

# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

## WHERE OPPORTUNITY MEETS INNOVATION

### A Student-Centered Vision for New Jersey Higher Education

**C**ollege is an opportunity. An opportunity to gain knowledge. An opportunity to preview and select a career. An opportunity to improve future earnings and contribute to the economy. In order to support lasting economic growth across the state, every resident of New Jersey needs to have access to this critical opportunity. In 2018, Governor Phil Murphy unveiled an economic plan for a “Stronger and Fairer Economy in New Jersey,” setting forth a bold vision to reestablish New Jersey as an economic and innovation leader.<sup>1</sup> A key priority of the plan is to “invest in people” so that all New Jerseyans can find work to sustain and support their families.

To achieve this, New Jersey must take advantage of its *own* opportunity: the opportunity to transform higher education. By implementing the shared vision presented in this plan, New Jersey can make higher education in the state more affordable and accessible for all residents. And New Jersey can ensure students have the ability to thrive once in college through enhanced supports and experiential learning opportunities that allow students to not only complete college—but succeed upon graduation.

The key to making these changes starts with a renewed commitment to students. This commitment is embodied in the vision for New Jersey’s Student Bill of Rights, which holds *every* New Jerseyan, regardless of life circumstances, should have the opportunity to obtain a high-quality credential that prepares them for life after college.

Under this vision all New Jersey students should have:

- 1 EARLY EXPOSURE TO COLLEGE.**  
*Every student in New Jersey should have the opportunity to explore college options and career paths during their middle and high school years.*
- 2 CLEAR AND COMPREHENSIBLE FINANCIAL INFORMATION.**  
*Every student in New Jersey deserves to receive clear and comprehensible information explaining what college will actually cost for them and their families, including an explanation of the types of aid available, an estimate of likely loan debt, and information on postgraduate outcomes—such as earnings and job placement.*
- 3 AFFORDABLE AND PREDICTABLE EDUCATION COSTS.**  
*Every student in New Jersey should have access to an affordable route to a college degree with predictable tuition and fees, and support to help with non-tuition expenses.*
- 4 EXPERIENTIAL LEARNING OPPORTUNITIES.**  
*Every student in New Jersey should have the opportunity to work with an employer, conduct meaningful research supervised by a faculty member, or access some other form of experiential learning before graduation.*
- 5 SUPPORTIVE FACULTY AND STAFF.**  
*Every student in New Jersey should have access to faculty and staff who have the ability, time, and resources necessary to support student learning and development.*

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**SUPPORT FOR ON-TIME COLLEGE COMPLETION.**

*Every student in New Jersey should have the financial, academic, and social support needed to complete college as promptly as possible with a degree or credential.*

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**OPPORTUNITIES TO EARN COLLEGE CREDIT OUTSIDE THE CLASSROOM.**

*Every student in New Jersey should have the opportunity to demonstrate that credentials and work experiences obtained outside a college classroom are worthy of being awarded college credit.*

8

**HIGH-QUALITY ACADEMIC PROGRAMS.**

*Every student in New Jersey should have high-quality, career-relevant academic programs that will prepare them to succeed in the global economy.*

9

**SAFE, SUPPORTIVE, AND INCLUSIVE CAMPUSES.**

*Every student in New Jersey should feel safe and supported in their learning environment. This means colleges must work to ensure students are not only safe from physical harm, but also included and welcome on campus.*

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**A VOICE IN THE DECISIONS THAT AFFECT THEIR EDUCATION.**

*Every student in New Jersey should be included in decision-making processes that affect them, whether it be on campus or statewide.*

These rights are not self-executing, nor will they happen overnight. Achieving them will require the state, colleges, and students to all take on active roles and work in collaboration with one another. Some steps, however, should be taken immediately to make these rights a reality. They include:



Exposing students to postsecondary pathways through enhanced partnerships and access to fee-free college-preparatory programs;



Ensuring college access and affordability by examining new partnerships between the state and institutions to meaningfully reduce higher education costs for students and their families;



Building support systems necessary to make sure students thrive in college and get across the graduation stage;



Ensuring students feel safe, supported, and included in their chosen learning environments; and



Cultivating research, innovation, and talent to deepen and recapture our role as a leader in the innovation economy and effectively prepare students for success after college.

Taking these coordinated steps now will help transform higher education in the state. Additional steps may require more long-term, collective action. Along with the immediate recommendations set forth in the plan, a set of working groups will be charged with specific follow-up tasks to continue the conversation set forth in this living document. This type of collaboration between stakeholders will make the Student Bill of Rights a reality and showcase what New Jersey truly values: opportunity and innovation.