Governor Phil Murphy

Governor Murphy, Secretary Bridges Announce $29.5 Million to Support College and University Students Amid COVID-19 Pandemic

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Second Round of Governor's Emergency Education Relief (GEER II) Funds to Address Challenges Exacerbated by Pandemic

TRENTON – Today, Governor Phil Murphy and Secretary of Higher Education Dr. Brian Bridges announced that $29.5 million in federal funding will be available to New Jersey's institutions of higher education amid the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic to support the goals of the State Plan for Higher Education (https://nj.gov/highereducation/documents/pdf/StateEducationplan.pdf) through a competitive challenge grant and address student food insecurities across college campuses.

About $28.5 million in funding from the U.S. Department of Education through the Governor's Emergency Education Relief (GEER II) Fund will be awarded to New Jersey's public and public-mission private institutions that receive state operating aid to implement vetted best practices (https://nj.gov/highereducation/workinggroups.shtml) that increase college completion, address barriers to student success, and develop sustainable systemic reforms. Another $1 million will be awarded to public institutions to combat food insecurity among students.

"As we continue to fight the pandemic and look toward recovery, it is critical to provide immediate relief and support for our higher education institutions to meet the challenges brought by COVID-19," **said Governor Murphy**. "Now more than ever, this necessary funding will provide the financial assistance for our colleges and universities to better serve our students and continue propelling them toward their fullest potentials."

"The COVID-19 pandemic only intensified the challenges many students already faced in the pursuit of higher education, including college affordability and food insecurity, making our State Plan priorities even more critical," **said Secretary of Higher Education Dr. Brian Bridges**. "New Jersey's higher education sector will experience long-term effects from the pandemic. However, we remain committed to ensuring students have equitable access to postsecondary education now and in the future, and are equipped with the supports needed to increase their likelihood of completion. This funding allows us to further that commitment. We look forward to continuing to explore innovative ways to strengthen higher education supports and carry out our student-centered vision."

"Colleges are often overlooked as places where you might find students struggling for their next meal, but food insecurity is very real and prevalent on New Jersey college campuses," **said Speaker Craig Coughlin**. "The Hunger-Free Campus Grant Program will become another tool in our fight against hunger throughout the state. I implore all eligible colleges and universities to apply to receive the assistance they need to help college students facing food insecurity."

"It is crucial we are exploring creative solutions to help those most impacted by the pandemic rebound from the social, emotional and financial impact it has had. Higher education grant programs like this one will be an essential piece of that recovery," **said Senator Cunningham, chair of the Senate Higher Education Committee**. "The funding announced today will go a long way towards assisting some of our most vulnerable residents in obtaining a college degree and getting back on their feet."

"No college student should ever have to worry where their next meal will come from," **said Assemblywoman Mila Jasey**. "Sadly, that is the reality for an overwhelming number of students facing food insecurity while trying to balance the stresses of college, especially now during a pandemic. These grant initiatives will further our mission of

eliminating food insecurity on campuses and for families across New Jersey."

Opportunity Meets Innovation Challenge Grants ($28.5 Million)

Given the devastating impacts of COVID-19 on the entire higher education sector, approximately $28.5 million in GEER II funds will support the launch of the "Opportunity Meets Innovation Challenge," a competitive grant program available to public and public-mission private institutions that receive state operating aid to implement best practices (https://nj.gov/highereducation/workinggroups.shtml) released by the State Plan working groups in March 2020 and develop sustainable system-wide reforms. In implementing these strategies, institutions must focus on populations that have been historically disadvantaged, including underrepresented minorities, low-income students, and working-age adults. Many of these populations were among the hardest hit by the pandemic, which resulted in declines in enrollments, challenges to student success, and unprecedented unemployment figures.

Grant initiatives will also help New Jersey achieve its educational attainment goal of 65 percent of working-age adults obtaining a high-quality credential by 2025, as outlined in the state's talent development plan, Jobs NJ (https://www.njeda.com/jobs-nj/). Funding will help increase the likelihood of college completion and ensure a robust pipeline of talent is matched to workforce demands.

Institutions can select from a series of interventions that reflect the five core priority areas of the State Plan:

1. Expanding opportunities for students to gain early college exposure
2. Improving college affordability
3. Fostering student success
4. Promoting safe and inclusive learning environments
5. Cultivating research, innovation and talent

Institutions may apply for a maximum total grant award based on their full-time enrollment (i.e. $500,000 for small institutions, $1 million for medium institutions, and $1.5 million for large institutions) and may utilize the funds for one or more categories based on their student populations' needs. The final number of awards will be based on the quantity and quality of applications received.

Hunger-Free Campus Grant Program ($1 million)

According to data from a survey of New Jersey community college students conducted by the Hope Center for College, Community and Justice and released in February 2020 (https://nj.gov/highereducation/documents/pdf/index/materialhardships.pdf), about 40 percent of respondents were food insecure within the previous 30 days, 44 percent were housing insecure, and 14 percent were homeless in the previous year.

A total of $1 million in GEER II funding will be used to support the goals of the "Hunger-Free Campus Act (https://nj.gov/governor/news/news/562019/approved/20190509b.shtml)," signed by Governor Murphy in 2019 to establish a grant program to address food insecurity among students enrolled in public institutions. This funding is only available to public institutions that received "Hunger-Free Campus" designations.

Grant awards will range from $40,000 to $100,000 per institution. The final number of awards will be based on the quantity and quality of applications received. Through the application, institutions must document that they meet all qualifications for the Hunger-Free Campus designation prior to being eligible to receive the grant funds.

Applications for both grant programs are forthcoming and will be available on OSHE's website.

Governor Phil Murphy

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