



Framework for the Future of New Jersey's Community Colleges

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 2015¹ 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).² 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.³

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 Services⁴ 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.

¹ 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.

² Kruger, K., Parnell, A., and Wesaw, A. (2016) Landscape analysis of emergency aid programs. National Association of Student Personnel Administrators. Washington, D.C.

³ <https://cfanj.org/hungerfreenj/hunger-in-new-jersey/>

⁴ <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



New Jersey
Council of
County Colleges