



rutgers-lawn.jpg

A Rutgers University student sits on the lawn at Voorhees Mall and reads. A recent Stockton College poll found favorable views of the state's public colleges.

By

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Public colleges rank among the nation's most productive, based on an analysis by the National Center for Higher Education Management Systems.

Here are three “big ideas”:

**Affordability:** The state needs to define what it wants to “buy” from higher education, and how to invest in success. New Jersey has no funding rationale for its colleges. The state appropriates annually what it can afford, period; and has systematically shifted college costs onto students and families. This has to stop, as recommended to a 2010 Task Force headed by former Gov. Tom Kean. A funding rationale has to be created in consultation with college leaders and others. This step will not automatically lead to greater affordability, or more money for the colleges; but it will clarify shared responsibilities for paying for college, and will lead to a predictable set of educational funding priorities, tied to regional and statewide needs. This way, colleges and families can plan better to manage college costs.

To improve college affordability, we need a thorough review of historically successful student financial aid programs to test their effectiveness for a different population, in a different era; to realign their purposes with the needs of middle-class citizens; and to refine objectives based on new college financial and business models.

**Value:** New Jersey needs brains and jobs. We should expand colleges’ roles in serving the state, not diminish them. New Jersey has too few college opportunities for its relative wealth and population. For decades we have been the nation’s number one net-exporter of college-bound students. This loss of human capital costs New Jersey billions in lost revenue, and much in economic competitiveness. The expansion of state colleges and universities such as Stockton, Ramapo, and community colleges, and recent efforts to extend the missions of Rutgers in biomedical research, and Rowan in medicine and engineering, are positive steps.

More needs to be done to partner with businesses to assist in creating new academic programs with strong practical, as well as academic experiences. For example, research at Stockton indicates clearly that citizens and employers agree that students need earlier access to practical, out-of-classroom experiences and internships. Business and labor leaders should be involved in policy that rewards colleges for building new partnerships leading to a high-value college degree.

**Opportunity and effectiveness:** Colleges should continue to do more with existing resources, through educational partnerships. New Jersey has some very good community colleges with strong partnerships with four-year colleges, which help to make college more valuable through joint degree, and comprehensive transfer programs. In South Jersey, Stockton and Rowan stand out in this regard. Colleges should expand these partnerships regionally, based on sound educational principles. Such “access to success programs” need to be promoted through rational educational planning, with high standards and clearly defined outcomes developed by faculty. An example is Stockton’s 10 Essential Learning Outcomes, which focus on skills such as problem solving, communicating, quantitative reasoning and teamwork.

These are some big ideas that New Jersey can embrace to make college more accessible, affordable, valuable and accountable to citizens’ needs. Higher Education Strategic Information and Governance at Stockton College, in partnership with others, is working on initiatives to help achieve this goal.

