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Office of the Secretary of Higher Education Holds First Statewide Convening on ‘Some College, No Degree’ Student Engagement Initiative

Initiative Receives Another \$8 Million Investment in FY24 State Budget

TRENTON – In a groundbreaking effort to empower and support New Jersey residents who have some college credit but left school before completing their degrees, the Office of the Secretary of Higher Education (OSHE) hosted a convening at Middlesex College on Wednesday, June 28. The ‘Some College, No Degree’ initiative aims to address the educational aspirations of over 750,000 New Jersey residents, providing them with the resources and opportunities necessary to return to higher education and complete their degree or credential.

“This convening focused on policy-driven conversations and emphasized the urgent need for a comprehensive strategy to support these individuals in completing their higher education journeys,” **said Dr. Brian K. Bridges, Secretary of Higher Education.** “Our goal is to help them overcome barriers to reenrollment, learn about newly available State resources and financial aid, and emphasize how a credential can open new doors of opportunity. By bringing together national policy leaders and campus partners, who work directly with these students, all under one roof, we hope to inspire new and amplify ongoing strategic approaches to reaching, reengaging, and reenrolling this population statewide.”

The day-long event welcomed over 200 campus partners representing 42 New Jersey institutions of higher education and a diverse collaborative of higher education professionals with student life, advising, admissions, financial aid, and institutional research backgrounds. Guest speakers included national experts from the National Student Clearinghouse (NSC), the Institute for Higher Education Policy (IHEP), and ReUp Education. These presentations focused on the national-level data perspective, case studies from other states and institutions, and best practice strategies being deployed to engage and support students in New Jersey.

“Reengaging students with some college credits but no degree is critical to making student success more equitable,” **said Amanda Janice Roberson, Senior Director of Strategic Engagement, Planning, and Operations at IHEP.** “The obstacles that force students to stop out of college disproportionately impact first-generation students, adult students, students from

low-income backgrounds, and students of color. We applaud institutions in New Jersey for committing to use disaggregated data and data-informed strategies to address these inequities and help students cross the degree-completion finish line.”

According to data from the NSC, New Jersey ranks 12th out of 50 states in the size of its ‘Some College, No Degree’ population, with 792,527 individuals who fall within the some college, no credential category. Of that population, 8.1% are considered ‘potential completers’ having made at least two years’ worth of academic progress within the last 10 years and 5.4% are recent ‘stop-out’ students who stepped away from their academic journeys in 2019 or later.

“As of July 31, 2021, the some college, no credential population grew and, at the same time, we also observed re-enrollment declines, meaning more students were stopping out and fewer returning to continue their academic progress,” **said Jennifer Causey, Senior Research Associate at NSC.** “The recent national data will enable institutions as a whole to consider how to get these students re-enrolled and ultimately on track to earn their first credential. Equally, institutional resources such as student advising and support services are critical to ensure student success.”

The day also featured a panel of five students and was moderated by OSHE staff member Catherine Sackey, a former ‘some college, no degree’ student herself. Each student spoke about their unique experience navigating the return to college and many pointed to the value of individualized support and advising as well as flexible learning options offered to them.

“What’s important to know is every student’s journey and story is unique,” **said Sackey.** “But it’s the deeply personal reasons for returning and the shared experience of going on that journey that bring us together. For me, personally, setting an example for my kids and having the opportunity to work in educational access in the hopes that others like me, who did not have a linear educational journey, have an opportunity to complete their degree became my ‘why’. Now working for OSHE, I get to leverage my lived experience to help inform State perspectives and ensure the stories of students like me and those on the panel are represented.”

“Collaborations with colleges in New Jersey that harness the power of information are the catalyst for transformative change in higher education,” **said Christine Wyatt, COO of ReUp Education.** “Hearing students tell their stories on the panel really drove home how important it is to unlock the potential of data and technology to treat these students as individuals, by matching the right resource to the right learner at the right time, at scale.”

As part of the State initiative funded for the first time in Fiscal Year 2023 with \$3 million, [OSHE launched a partnership](#) with ReUp Education and 17 of New Jersey’s higher education institutions to identify, reach, and engage students who have left college without completing a degree.

In New Jersey’s State Budget for Fiscal Year 2024 signed on June 30, OSHE’s statewide ‘Some College, No Degree’ initiative has received another \$8 million in funding. During this second year, OSHE intends to build on the inaugural year of outreach and explore further supports that can help re-engage this priority student population to facilitate their persistence through to degree completion.

The full event program as well as photos are available [here](#). Video recordings, once available, will be located on our website at nj.gov/highereducation.

