

Governor Phil Murphy

Governor Murphy Signs Landmark Legislation to Permanently Establish the Community College Opportunity Grant Program

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New Law Will Continue to Guarantee Tuition-Free Community College Education to More than 50,000 New Jersey Students Each Academic Year

JERSEY CITY – Fulfilling his promise to make tuition-free community college a reality, Governor Phil Murphy today signed A4410, permanently establishing the Community College Opportunity Grant Program (CCOG), which will allow qualified students to attend any New Jersey community college without tuition or educational fees.

“For far too long, higher education has been out of reach for countless New Jerseyans due to its high cost,” said **Governor Murphy**. “Today’s bill signing underscores our continued commitment to college affordability, ensuring that our young people and working adults have the opportunity to earn post-secondary degrees and advance their promising careers.”

“Today represents a huge win for college affordability and a transformative moment in our state’s history. In the years to come, CCOG will continue offering thousands more eligible students equitable access to a college education for free,” said **Dr. Brian Bridges, Secretary of Higher Education**. “To emerge stronger and fairer from the COVID-19 pandemic, we are investing in future generations today by expanding affordable options to ensure students’ lifelong success.”

“New Jersey now sends a clear message: county college is tuition-free for students with family incomes of \$65,000 or below,” said **David Socolow, Executive Director of the New Jersey Higher Education Student Assistance Authority (HESAA)**. “Governor Murphy has enabled HESAA to back up that promise by filling students’ remaining financial aid gaps with more than 25,000 Community College Opportunity Grants since the spring 2019 semester. The impact of this commitment reaches still further, by making an up-front, tuition-free price guarantee that enables tens of thousands of additional students to focus on their postsecondary education without concern about paying the tuition sticker price. Many students can now consider enrolling in college with full confidence that their entire county college tuition will be covered by the State of New Jersey. By raising awareness that college is more affordable, we can encourage more students to pursue courses of study that will enhance their lives and careers here in the Garden State.”

CCOG, which will be administered by the Higher Education Student Assistance Authority (HESAA), will provide last-dollar grants to eligible county college students for those tuition costs and fees not already covered by any other State, federal, and institutional need-based grants and merit scholarships. Students with adjusted gross incomes of \$65,000 or less will be eligible to receive this financial grant for a total of five (5) semesters. This legislation also directs the Legislature to appropriate funding for the “Student Success Incentive” to the Office of the Secretary of Higher Education, for distribution to each county college. This funding will be used to support outreach and student success initiatives to further the goals of the CCOG grant program.

Since taking office, the Murphy Administration has taken meaningful steps toward tuition-free community college. The CCOG grant program was first enacted through budget language in the Fiscal Year 2019 appropriations act. The grant program received a \$20 million appropriation in Fiscal Year 2019 and a \$25 million appropriation in Fiscal Year 2020. The appropriation to the grant program for the Fiscal Year 2020 three-month budget extension totaled \$10 million and the appropriation in the Fiscal Year 2021 appropriations act for the nine-month period was also \$10 million, making the total financial aid funding for that 12-month period \$20 million. For the current Fiscal Year budget of 2022, the Governor has proposed \$27 million to support the CCOG grant program.

“County colleges have long played a vital role in educating students from working-class families across New Jersey. By providing ‘last dollar’ financial aid to eligible students, we will make sure they have every opportunity to graduate without having to take on burdensome student loans,” said **Senator Sandra Cunningham, chair of the Senate Higher Education Committee**. “I am grateful to see this meaningful initiative codified into law, ensuring it will continue to help low-income New Jerseyans for many years to come.”

“The Community College Opportunity Grant Program has provided valuable opportunities for low-income students and working parents to advance their education and expand their career opportunities. It represents a monumental step towards a more equitable higher education landscape by ensuring an associate’s degree is accessible to all New Jersey residents regardless of their economic status,” said **Senator Teresa Ruiz, chair of the Senate Education Committee**. “Education is our greatest equalizer and today, by codifying this program into state law, we have assured that it will be available to all who need it in the years to come.”

“The rising costs of college tuition, books and fees are often out of reach for many college students and their families,” said **Assembly Majority Leader Louis Greenwald, Assemblywoman Mila Jasey, and Assemblyman Daniel Benson, in a joint statement**. “A college degree has become the standard for entry into many industries and workplaces, but too many students must take on enormous debt in pursuit of higher education and a successful career. The Community College Opportunity Grant closes the gap for middle class and low-income students, helping to balance costs not covered by State and federal aid. It makes college more affordable and accessible for students who may not otherwise be able to further their education. We’ve already seen this program’s outstanding potential to open doors for students across New Jersey. We are proud this new State law will benefit future generations.”

“CCOG is an important investment in our students and in our state’s economic future. The program has the potential of transforming the lives of a generation of New Jersey residents,” said **Assemblyman Nicholas A. Chiaravalloti**. “This tuition scholarship program supports our most vulnerable residents, for whom a college education is unaffordable. CCOG not only assists individuals in earning a degree or credential, but also builds a skilled workforce that will close critical skills gaps in our state. As someone who works in higher education, I have seen the incredible benefit of the CCOG program. At Hudson County Community College (HCCC), I am constantly amazed by the perseverance of the students who attend. They come to class every day prepared and ready to learn, and I have found that this has not changed even though we have switched to remote learning due to the COVID-19 pandemic. They serve as a daily inspiration. CCOG will help remove a barrier to their success.”

“As a result of this investment, thousands of New Jerseyans are able to embark on career pathways, to prepare for jobs that pay family-supporting wages, and to contribute directly to the state’s economic growth and recovery,” said **Aaron Fichtner, President of New Jersey Council of County Colleges**.

"Our Hudson County Community College family is honored to welcome Governor Murphy to our campus for the signing of Community College Opportunity Grant (CCOG) legislation that will permanently fund this vital financial aid program," said Dr. Chris Reber, President of Hudson County Community College (HCCC). "We thank the Governor, our state and local officials, HCCC Trustees, students, alumni, friends, and colleagues. CCOG is an investment in the people of our communities and their dreams. The program is providing life-changing opportunities for students to acquire postsecondary educational credentials that open doors to fulfilling careers with family-sustaining wages. We are exceedingly grateful to Governor Murphy for his leadership and support for CCOG and New Jersey's 18 community colleges."

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