

INCREASING COLLEGE ATTAINMENT – “65 by 25”

Trenton, April 4, 2016, – A Newsletter from The Governor’s Higher Education Council.

Today 45% of New Jersey adults have attained a higher education degree or certificate. New Jersey’s attainment percentage needs to be significantly improved. Attainment of 65% by 2025 must be achieved for New Jersey to compete effectively with other states and nations.

So what’s the plan?

The truth is New Jersey has no goal. Most states do. This newsletter addresses what might be done to change that.

We members of the independent and non-partisan Governor’s Council on Higher Education, after extensive review, last year released our 17-page Report about this situation. Our Report points to key facts that cannot be denied. See:

<http://www.state.nj.us/highereducation/documents/pdf/2015Report.pdf>

First, New Jersey more than most states has jobs that require higher education.

Second, this situation is getting more acute as our businesses become increasingly based on knowledge and technology.

Third, other states are filling attainment gaps with action steps to produce more graduates. New Jersey has done so only in a limited way.

New Jersey is falling behind, harming our economy and our students.

There are no villains here. The task is up to all of us: professors, business leaders, and journalists, Republicans, Democrats, and Independents. Yet, responsibility today is not clearly fixed anywhere. In a real sense this is an orphan issue: it is everybody’s issue, and thus nobody’s responsibility. Without leadership and action, the problem is getting worse, and New Jersey falls further behind without noticing it. It is time to act.

There are various ways to start addressing this problem without breaking the bank. One is to reduce time spent in college on remediation courses for students whose K-12 programs do not make them college-ready. Another is thoughtful

competency testing so a student's learning already accomplished does not have to be repeated. New Jersey's Thomas Edison State University has been a national leader in this field.

Look at just a few of the many things other states have done to achieve the attainment targets they have set for themselves. For examples, Connecticut provides tuition-free courses at community colleges to those adults who go back to school after their jobs were lost in a changing economy. Hawaii has adopted a program to strongly advise students to take more credits per year as a way to accelerate time to graduation, and it seems to be working. Tennessee provides increased state funding to schools with programs designed to increase college completion, rather than funding merely for increased enrollment. Like most businesses, many states provide funding to schools in part based on their success at achieving state-mandated performance goals; New Jersey does not.

To the credit of Higher Education Secretary Rochelle Hendricks, New Jersey has recently adopted a pilot plan called "NJ PLAN," now with eleven participating schools, following the examples of many states using Prior Learning Assessment tools to avoid students' wasting time and money in classes on subjects at which they are already proficient. But this and some other bright spots in New Jersey must be expanded and embedded in a comprehensive plan with measurable goals.

It is likely that little or nothing of major importance will happen until a first key step is taken by establishing without delay a clear State target for attainment. We have recommended a target of 65% college and certificate attainment by 2025. There must of course also be sensible and comprehensive multi-year action plans to achieve this target. But we need leadership to make all this happen.

Broad endorsement of an attainment target and plan is required with clearly defined individual responsibilities assigned.

The New Jersey college attainment gap is a major challenge of our era. Galvanizing action to address it is needed now.

The New Jersey Governor's Higher Education Council (John McGoldrick, Chair; Robert Campbell; Patricia Nachtigal; John Wefing; Richard Wellbrock)

See <http://www.nj.gov/highereducation> for more about the Council.