

START, STAY, SUCCEED

A retrospective on New Jersey's progress toward a student-centered vision for higher education, through strategic collaboration between the state and institutions



Photo from the New Jersey Office of the Secretary of Higher Education

BRIEF 2 OF 4

Supporting the Whole Student to Achieve Success in College and Beyond

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INTRODUCTION

The New Jersey Office of the Secretary of Higher Education (OSHE) has worked to ensure that every student in the state has the opportunity to succeed academically, thrive personally, and graduate with a quality credential that prepares them for the workforce and life beyond college. This commitment is rooted in the [New Jersey State Plan for Higher Education](#), which sets forth a Student Bill of Rights that affirms every student should have early exposure to college, opportunities for on-time completion, safe and inclusive campus environments, and a voice in decisions affecting their education.

Today, more students have access to real-world learning opportunities aligned with employer expectations, supportive faculty and staff equipped to teach and engage them, and innovative pathways to earn college credit outside the classroom. Working with partners, OSHE has continued to recommend proven strategies for reducing financial burdens on New Jersey students, including policies that allow unused credits to apply toward tuition, year-round enrollment with summer financial aid, and flat-rate tuition models. These policies can help remove obstacles to student success caused by excessive student debt and delayed progress toward graduation caused by unnecessary developmental courses.

To help students feel safe and supported, OSHE has launched initiatives informed by research and proven strategies. Campus climate surveys, resource guidebooks on creating safe and welcoming environments, and comprehensive implementation guides for sexual assault prevention and trauma-informed response have equipped institutions to build more inclusive spaces for all students. These efforts, shaped by the [Safe and Inclusive Environment Working Group](#), underscore OSHE's commitment to intersectional support and rigorous institutional accountability.

PATHWAYS TO POSTSECONDARY EDUCATION

Strong partnerships between OSHE, the New Jersey Department of Education (DOE) and the Higher Education Student Assistance Authority (HESAA) have helped to motivate future enrollment in higher education.

As the key facilitator of grants to institutions of higher education from the state and federal government, OSHE's partnerships are strengthening students' academic and social capital for a successful transition to college:

- **Investment into a statewide dual enrollment pilot** contributed to an increase in high school students taking college classes, giving them the knowledge and skills to pursue college in New Jersey. Collaborations between school districts and colleges strengthened communication channels, shared resources, and designated pipelines for students graduating from high school and entering college with credits applied to their degrees, putting them on a faster track to college completion. Utilizing data from the New Jersey Statewide Data System (NJSDS), a recent report [Review of Dual-Enrollment Participation and Outcomes in New Jersey](#), from the John J. Heldrich Center for Workforce Development at Rutgers University found that taking college-level courses in high school through dual enrollment improves the likelihood of pursuing higher education and graduating on time. It also highlights that disparities remain in access and benefits based on factors like socioeconomic status.
- **The Gaining Early Awareness and Readiness for Undergraduate Programs (GEAR UP)** project, funded by a federal grant program and State's College Bound appropriation, offered academic tutoring, peer mentoring and other support to students in middle and high school to prepare them for postsecondary education in New Jersey. Current college students gained invaluable leadership skills through mentorship opportunities they provided to GEAR UP students and their families. Participants of GEAR UP maintained an average high school graduation rate of 98% since 2019. In a significant achievement for the program, GEAR UP boosted its college enrollment rate by 41% between 2020 and 2024 with enrollment climbing from 51% in 2020 to 72% in 2024.

These critical financial, academic, and support programs for our state's young people provided seamless on-ramps for their successful enrollment at many of our institutions of higher education. The ongoing effectiveness of these programs and the interagency cooperation among OSHE, DOE and HESAA points to New Jersey's innovative approaches, multi-stakeholder collaboration, and sound investment of federal and state resources.

