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New Jersey Higher Education Collaborative Releases Final Report Strategies

TRENTON – Throughout 2021, New Jersey Secretary of Higher Education Dr. Brian K. Bridges partnered with The Hunt Institute, State Higher Education Executive Officers Association (SHEEO), and 24 postsecondary education and workforce development leaders from across the state to form the New Jersey Higher Education Collaborative (NJHEC). The group’s charge was to develop a set of strategies that will enable the state to make progress advancing the student rights established in the State Plan for Higher Education and improve postsecondary education for all New Jersey residents.

“I am continually inspired by and grateful for the visionary leaders in the Collaborative and their commitment to helping students reach new heights for themselves and their families,” **said Secretary of Higher Education Dr. Brian K. Bridges.** “Building on the State Plan for Higher Education, this partnership has generated exciting, creative ways to move New Jersey closer to ensuring that every resident, regardless of life circumstance, can obtain a high-quality postsecondary credential that prepares them for success in the global economy.”

“By listening to the concerns of students directly, productive and informative discussion led to comprehensive and impactful recommendations grounded in communication and interaction by institutional leaders at every stage of the education progression,” **said Assemblywoman Mila M. Jasey,** Co-Chair of the New Jersey Higher Education Collaborative. “It is expected this will assist in the removal of barriers to students’ transition into higher education and the creation of options and pathways for post-secondary entry into the workforce. The work of the Collaborative will guide the crafting of policy and programs, and reaffirm New Jersey’s steadfast commitment to higher education and workforce development.”

“Improving access to, and success in, postsecondary education is a key goal of the Murphy administration, as exemplified by our increased funding for higher education operations, financial aid for students, and wraparound services to help them succeed,” **said Chief Policy Advisor to the Governor and former Secretary of Higher Education Dr. Zakiya Smith Ellis.** “This report of this collaborative builds on the state’s plan for higher education, *Where Opportunity Meets Innovation*, by continuing to focus on the needs of students in conjunction with key partners in the field. I’m thankful to Secretary Bridges for leading this important work forward on behalf of the State.”

Building Collaboration

The statewide initiative brought together a diverse set of constituencies, including leading state policymakers, legislators, presidents of institutions of higher education, student representatives, workforce leaders, higher education faculty, and others, for three in-person meetings.

“Hosting meetings for policymakers and thought leaders to advance education policy is the cornerstone of our programming at The Hunt Institute,” **said Dr. Javaid Siddiqi, President and CEO of The Hunt Institute.** “Secretary Bridges, his staff, and Collaborative members, have done tremendous work to create a set of strategies that will close equity gaps, address workforce needs, and continue to propel New Jersey’s postsecondary education forward.”

Strategies put forth by the Collaborative include expanding workforce training and career pathways, designing student support services to close equity gaps in persistence and retention, increasing resources and personnel that support the transition from K-12 to postsecondary education, and leveraging best practices and innovative solutions to scale promising efforts.

“We are proud to be part of this diverse group of stakeholders charting an actionable blueprint to assist residents in overcoming barriers to identify opportunities for greater education attainment beyond high school,” **said Acting Commissioner of Education Angelica Allen-McMillian.**

“The African American Chamber of Commerce of New Jersey is proud to have been a part this collaborative effort to address the needs of past, current, and future students.” **said John E. Harmon, Sr., Founder, President, and CEO of the African American Chamber of Commerce of New Jersey.** “As New Jersey is one of the most diverse states in the nation, these plans should be implemented throughout the state with particular emphasis on ensuring participation in our underserved communities!”

“After collaborating with colleagues throughout New Jersey dedicated to making higher education more accessible, I am confident these recommendations will help make college more affordable for students and provide them needed support as they earn their degrees and chart paths to the workplace,” **said Rutgers University President Jonathan Holloway.**

Advancing Economic Growth and Opportunity

The report and strategies also outline the economic imperative and potential benefits associated with improving postsecondary attainment.

“To be competitive in today’s job market, a postsecondary education is vital,” **said Lieutenant Governor Sheila Oliver,** who serves as Commissioner of the Department of Community Affairs. “The Collaborative has given our Administration the opportunity to re-examine and act on ways to better support the needs of today’s student. We are helping set students up for success while strengthening and improving our education-workforce ecosystem.”

“Studies show time and again that degree completion can make a profound economic impact on a person’s future,” **said Dr. Barbara Gaba, President of Atlantic Cape Community College.** “By convening this task force, Secretary Brian Bridges has allowed stakeholders from across the state to share ideas on how to best meet the needs of all students and make a degree or certification not only possible but affordable and easily accessible.”

The work completed by this Collaborative has helped New Jersey ensure that our next generation of workers will be ready to keep our state's economy moving forward," **said Labor Commissioner Robert Asaro-Angelo.** "That means creating an affordable, accessible education-workforce pipeline, and our department looks forward to being a part of the reform needed."

“At the State Higher Education Executive Officers Association, a component of our mission is to help equip higher education agencies and their staffs with the tools to effectively advance the value of higher education,” **said Dr. Rob Anderson, President, SHEEO.** “The New Jersey Higher Education Collaborative shows the value of a strategic SHEEO transition process, and we commend Secretary Bridges, his team, and The Hunt Institute for their work in strengthening a more equitable postsecondary education system in New Jersey.”

To read the New Jersey Higher Education Collaborative final report and strategies, please visit:

<https://hunt-institute.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/03/NJHEC-Final-Report-3.24.22.pdf>