

Community Colleges Support Opportunity Grant Expansion

TRENTON, N.J. – In his FY2020 State Budget Address, Governor Phil Murphy announced the expansion of the Community College Opportunity Grant (CCOG) Program to students at all community colleges statewide.

The New Jersey Council of County Colleges released the following statements from 18 New Jersey community college presidents, eight community college students and the NJCCC president regarding the Governor's proposal.

Atlantic Cape Community College

President Barbara Gaba:

"The Community College Opportunity Grants are removing a barrier for many who never thought that College was a possibility for them to attend; providing career and transfer opportunities for eligible students"

Bergen Community College

President Michael Redmond:

"With the launch of the Community College Opportunity Grant, New Jersey has taken an important step in expanding access to a high-quality education, supporting economic growth and addressing evolving workforce needs. To build on this foundation, we must extend this strategic investment in our state's future to all of the state's community colleges to ensure access for all eligible New Jersey residents."

Brookdale Community College

President David Stout:

"Brookdale Community College celebrates the expanded access to high-quality college education available through New Jersey's Community College Opportunity Grant (CCOG) Program. Thanks to this program, Brookdale has partnered with our surrounding community to identify and remove barriers that often stand in the way of obtaining a college degree, such as confusing admissions and financial aid processes, transportation difficulties, food insecurity, and lack of access to technology. Further, the program enables Brookdale to implement innovative approaches that support student success, such as career exploration and planning services and peer mentorship. It is our hope that continued support and enhancements of the CCOG program, including statewide availability of tuition aid grants, will enable Brookdale to sustain the beneficial services of this program while reducing the overall cost of a college education."

Camden County College

President Donald Borden:

“Camden County College appreciates the commitment from the state to provide financial support to our most needy students. This creates a model in which financial barriers no longer restrict people from getting the post-secondary education they need to be successful in their careers and lives. We could impact even more students in the future if this grant is extended. In fact, there is a need to increase the adjusted gross income to \$75,000 as we heard from many students between \$45,000 and \$75,000 who we estimate would have benefited from this program.”

Essex County College

President Anthony Munroe:

“While Essex County College provides comprehensive financial assistance to more than half of our 8,000+ students, there remains a large population in Essex County in need of resources so that they can receive an affordable, high quality education. Essex County College was not selected to participate in the Community College Opportunity Grant (CCOG) pilot this spring and the most needy of our students were denied critical financial support. If CCOG is expanded statewide, it will make a major difference here in Essex County. We expect that nearly 2,000 of our students would receive this valuable financial aid.”

Hudson County Community College

President Christopher Reber:

“A college education has become essential to establishing a career and earning family sustaining wages. At Hudson County Community College we were honored to have been chosen to pilot the Community College Opportunity Grant during the spring 2019 semester. This program benefited nearly 600 students and Hudson County families in a short period of time and will surely benefit thousands going forward if funding is continued. The opportunities afforded these families is life-changing and transformative.”

Mercer County Community College

President Jianping Wang:

“The Community College Opportunity Grant has been a real game changer for the expansion of college accessibility, and ultimately for the success of economically-disadvantaged students. Instead of working two, even three jobs to support their families and cover college expenses, students can now focus more on their studies, with adequate time for family and other obligations. The success of this program will be reflected in a highly-educated workforce, leading to a more vibrant economy and a higher quality of life for all New Jerseyans.”

Middlesex County College

Interim President Mark McCormick:

“The Community College Opportunity Grant is an important program that is helping more of our residents earn a high quality college degree or credential. Middlesex

County College is grateful to be participating in the CCOG pilot, and we are eager to see this program expanded to students throughout the state.”

County College of Morris
President Anthony Iacono:

“The benefits of a great education support not only individuals but entire communities. The Community College Opportunity Grant is a great example of helping people so New Jersey can be its very best. County College of Morris believes that when students are denied the opportunity to acquire career skills because of lack of funding, the loss to our communities and our state is insurmountable. Each year, New Jersey’s community colleges offer the state a multi-billion dollar return on investment by serving as the state’s pipeline to a skilled workforce. Our future depends on this important investment.”

Ocean County College
President Jon Larson:

“We are grateful for the generous support Governor Murphy has provided in his budget for New Jersey community colleges, in particular for the Community College Opportunity Grant program.”

Passaic County Community College
President Steven Rose:

“Most jobs being created in New Jersey will require a degree or certificate beyond high school. Community College Opportunity Grants send a powerful message that a college education is available to anyone willing to work for it.”

Raritan Valley Community College
President Michael McDonough:

“Make no mistake, Governor Murphy’s proposed expansion of the Community College Opportunity Grant will transform the lives of thousands of New Jerseyans and fuel statewide economic growth. It provides access to affordable and exceptional education. More importantly, it provides hope and dignity to all residents of the Garden State.”

