersey Community Colleges: Study Results**

Fichtner reviewed the highlights of the Statewide Economic Impact Study with the Council members. New Jersey's Community Colleges annual impact on the state economy is significant. The Council will release the statewide report along with a press release on Wednesday, February 25, 2026. The presidents previously agreed that the statewide report will be released prior to any individual college reports that Lightcast completed. This report will be transmitted to Governor Sherrill, the NJ legislature, the media, and all the Council partners.

#### 9. **State Policy Update**

- **Gubernatorial Transition**

Heidkamp reported that the Sherrill administration has been busy filling cabinet positions. The current list was reviewed with the Council members. Council staff will continue to work to set up meetings with department and agency leaders in the coming weeks.

- **Review of Reports from the Sherrill-Caldwell Transition Action Teams**

Heidkamp reported that the Sherrill-Caldwell Transition Action Team Reports have been released. The link to the reports is included in the Council meeting packet. Heidkamp discussed the highlights in the Jobs, Opportunity, & Prosperity for All transition report. The Council Opportunity Agenda initiatives and the Pathways initiative are highlighted throughout the report.

- **Update: FY2027 State Budget Request**

Heidkamp informed the Council that a meeting with staff of the Governor's office and Department of Treasury have already taken place. A letter to the Governor, signed by all 18 college presidents is being transmitted tomorrow as a follow up to the Budget Request.

- **Council Priorities/Strategy**

Heidkamp reviewed the State Budget Strategy and Key Actions with the Council. The Governor's budget address is scheduled to take place on March 10, 2026. As soon as the Senate and Assembly budget hearings are schedule, the Council will reach out to invite the presidents, trustees, and students to testify at the hearings. The Council advocacy email campaign will run from March through June 2026. We will keep everyone posted.

- **Update: Future Ready New Jersey Coalition**

Heidkamp reported that the launch of the Future Ready New Jersey Coalition took place on January 15, 2026. It was well attended, and there was good discussion on collaboration opportunities amongst the various partners.

**10. Overview of Five Opportunity Agenda Laws**

Heidkamp reported on January 20, 2026, Governor Murphy signed the following Opportunity Agenda Bills into Law: S4021 (A5182) Modernizes responsibilities of New Jersey Council of County Colleges; S4023 (A5211) Establishment of NJ Pathways to Career Opportunities Initiative Act; S4010 (A5212) Provides for expansion of social services supports at county colleges; S4012 (A5213) Establishes "New Economy Opportunity Skills System Pilot Program" to strengthen alignment and collaboration between local workforce development boards, community colleges, and county vocational school districts; makes appropriation; and S4009 (A5183) Directs DOLWD to develop and maintain industry-valued credential list. Heidkamp reviewed the details of the new legislation with the presidents. This was a highly successful lame duck session of the legislature for NJ Community Colleges.

**11. Upcoming Council Convenings**

Fichtner reviewed the following convenings with the Council members:

- AI in Technology and Learning- February 27, 2026 (Union College of Union County)
- Spring Trustee Leadership Academy- March 30 & 31 (Virtual)
- Student Leadership Day – April 24, 2026 (Brookdale Community College)
- Council Meeting – June 15, 2026 (Virtual via Zoom)
- Community College Opportunity Summit- June 9-11 2026 (Atlantic City, NJ)

**12. Consideration of Employment Contract for Council President Aaron Fichtner**

Jessica Stewart and President McCormick reviewed Fichtner's evaluation with the Council. Based on the feedback received during the evaluation of Fichtner, the Executive Committee is recommending a 7.5% increase to base salary based on merit. Fichtner's salary was last adjusted in December 2023. The Executive Committee further recommended the new salary take effect March 1, 2026, concurrent with a new contract for Fichtner that would be dated March 1, 2026 – June 30, 2031. By the time this item was discussed a quorum was not present. All 17 members on voted yes to the recommendation. The recommendation will be sent out to all absent Council members for an electronic vote. On February 26, 2026 the total vote received including electronic votes was: 27- Yes, 0- No, 0-abstentions.

**Meeting Adjourned.**