



Governor Phil Murphy

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Newark, N.J.

Governor Murphy Urges the Importance of Fully Funding the Community College Opportunity Grant

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PATERSON – Governor Phil Murphy today emphasized the need to fully fund the state's last-dollar college grant program, the Community College Opportunity Grant (CCOG), in order to expand the opportunity to more students at all of the state's county colleges next academic year. During the spring 2019 semester, the program enabled thousands of students to work toward a degree without accruing large amounts of debt.

CCOG helps make college more affordable by enabling low- and moderate-income students to attend all 19 county colleges tuition- and fee-free. The program is "last-dollar," meaning that the Community College Opportunity Grant awards cover any balance of tuition and approved educational fees that remain after accounting for all other grants and scholarships that an eligible student receives. To be eligible in spring 2019, students had to be enrolled at least half-time, had to have an adjusted gross income of less than \$45,000, and had tuition and covered fees that exceeded the Pell Grant, Tuition Assistance Grant, and other grants and scholarships for which they qualified.

In the Fiscal Year 2019 enacted budget, the Governor and the Legislature appropriated \$20 million toward tuition and fee assistance for students through CCOG. Governor Murphy recommended funding of \$58.5 million in the Fiscal Year 2020 budget in order to expand the program to both the fall and spring semesters. While the Legislature voiced support for expanding the program to cover students with adjusted gross incomes of up to \$65,000, the Legislature's budget only appropriated \$25 million for CCOG grants to students. Today's event emphasized the need to fully fund the program in order to ensure that no eligible student is denied the opportunity to participate due to lack of funding.

"Making community college free this past semester was a game changer for the students, for their communities, and for the State," **said Governor Murphy**. "If we are serious about continuing our investment in our residents, it is critical that we fully fund this grant in order to ensure that every individual has a chance to succeed."

"This spring I have been participating in roundtables and hearing the stories of students who benefited from the Community College Opportunity Grant Program. I heard from students who had to take on three jobs to pay their expenses. I heard from single parents who supported their children while studying for exams," **said Secretary of Higher Education Zakiya Smith Ellis**. "The Community College Opportunity Grant enabled these students to stay in college. Those students are more likely to graduate and thereby repay the state's investment. However, the only way to deliver on this commitment is to adequately fund the program."

"Community College Opportunity Grants made college more affordable for thousands of students who participated in the initial pilot program this spring," **said David J. Socolow, Executive Director of the Higher Education Student Assistance Authority**. "It's crucial to expand this program to boost more students to educational success and build a well-prepared workforce."

"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," said **Passaic County Community College President, Dr. Steven M. Rose**.

"The Community College Opportunity Grant (CCOG) Program creates pathways to success that are not currently available to many who wish to attend college by removing the barrier of cost and overwhelming debt faced by so many," said **Assemblywoman Mila Jasey**. "Those who previously believed this option was unavailable to them, including young people graduating high school, and adult and English language learners wishing to further their education, now have the ability to take charge of their future. County colleges offer a wealth of certification programs and associate degrees in a wide variety of subjects and fields, which creates strong motivation to pursue college and career pathways that previously did not exist. I am confident CCOG will be a model for the future of higher education for many of our state's students and am proud to have been a part of its creation. Their success is ours."

"I was thrilled when the Community College Opportunity Grant was introduced by Governor Murphy last year because as an adjunct professor at Passaic County Community College for the last 19 years, I have seen how higher education can raise people up and provide better economic opportunities for themselves, their families, and their communities," said **Andre Sayegh, Mayor of Paterson**. "This program needs to be supported at double the \$25 million introduced by the legislature and the income cap needs to be increased to \$65,000. This will allow the 2 million adults in our state who have no college degree or minimal credentials without a full degree, many of whom currently hold minimum wage jobs, to earn a college degree and improve their financial situation. They will find careers, not just jobs, and then be able to contribute more to the local economy. Supporting free community college has a multiplier effect, and I support Governor Murphy's efforts to fund it a more appropriate level."

"Wealth should never be a prerequisite to receive a higher education and should never be a barrier to opportunity," said **Passaic County Freeholder Director John Bartlett**. "New Jersey's investment in CCOG will lift the burden of tuition and fees, enabling all students to reach their greatest potential that benefits not just the student and their families, but the entire community."

"The only way out of poverty is education," said **Passaic County Freeholder Bruce James**. "Our community colleges must offer degrees which are within reach for all those who need the opportunity. The Governor's plan is the only one to address the future for all residents of New Jersey, regardless of income. We in Passaic County stand firmly with our Governor on his plan to fund community colleges."

The Office of the Secretary of Higher Education (OSHE) and the Higher Education Student Assistance Authority (HESAA) are jointly administering this funding opportunity. To learn more about the Community College Opportunity Grant, visit: <https://www.hesaa.org/Pages/ccog.aspx>

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