



Governor Phil Murphy

[Home](#) [Administration](#) [Key Initiatives](#) [News and Events](#) [Social](#) [Contact Us](#)

Newark, N.J.

Governor Murphy Highlights Budget Investments to Make Community College Tuition-Free

05/23/2019

*Community College Opportunity Grant Expands to All 19 Community Colleges in New Jersey**Event Marks Final Stop on Secretary of Higher Education's Garden State Graduation Tour*

MOUNT LAUREL – Governor Phil Murphy today highlighted the value of the Community College Opportunity Grant (CCOG) program, which has made community college tuition-free for thousands of students at county colleges across the state during the Spring 2019 semester. The Governor's Fiscal Year 2020 Budget proposes to expand this program to students statewide in both the fall and spring semesters of the 2019-2020 academic year.

"New Jersey's community college students should be able to obtain a college degree without accruing large amounts of debt," **said Governor Murphy**. "College affordability is the foundation on which we will build a stronger middle class, and the Community College Opportunity Grant program is exactly the boost New Jersey's students and communities need to thrive."

The Community College Opportunity Grant program helps make college more affordable by enabling low- and moderate-income students to attend all 19 county colleges tuition- and fee-free. The State began pilot testing this program in Spring 2019, by funding "last-dollar" Community College Opportunity Grant awards that cover any balance of tuition and approved educational fees that remain after accounting for all other grants and scholarships that an eligible student receives. The initial Community College Opportunity Grant pilot started in January 2019 at 13 county colleges, and earlier this month was expanded to cover students at all of New Jersey's 19 county colleges for the Spring 2019 semester. To be eligible for the Community College Opportunity Grant in the spring semester, students had to be enrolled at least half-time, have an adjusted gross income between \$0 and \$45,000, and have their tuition and covered fees exceed the Pell Grant, Tuition Assistance Grant, and other grants and scholarships for which they qualify.

"The Community College Opportunity Grant enables us to send a clear message to students on college affordability, which is that tuition and fees will not be a barrier in their journey to obtain a high-quality credential," **said Secretary of Higher Education, Zakiya Smith Ellis**. "By removing barriers to students' educational progress, we are able to ignite the innovation economy right here in New Jersey."

"In the first several months of the pilot, thousands of students across our state received support from this crucial funding," **said David J. Socolow, Executive Director of the Higher Education Student Assistance Authority**. "For many students, the net price of community college remains out of reach even after accounting for the financial aid they could receive. Removing the barrier of tuition and educational fees can make the difference that enables students to complete their studies."

"As the first community college in the region to offer a 3+1 program that reduces the total cost of a bachelor's degree to less than what most universities charge for a single year, Rowan College at Burlington County is deeply

[Back to top](#)

committed to providing high-quality affordable education for all," said **RCBC President Dr. Michael A. Cioce, who is a member of New Jersey's task force on college affordability.** "The Community College Opportunity Grant adds a new variable to make it 'Free plus 1,' which will provide exponentially greater benefits to hard-working students and the regional economy that needs more highly educated workers to stay in New Jersey."

Today's event marks the final stop of the Secretary of Higher Education's Garden State Graduation Tour. Over the past three weeks, Secretary Smith Ellis and David Socolow have stopped at nine colleges around the state and talked with students, college leaders, and legislators about the important issues of college affordability and student success. Discussions have explored the challenges faced by students and their resilience in progressing toward graduation, and what the State can do to help.

Students at the Graduation Tour stops have emphasized the need for strategies to make college more affordable, such as the Community College Opportunity Grant program; expansions of the Tuition Assistance Grant (TAG) and the Educational Opportunity Fund (EOF); and opportunities to learn about their role in the State Plan for Higher Education, as outlined in *Where Opportunity Meets Innovation: A Student-Centered Vision for New Jersey Higher Education*.

To learn more about the Community College Opportunity Grant, visit: <https://www.hesaa.org/Pages/ccog.aspx>.

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Home

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Boards, Commissions &

Authorities

Internship Opportunities

Governor's Residence -

Drumthwacket

Key Initiatives

Economy & Jobs

Education

Environment

Health

Law & Justice

Transportation

News & Events

Press Releases

Public Addresses

Executive Orders

Statements on

Legislation

Administration Reports

Transition Reports

Press Kits

Social

Facebook

Twitter

Instagram

Snapchat

YouTube

Contact Us

Scheduling Requests

Contact Us

Statewide

NJ Home

Services A to Z

Departments/Agencies

FAQs

Contact Us

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Legal Statement &

Disclaimers

Accessibility Statement





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