

Vision and Action

Community Colleges as Leaders in the Response to and Recovery from this Crisis

The COVID-19 virus is having a significant impact on all New Jersey residents, on our economy, and on our state. New Jersey's community colleges are proud to play a critical and lead role in responding to this emergency and to ensuring that our students, communities, and state can rebound from this crisis. New Jersey's agile and innovative community colleges will lead in the recovery and secure a brighter future for all New Jerseyans.

Already, New Jersey's community colleges have served as testing centers, donated equipment, including badly needed ventilators, adapted their manufacturing labs to make face shields and other PPE before commercial manufacturers could respond, and have partnered with county governments during the response. Within days, the colleges executed an almost seamless transition to online learning, sustaining student momentum and making all support services available online. The past few months have been inspiring and once again New Jersey's community colleges have proved how transformative and powerful they are.

To respond to this crisis and to emerge stronger than before, New Jersey's community colleges believe that New Jersey will need to:

1. Build and Support the Health Care Workforce;
2. Assist the Hundreds of Thousands of Unemployed Residents to Find New Career Opportunities;
3. Offer Effective and Efficient Pathways to Earning a Post-Secondary Degree or Credential for All New Jerseyans, Including Providing a Cost-Effective Means for Traditional Students to Continue Their Education; and
4. Provide Workforce Training and Education Programs to Meet Critical Labor Market Needs.

New Jersey's community colleges are prepared to play a leadership role in these efforts. All of these efforts will continue to make education affordable for a more resilient and equitable New Jersey while supporting economic opportunity for all residents and building a skilled workforce to propel economic recovery.

The Critical Role of Community Colleges in New Jersey

Now, more than ever, New Jersey's future and that of its residents depends on a strong network of community colleges. New Jersey's community colleges fulfill a remarkable number of vital roles: they prepare students to succeed in four-year institutions; they train residents in accelerated, industry-recognized, and stackable workforce training programs to meet labor market demands; they provide access to high quality postsecondary programs for the state's most vulnerable residents; and they serve as dynamic engines of both economic development and civic engagement. Their impact is beyond measure.

New Jersey's 18 community colleges serve more than 300,000 individuals each year, almost half of all undergraduate students in public higher education in the state. These colleges train over 63,000 students in non-credit programs, and partner with thousands of businesses to meet their training and workforce needs. Consider their vital role:

- Serving thousands of first-generation college students;
- Welcoming displaced workers and providing a pathway to employment and prosperity;

- Partnering with companies to deliver focused and effective professional development and training;
- Encouraging high school students to enroll in dual enrollment courses to jump start their college careers;
- Insisting that students become critically engaged and serve their communities.

We live in an increasingly global, connected, and digital world and New Jersey's community colleges are quick to help students and residents prepare and thrive in this fast-changing reality. Our colleges demonstrate a singular focus and passion to provide accessible and affordable excellence. Quite simply, New Jersey's community colleges are instrumental in creating a strong and inclusive economy and society.

New Jersey's community colleges are critical, then, in helping our state and communities respond to and recover from this crisis. A significant number of those who are on the frontlines of this crisis, in hospitals, as first responders, and as workers in essential businesses, including retail, transportation and manufacturing, received their education and training at a community college. Community colleges have prepared a sizable share of the healthcare workforce, with more than 20,000 students currently enrolled in healthcare education and training programs across the state. New Jersey's community colleges will also assist the large number of people who have lost their jobs in the state and will continue to expand already strong partnerships with businesses to meet the workforce needs of the state's industries. The 18 colleges are uniquely rooted in their local communities and have the statewide reach of few other institutions.

The state's community colleges have strong partnerships with the K-12 sector, providing dual enrollment programs to prepare students for post-secondary education and to provide a more seamless 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.

New Jersey's community colleges are rooted in our local communities, partnering with county governments, nonprofits, and industry leaders to respond to this public health crisis. We live in an increasingly global, connected, and digital world and New Jersey's community colleges are quick to help students and residents prepare and thrive in this fast-changing reality. Our colleges demonstrate a singular focus and passion to provide accessible and affordable excellence.

Of course, any response demands an integrated, collaborative, and innovative strategy and targeted investments from the state and federal governments. And while it is impossible to predict the full extent of this abrupt and unprecedented economic downturn, it is certain that, with thousands of individuals rendered unemployed and businesses closing doors, the state will confront a massive number of economic and social challenges.

New Jersey's community colleges will be critical in solving the state's challenges, in rebuilding the economy, and in offering critical workforce training to close the skills gap. Most importantly, New Jersey's community colleges, the essential partner in this urgent time, will provide open and affordable access to all New Jerseyans, offering all residents the tools to transform their lives.

