In a rapidly changing world and intensely competitive global economy, New Jersey’s community colleges are critical institutions of higher education and economic opportunity, able to reach a significant proportion of the state’s population and offer affordable, high quality education that serves the complex needs of students, employers, and local communities.

Many of New Jersey’s 18 community colleges were created 50 years ago, and now enroll over 325,000 students at over 60 campuses throughout the state, making them the largest provider of higher education in the state. New Jersey’s community colleges are uniquely positioned to help the economy grow, industries thrive, and people succeed in an era of rapid economic, social, and technological change.

New Jersey’s future and that of its residents depends on a strong network of community colleges, uniquely able to assist residents to obtain the skills and knowledge they will need to thrive and succeed. This report, which sets out a framework for the future of New Jersey’s community colleges, was developed by the New Jersey Council of County Colleges, working with the state’s 18 community colleges, and is aligned with New Jersey’s Plan for Higher Education developed by the Office of the Secretary of Higher Education. This bold vision is based on input from over 600 community college leaders and stakeholders through more than 25 meetings, a statewide Leadership Summit, and through online comments from members of the community college community, including students, alumni, trustees, faculty, staff, and others.

At the heart of this vision is a commitment of the state’s community colleges to playing a critical role in increasing the number of New Jerseyans who have earned a post-secondary credential or degree so that the state can meet its ambitious goal of 65% post-secondary attainment by the year 2025 (65 by 25). Community colleges will focus on expanding opportunities for all New Jerseyans in order to close equity and opportunity gaps by race, ethnicity, and geography. Continued and expanded financial support from state and county governments is critical to this broad and ambitious effort.

**Imperatives for New Jersey’s Future**

Not long ago, and within the lifetime memory of many New Jerseyans, earning a high school diploma enabled many people to secure a good, stable job in a manufacturing-dominated economy. This was the post-World War II American dream, spawned by the Industrial Revolution and two World Wars. In today’s economy, more and more jobs require a post-secondary degree or credential. Without this vital post-secondary education, the American dream is becoming out of reach for too many people.
The state economy shares the nation’s 50-year shift in employment away from goods-producing industries to private service-producing industries, a transformation reflected in new job titles, skill sets, job descriptions, and tools. The growth of the service industry and technological integration across the economy is prompting the wholesale restructuring of leading industry sectors, such as health care, finance, manufacturing, and retail trade. Mathematical algorithms, software applications, social media and networking, the Internet of Things, and artificial intelligence are now transforming the nature of work from the factory floor, to small businesses, and to the board rooms of the state’s largest companies. These technologies, and others, have changed the way we work, learn, and live and have transformed internal business operations in every industry. Technological advances have enabled the rise of a highly integrated global economy that has further increased the pace of change in the labor market.

Amid these changes, too many New Jerseyans are struggling, despite a relatively strong labor market and economy. Nearly four in 10 households (38.5%) in New Jersey are struggling to make ends meet each day. Many of these households include an adult who is employed, but they do not earn enough to afford basic necessities, such as housing, child care, transportation, and health care. New Jersey has significant inequities in post-secondary education attainment by race, ethnicity and geography. While 52% of New Jerseyans have earned a post-secondary degree or credential, only 31% of African-Americans and 24% of Hispanic residents have had the same access to post-secondary education. Over 60% of adults in Morris, Somerset, and Hunterdon counties hold post-secondary credentials, while less than 35% of adults in Cumberland, Salem, and Passaic counties hold post-secondary credentials. Addressing these disparities is a moral imperative and an economic necessity.

Responding to this rapidly changing world will require innovative public policy and strategic investments in the future. Five imperatives will be central to a broader strategy to ensure that more New Jerseyans are prepared to thrive and adapt, and to ensure that the state has a skilled workforce to propel economic growth:

1. Increase the Number of Individuals who have Earned Post-Secondary Credentials and Degrees
2. Prepare Residents for Change
3. Ensure Access to Life Long Learning
4. Focus on Equity
5. Build Broad Partnerships

A Strong and Solid Foundation

Every day, New Jersey’s community colleges work to respond to these imperatives. We are building on a solid foundation and a statewide reach. New Jersey’s strong network of comprehensive, open door, and affordable community colleges respond fully to the educational, economic, cultural, and community needs of their respective counties. New Jersey’s comprehensive community colleges prepare students to enter four-year institutions, train them to assume skilled positions in New Jersey’s workforce, and offer many other programs that enrich the quality of life for the state’s residents. The community colleges offer a wide variety of associate degree programs including both transfer and occupational curricula, certificate programs in various occupational fields, and noncredit courses that serve students’ career or general interests.