Rowan College at Burlington County
President Michael Cioco:

“Rowan College at Burlington County’s path to high-quality affordable college degrees aligns with Governor Murphy’s goals for higher education in New Jersey and we look forward to the statewide expansion of the Community College Opportunity Grant to increase the number of college students in New Jersey.”

Rowan College at Gloucester County
President Frederick Keating:

“Rowan College at Gloucester County was honored to be a recipient of the inaugural CCOG program funding for the spring 2019 semester. RCGC has been pleased to award and aid over 80 students with approximately \$100,000 of last dollar aid to allow them to attend college this spring term and are extremely supportive of this program for future years. Without help, these students would not have been able to attend RCGC without the concern of a negative financial impact on their college success.”

Salem Community College

President Michael Gorman:

“Education is the solution to every problem. Community colleges change lives, and the Community College Opportunity Grant helps us change the lives of those most significantly in need.”

Sussex County Community College

President Jon Connolly:

“The expansion of the Community College Opportunity Grant (CCOG) program statewide is an important step in helping community colleges fulfill their mission of access and completion. If higher education is not available to everyone in New Jersey, we all are held back.”

Union County College

President Margaret McMenamin:

“Expanding access to affordable higher education to more residents of Union County will be transformational to individual recipients, their families and the local economy. We have proudly participated in the initial pilot program and would be grateful for the opportunity to further expand access to additional residents. A more educated workforce is a stronger workforce, and the whole community benefits.”

Warren County Community College

President Will Austin:

“Governor Murphy’s Community College Opportunity Grants represent the implementation of a forward thinking, game changing and sweeping reform to New Jersey’s higher education landscape. By making a higher education affordable to all citizens, the Murphy administration has taken a great leap forward toward the attainment of an innovation economy realized through the creation of the educated workforce required to compete in a competitive environment.”

Bergen Community College

Student Lindsey Njanja:

“I have great aspirations – aspirations of becoming a doctor. But there’s a problem when people like me dream big – we are often faced with a big barrier: how to afford the next semester. Getting the Community College Opportunity Grant helped me to keep believing that I’ll have opportunities to continue my education. I am filled with hope.”

Camden County College

Student LaWanda McKinney:

“Being a single parent, this award has helped to reduce my financial burden and further assist me in meeting my educational goals. I am grateful for this opportunity and express my thanks for you looking out for those who are in financial need. My education would not be possible had I not received this award.”

Hudson County Community College

Student Alexa Campos:

“For me the CCOG grant played a major role in my academic journey. I work a part-time job and my mom helps me with academic expenses, but it is hard to make ends meet for both of us. This grant has allowed me to focus more on school work without worrying about how I am going to afford everything. It has definitely been a major help for me and my family.”

Mercer County Community College

Student Jessica Bookholdt:

“The Community College Opportunity Grant makes it a lot easier for me to be able work toward my future, and not have to work long hours outside of school. Now I can focus on my career, and my schooling. The biggest mistake you can make is to not apply.”

Passaic County Community College

Student Paola Arias-Batista:

“I am so happy to receive the Community College Opportunity Grant. It is awesome. I really appreciate it because I am in my last semester at PCCC and plan to continue my education, so I’m trying to save money. Receiving this grant helped me a lot.”

Salem Community College

Student Sharon Sweatmon:

“The CCOG gave me the opportunity to go back to school. The grant has been an awesome opportunity. I love Salem Community College. The professors have been very understanding and accommodating.”

Union County College

Student Lauren Tutt:

“I thought I’d work and retire from the corporate world. Unfortunately, my job was outsourced, and I had to revamp my life. In a way, attending Union County College has been a blessing because I’ve had the opportunity to earn an education that I otherwise wouldn’t have had. However, as someone taking care of a child with a disability and an aging parent, an expansion of the Community College Opportunity Grant program to people like me would be wonderful and provide that bit of extra financial assistance.”

Warren County Community College

Student Brittani Kopecki:

“Without the CCOG grant, I would not have been able to further my education. The Community College Opportunity Grant makes my education affordable and stress free! I am excited to complete my education after 11 years of being unable to attend school.”

New Jersey Council of County Colleges

President Aaron Fichtner:

“We applaud Governor Murphy for his bold vision for the future of our state. The Community College Opportunity Grant Program is critically important for our state, our economy and our people as we increase the number of people in New Jersey who hold post-secondary degrees or credentials. CCOG is instrumental in helping our residents obtain the skills and education they need to participate in the innovation economy and obtain family supporting careers.”