FOSTERING STATEWIDE COLLABORATION

As a coordinating body, OSHE leads various communities of practice to create supportive learning environments for higher education practitioners that are interdisciplinary and bring diverse stakeholders together to share, learn and strategize. The agency's role providing professional development to multiple institution sectors, numerous campus leaders, and countless on-ground practitioners improved delivery of high-quality programs and services for students.

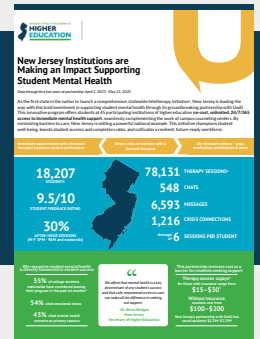


Read on ReUp's blog [How New Jersey Is Removing Barriers for Adult Learners](#)

- The Statewide **Some College, No Degree** initiative brings together 22 institutions to engage former stopped out learners across New Jersey to return to campus and complete their degree. This innovative statewide approach helping residents earn their postsecondary credential and supporting the state in meeting workforce demands has delivered significant [economic returns](#) for individuals, institutions and the State.
- **The Campus Sexual Assault Commission (CSAC)** was established and tasked a group of institution leaders with studying, evaluating, and developing an action plan for proactive responses and solution-based practices to address sexual assault and harassment on all college campuses in New Jersey. Impactful resources and streamlined guidance created by CSAC were used by all higher education to benefit all students regardless of what institution they attended.
- **Capitalizing on the agency's subject matter expertise, OSHE held several large scale in-person convenings.** These events increased opportunities for strategic collaboration between various institutions and practitioners and brought national organizations and other students together with students, faculty and staff to discuss best practices and proven strategies for addressing complex challenges like [student basic needs insecurity](#), [adult learner persistence](#), and [college completion](#).

NEW JERSEY INSTITUTIONS ARE MAKING AN IMPACT SUPPORTING STUDENT MENTAL HEALTH

New Jersey is leading the way with this bold investment in supporting student mental health through its groundbreaking partnership with Uwill. This innovative program offers students at 45 participating institutions of higher education no-cost, unlimited, 24/7/365 access to immediate mental health support, seamlessly complementing the work of campus counseling centers. [See the original summer 2025 report here.](#)



21,630 STUDENTS

670 CHATS

9.6 STUDENT FEEDBACK RATING

9,222 MESSAGES

30% AFTER-HOUR SESSIONS

1,629 CRISIS CONNECTIONS

101,492 TELETHERAPY SESSIONS

6 AVERAGE STUDENT SESSIONS

Data current as of December 2025

The value institutions of higher education contribute to student prosperity, economic gains, and academic advancements is measured not just in financial benefits, but in a productive workforce and responsible citizenry. The mission of OSHE to bring organizations together to solve critical issues and the agency's reputation as a champion of student success has increased collaboration and idea sharing amongst numerous institutions and leaders throughout New Jersey.

SUPPORTING THE WHOLE STUDENT

The recent high school graduate or "traditional student" is no longer the primary participant in higher education. Today's [students are](#) increasingly older, they are parents, caregivers, veterans, working full-time jobs, the first in their families to go to college and the like. It is the role of the State and our institutions of higher education to provide various opportunities for students to get the support they need for success.

To help students succeed, OSHE seeks to understand the whole student and address barriers to their completion such as mental health and basic needs insecurity. The agency has worked to provide various levels of supports for students and create room for institutional creativity and adaptability. As each campus serves a unique group of students, having the capacity and state-funded support to propel these efforts is critical.