New Jersey’s community colleges are a critical nexus in the state’s education system. The colleges have strong partnerships with the K-12 sector, providing dual enrollment programs to ensure

that students are better prepared for post-secondary education and are on a pathway to further education. New Jersey's community colleges enjoy a special relationship with New Jersey's county-based vocational technical schools, working in collaboration to prepare students for careers in the innovation economy. The community colleges also have strong partnerships and articulation agreements with New Jersey's public and independent four-year colleges and universities, playing a critical role in baccalaureate degree attainment for students in this state.

Community colleges play a critical role in meeting the workforce needs of New Jersey's businesses. Each community college has a wide array of innovative collaborations with businesses and other partners that help companies upgrade the skills of their employees, provide training to unemployed and underemployed individuals, and address skills gaps across the state. New Jersey’s community colleges are critical to providing economic mobility, helping individuals earn high school equivalency degrees, teaching English language skills, and helping individuals improve their basic skills. These efforts provide a pathway to further education and to a career. And the colleges serve as centers of life-long learning, helping individuals to upgrade their skills, and to obtain the skills and education required to prepare for new careers.

Through all of these efforts, New Jersey’s community colleges have a significant economic impact on the state and on their communities.

A Bold Vision for the Future
New Jersey's community colleges are poised to offer an ever-expansive vision of higher education that is agile, collaborative, and innovative, and that prepares individuals, at varying stages of their lives and careers, for success in an increasingly diverse society and global economy. We are rooted in our local communities, responding to the local needs of students and employers, while understanding that we live in an increasingly connected global community. We impact our students, counties, and our state, and enable each to compete and thrive in the nation and the world.

Continued and expanded state support for community colleges is critical to the ability of the colleges to achieve this bold vision for the future and to maintain quality and affordable post-secondary education.

With state and county support and collaboration, New Jersey’s community colleges will work together in the years ahead, developing new models of collaboration and cooperation and leading partnerships with businesses, educational institutions, government, community and faith-based organizations, and other stakeholders in order to:

Increase access to post-secondary education for more New Jerseyans:
New Jersey’s community colleges will work to build a broad partnership of state government, educational institutions at all levels, community organizations, and others to ensure that more New Jersey residents have the opportunity to enroll in post-secondary degree or credential programs.

- Partner with high schools
- Build partnerships to better serve adults
- Close equity and opportunity gaps
- Reduce financial barriers to students
- Offer specialized baccalaureate degrees in response to local workforce needs

Support the success of students
Community colleges will continue and expand efforts to ensure that students who enroll have the supports needed to succeed and to complete their degrees or credentials.

- Strengthen career advising
- Expand and strengthen student supports
- Expand social service supports
- Re-imagine a transfer culture
Ensure access to valuable and relevant learning
Community colleges will continue to provide an affordable and high-quality education that
prepares students for further education, for a job and career, to be engaged in a rapidly
changing democracy and to be participants in increasingly diverse communities.

- Support the development of critical-thinking and problem-solving skills and the
  learning of essential knowledge
- Upgrade the skills of currently employed individuals
- Strengthen work-based learning opportunities, including apprenticeships
- Develop industry-focused collaboratives to build paths to credentials and careers
- Build new credit/noncredit pathways
- Expand industry-valued credit-bearing credential programs
- Consider the implications of competency-based education

Serve as community engines
Community colleges will continue to play a central role in their local counties and the
cities where they are located acting as centers for community gatherings, arts, civic
engagement, and contributors to the economic development of their communities.

- Serve as centers of community and civic engagement
- Promote innovative public-private partnerships
- Serve as incubators of innovation

Vision 2028 Initiatives
In the months and years ahead, the New Jersey Council of County Colleges and the state’s
community colleges will work to achieve this vision. With the input and support of a broad array
of partners, we can all work collectively to ensure we are helping the people of this state obtain
the post-secondary credentials and degrees they will need to thrive in the economy, and ensure
that economic mobility is available to more New Jerseyans. These four initiatives will serve as
the initial foundation for broader efforts to reach the State of New Jersey’s 65 by 25 goal.

**Initiative 1:** Expanding Pathways That Lead to Credentials and Careers
**Initiative 2:** Strengthening the Delivery of Innovative Learning of Essential Skills and Abilities
**Initiative 3:** Connecting Adults to Opportunity
**Initiative 4:** Connecting Students to Social Service Supports

Join the Partnership
Community colleges are well-positioned to play a significant role in addressing many of the
challenges and opportunities facing New Jersey. We cannot do this alone. And we need your
perspectives, your partnership, and your ideas for innovation, both now and in the years ahead.
If you or your organization is interested in partnering with community colleges, please contact
the New Jersey Council of County Colleges at Vision2028@njccc.org.

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