An Agenda for Collaborative Action

What is needed is integrated response, purposeful strategies that offer inclusive outcomes, that supports current practice and adopts new methods: to respond to labor market needs in real time, to champion collaboration, to support dynamic K-12 partnerships, to strengthen traditional academic and transfer

pathways with four-year colleges and universities.

New Jersey's community colleges are prepared to lead an unprecedented collaborative effort of businesses, state and local government, labor unions, community based organizations, libraries, K-12, and four year colleges and universities.

To respond to this crisis and to emerge stronger than before, New Jersey's community colleges believe that New Jersey has an opportunity to take bold steps:

1. Build and Support the Health Care Workforce

Ensuring a well-trained healthcare workforce is imperative during this public health emergency.

A large number of healthcare workers on the frontlines of this crisis were educated and trained at New Jersey community colleges. As the largest providers of healthcare education, New Jersey community colleges educate and train 20,000 individuals. New Jersey must ensure that we have an adequate supply of trained health care workers, including public health workers and those trained to administer an expanded number of tests and to perform the contact tracing needed to contain this virus.

- Establish a "Health Care Skills and Pathways Collaborative" to develop and implement a coordinated, industry-driven strategy for educating and training the healthcare workforce led by the state's key health care employers and built around partnerships with high schools and four-year colleges and universities.
- Partner closely with hospitals and other healthcare providers and businesses to ensure that their workforce needs are addressed in a timely and efficient manner,
- Map and expand pathways from high school to community college to four-year colleges and universities and communicate the pathways clearly to students and adults in need of jobs and new careers.
- Identify immediate needs and longer-term investments and implement training and education programs for healthcare occupations.

2. Assist the Significant Number of our Unemployed Residents and Neighbors Secure New Career Opportunities

Connecting unemployed individuals to jobs and new skills is critically important to the state's economic recovery.

- Build a collaborative effort with community colleges, libraries, community-based organizations, and the state workforce system to build a strong network of organizations able to provide unemployed individuals with the career guidance and information they need to find new careers and jobs.
- Implement a retraining and reemployment strategy to deliver effective and efficient training to individuals to help them prepare for new jobs and careers. New Jersey's community colleges are uniquely positioned to play a foundational role in this effort.

3. Offer Effective and Efficient Pathways to Earning a Post-Secondary Degree or Credential for More New Jerseyans Including Providing a Cost-Effective Means for Traditional Students to Continue their Education

Now more than ever, expanding access to a postsecondary education and reducing the cost of a college degree or credential is essential to our state's economy.

- Expand dual enrollment partnerships to allow more high school students to earn college credits.
- Develop Bridge programs (while students are in high school) and Launch programs (after students graduate from high school) to strengthen the transition from high school to college.
- Make the Community College Opportunity Grant (CCOG) permanent to give all individuals in New Jersey with income less than \$65,000 access to a tuition free college education. Many of the frontline and essential workers in this crisis would qualify for CCOG.
- Expand prior learning assessments to allow individuals to earn college credit for work experience and industry-valued credentials.
- Expand access to a college education for adults through partnerships with employers.
- Strengthen and expand transfer partnerships and pathways with four-year colleges and universities.

4. Provide Workforce Training and Education Programs to Meet Critical Labor Market Needs.

We cannot afford to have an education system that is not better connected to current and future job opportunities.

- Launch "Pathways and Skills Collaboratives" in key industries, including healthcare, advanced manufacturing, transportation and logistics, technology and other industries to bring together community colleges, high schools, four-year colleges and universities and other partners in an industry-driven effort to support the efforts of workforce training and education programs to better align with the needs of the labor market.
- Allow community colleges to offer BAS degrees to meet critical workforce needs unmet by other colleges and universities.
- Emphasize the essential skills of problem solving, critical thinking, communications, teamwork throughout education to ensure that our residents are prepared to adapt to the changes ahead.

New Jersey community colleges are strong and effective because they are rooted in the needs of their local communities. And community colleges are committed to working together in new innovative ways in the months ahead, developing new models of collaborative that honors the individual strengths and independence of each college while ensuring that each college is strong and resilient.

These efforts will position New Jersey to recovery from this public health and economic crisis by building a skilled workforce that can adapt to the changing economy, by assisting individuals who have lost their jobs and careers, by reducing the cost of higher education for parents and students, by providing adults the opportunity to obtain new skills and careers, and by building strong industry-driven education and training pathways that will be the foundation of the state's economy for years to come.