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## Acting Governor Kim Guadagno Announces NJ PLAN to Save College Students Time and Money by Awarding Academic Credit for Existing Knowledge and Experience

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### *Five Colleges and Universities Launch Pilot Program Led by Thomas Edison State College; Secretary of Higher Education Hopes More Institutions Will Join Network*

**Trenton, NJ** – With a focus on streamlining the transition of educated, experienced and qualified students from the classroom to the workplace, Acting Governor Kim Guadagno today announced the launch of the New Jersey Prior Learning Assessment Network (NJ PLAN) pilot program, an initiative that will allow students to earn college credits by taking tests or preparing portfolios of their work.

The event took place at Thomas Edison State College, which has earned a reputation as a pioneer and national leader in Prior Learning Assessment (PLA) methods. The institution will serve as the anchor for the consortium establishing the NJ PLAN pilot program, which includes Essex County College, New Jersey City University, the New Jersey Institute of Technology and Rowan University.

"Securing a prosperous future for New Jersey depends on our ability to embrace new and innovative ways to extend the benefits of a higher education to as many of our residents as possible, and the NJ PLAN pilot program helps achieve that important goal," said Acting Governor Kim Guadagno. "In addition to making it easier for those already in the workforce to get a head start when returning to college, NJ PLAN will translate their unique experience and skills into college credits that will save time, hold down college costs and reduce student loan debt."

Secretary of Higher Education Rochelle Hendricks said she is confident the program will be a success and will be available to students by the end of the fall.

"NJ PLAN will help make college more accessible and affordable – and degrees more attainable," said Secretary Hendricks. "We are hopeful that other institutions will join the network, expanding the program's overall benefit and impact."

In addition to its considerable cost benefits, NJ PLAN will achieve a wide array of additional advantages for New Jersey. This includes, but is not limited to:

- Building on credit-by-exam programs and portfolio assessments by identifying workforce training programs – including professional certification and licenses – that meet the standards for academic review.

- Enhancing the ability of colleges and universities to develop partnerships with corporations and organizations interested in customized training and other staff development programs.

- Expanding access to course offerings for adults, active duty military students, veterans and others to achieve the skilled and experienced workforce necessary to address the needs of a highly competitive 21st Century economy.

- Promoting the use of already established NJ PLAN program methods at Thomas Edison State College to eliminate the need for other institutions to expend their own time and limited resources.

Dr. George Pruitt, president of Thomas Edison State College, said he expects the program will encourage people to return to school if they left a college or university before earning a degree.

"We have more than 863,000 adults in New Jersey who have completed some college but hold no degree," said president Pruitt. "They represent a vast pool of untapped potential. NJ PLAN is focused on bringing back these adults and helping them find a way to complete their degrees – which provides better-trained workers for the state economy."

Secretary Hendricks added that the use of Prior Learning Assessments has repeatedly been proven to be academically sound and beneficial to students after many years of national implementation and review.

One such individual was Rolando Gorostiza of Riverside, who spoke at the event. Mr. Gorostiza earned credits using portfolio assessment before completing his Bachelor of Science in Applied Science and Technology degree in 2007. He was also named the American Council on Education's 2007 "Adult Learner of the Year" for his work to leverage his professional training to advance his education. He is currently senior manager, Corporate Technical Packaging at L'Oreal USA in Clark.

"I completed 43 credits through prior learning assessment portfolios at Thomas Edison State College, which was an efficient way of earning credits by documenting the college-level knowledge I had acquired throughout my career," noted Rolando Gorostiza. "The experience was tremendous."

According to the study, "Fueling the Race to Postsecondary Success," conducted by the Council for Adult and Experiential Learning (CAEL), which examined the outcomes of 62,475 students from 48 colleges and universities, students who earned credit through PLA had higher graduation rates and finished college much faster than those who did not earn credit through PLA.

The CAEL study found that 56 percent of students who used PLA earned a postsecondary degree within seven years, compared to only 21 percent of students who did not use PLA.

The study also found that students who earned credit through PLA saved an average of between 2.5 and 10 months of time in earning their bachelor degrees compared to students who were not awarded PLA credits.

"NJ PLAN is a perfect complement to the ongoing efforts of the New Jersey Partnership for Action, our Talent Networks through the Department of Labor and Workforce Development, the Governor's STEM Scholars Program and other initiatives to ensure our state's long-term economic growth and competitiveness," added Acting Governor Guadagno. "Together, these programs will help achieve our ultimate goal of not only creating the jobs of today's fluid 21st Century economy, but creating a sustainable pipeline of highly educated and skilled workers to fill them."

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