



## News Release

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### Essex County College Students Share Impact of Community College Opportunity Grant

**NEWARK** - Today, Secretary of Higher Education Zakiya Smith Ellis and Higher Education Student Assistance Authority Executive Director David Socolow participated in a roundtable forum with students at Essex County College to hear what the Community College Opportunity Grant (CCOG) has meant for their academic aspirations. Essex County College recently was included in this spring's statewide expansion of CCOG, New Jersey's free community college program. Smith Ellis and Socolow were joined by Essex County College President Anthony Munroe, and Assemblywoman Mila Jasey.

Students across the state are eligible for CCOG if they meet the requirements of enrolling in at least 6 credits this spring, making satisfactory academic progress, coming from families with adjusted gross incomes between \$0 and \$45,000, and having a completed application for federal and state financial aid. CCOG is a "last-dollar" grant that covers any gap remaining between students' tuition and covered educational fees and all other state and federal financial aid grants they receive.

Governor Murphy proposed allocating \$58.5 million for Community College Opportunity Grants in his proposed Fiscal Year 2020 budget this March. The budget currently being considered by the Legislature only includes approximately half that amount, which would limit the program's ability to support more students at all 19 county colleges for both semesters. After a successful pilot year, the Governor expects increased enrollment in FY2020.

"Over the past year, our Community College Opportunity Grant program has helped many New Jerseyans obtain a higher education they otherwise would not have been able to afford," **said Governor Murphy**. "Today's event is a testament to how critical it is to provide the proposed budget funding for programs like CCOG. I will continue my call for sustainable revenues in order to provide college affordability for our New Jersey's residents so that each individual has an opportunity to thrive."

"Hearing their input and positive feedback on the Community College Opportunity Grant from students at Essex County College reinforces what an important step it was to expand CCOG to all 19 of the New Jersey's community colleges," **said Secretary of Higher Education Zakiya Smith Ellis**. "The Community College Opportunity Grant is a central to our student-centered vision for higher education to lift up students and their communities across New Jersey. Legislative leaders, community college leaders, and the Governor all agree that expanding this opportunity to students at all colleges for both semesters is the right thing to do. In order to do this successfully and make sure no qualified student is denied, an expanded program will need an expanded budget."

“The students we heard from today eloquently testified to how this additional financial aid has opened opportunities and improved their lives. This semester’s pilot program has shown how the promise of tuition-free community college helps students build a better future by earning a college degree or high-quality credential. That is why the Governor’s budget proposal to expand the Community College Opportunity Grant is so urgently needed so we can reach even more students in the next Academic Year,” **said David Socolow, Executive Director of the New Jersey Higher Education Student Assistance Authority (HESAA).**

“For half a century, Essex County College has been committed to serving our students and community by providing academic and workforce development programs that prepare global leaders, and transform lives and communities,” **said Essex County College President, Dr. Anthony Munroe.** “We are pleased to have been included in the Governor's Community College Opportunity Grant Spring 2019 Pilot, an important investment in Essex County that will bring significant returns to the state of New Jersey. Through innovative academic programming and access to the CCOG funds, many more Essex County College students were able to continue their journey in earning credentials of economic value that will better their lives, improve their communities, and ultimately move the state of New Jersey forward.”

“The Community College Opportunity Grant (CCOG) program has allowed many Essex County students to take charge of their future,” **said Assemblywoman Mila Jasey (D-Essex/Morris).** “Thanks to this program, Essex County College students will be educated, prepared, and motivated young adults equipped with the tools to succeed, achieve great things and contribute to their communities. I am inspired by their passion for learning and their commitment to investing in their future. Their success will be our success.”

“Essex County College has been a beacon of hope for our residents, providing the educational foundation for students to pursue advanced degrees and embark on successful careers,” **said Essex County Executive Joseph N. DiVincenzo, Jr.** “I applaud Governor Murphy for creating the Community College Opportunity Grant. It eliminates the burden of higher education costs and allows our students to focus on their studies and future goals.”

“Governor Murphy's Community College Opportunity Grant is making it possible for more Newark high school graduates to attend community college,” **said Mayor of Newark Ras Baraka.** “This grant is essential to the work of the Newark City of Learning Collaborative (NCLC), a wide-ranging collaboration whose goal is increasing the proportion of Newark residents with a degree or credential beyond high school. The Opportunity Grant program at Essex County College is an important new tool in meeting that goal.”

The Office of the Secretary of Higher Education (OSHE) and the Higher Education Student Assistance Authority (HESAA) are jointly administering this funding opportunity. To learn more about the Community College Opportunity Grant, visit: <https://www.hesaa.org/Pages/ccog.aspx>