- Focusing on [college student mental health](#) has been an expanding focus throughout the Murphy administration. Considering that during the COVID-19 pandemic, NJ college students reported [70% had experienced an increase in stress and anxiety](#), focusing on providing a tele-mental health platform through the [Uwill partnership](#) became imperative. Additionally, through the [2025 Statewide Mental Health Summit and Mental Health Ambassadors](#), there has been a focus on having student-led and student-informed dialogue about college student mental health. Providing space for students to not only speak with professionals but also have a platform to discuss amongst peers.
- The Hunger-Free Campus Act Grants have expanded to 34 institutions within the state, providing funding for sustainable solutions to student hunger and food insecurity and creating more campus awareness regarding the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), among other initiatives. These efforts are designed to meet the immediate and comprehensive needs of students, a necessity highlighted by [OSHE's Spring 2025 Student Food Insecurity Survey](#) showing that 36% of New Jersey students report low or very low food security, 37% worry about food running out, and 45% of often have difficulty affording meals. The ultimate goal is to support the whole student by first providing "wrap-around" services that begin with food security.

- In 2023, OSHE had the opportunity to join the ASAP College Completion Coalition Learning Community, through the State Higher Education Executive Officers Association. The learning community provided insights regarding replication and implementation of the City University of New York's (CUNY) Accelerated Study in Associate Programs (ASAP) model. The model focuses on student success and attainment gaps. Through this opportunity, OSHE provided [two \\$12,500 microgrants](#) to Camden County College and Essex County Community College's Educational Opportunity Fund programs. The programs were able to utilize the funds for items such as transportation and grocery vouchers, programmatic needs, and feminine hygiene products.

In working alongside State, national, and institutional partners, OSHE has invested a total of \$6.4 funding towards Hunger Free Grants, launched the first in the nation [tele-mental health Uwill Partnership](#), utilized funds to explore ASAP possibilities within the State, and developed community provider partnerships and professional development opportunities.

PREPARING STUDENTS FOR CAREERS AFTER COLLEGE

Providing students with opportunities to explore the workforce while taking courses is critical to supporting them to and through higher education. Ensuring that students know the possibilities of where their postsecondary education can lead them provides more opportunities for students to expand their reach and advance in their careers.

- [Through the New Jersey Career Accelerator Internship Grant Program \(CAIGP\)](#), OSHE has provided \$6.2 million in grants to employers to offer paid internships across diverse range of sectors. Employer participation has increased by nearly 61% since being administered by OSHE, with funding awarded to an average of 130 New Jersey-based companies, non-profits, not-for-profits, and small businesses each summer to offer structured learning experiences to New Jersey undergraduate students, graduate students, and recent grads. Since 2022, the program has supported 1,700 paid internship opportunities.



Watch students of CAIGP share their experience with the program.

CAIGP SECTORS

- STEM
- Construction
- Energy
- Finance
- Technology
- Media
- Hospitality
- Retail
- Trade
- Nonprofit Organizations

- [The Global Entrepreneurs-in-Residence \(GEIR\)](#) program provides a unique pathway for international entrepreneurs to obtain H-1B visas through part-time academic roles. In these roles, entrepreneurs-in-residence work alongside university stakeholders and strategic partners to advance research, mentor and teach students, and build and scale their startups. Under state's pilot, the New Jersey Institute of Technology (NJIT) and William Paterson University (WPU) are supporting entrepreneurs to stay in New Jersey to grow their startups.

By developing equitable avenues for experiential learning and encouraging startup investment within the State, there are stronger opportunities to keep talent and develop our economy.

CLOSING

OSHE has remained committed to ensuring that students not only achieve academically but also thrive personally and prepare for meaningful lives and careers. By strengthening **pathways to higher education**, New Jersey has expanded access to early college experiences, financial guidance, and academic preparation that set them on a trajectory for success. Through **fostering statewide collaboration**, OSHE strengthened relationships across colleges, governmental partners, and stakeholders, building networks that amplify best practices and foster innovation in service of students. By **supporting the whole student**, the agency addressed mental health, basic needs, and inclusive supports, ensuring that every learner has the resources and environment needed to thrive. Finally, by **preparing students for life after graduation**, OSHE connected students with meaningful careers, internships, and entrepreneurial opportunities, working to strengthen the state's workforce. Together, these efforts demonstrate a comprehensive, data-informed, and equity-focused approach to student success and wellbeing, establishing a foundation for continued innovation and achievement in the years ahead.