

**Merit Aid Retains Our Best and Brightest**  
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New Jersey is pulling the plug on the state's most successful merit aid program for college students by eliminating the Outstanding Scholar Recruitment Program (OSRP) from the state budget. That may not at first seem a concern for many, because the OSRP provides funding for only several thousand of New Jersey's most academically talented students. The fact that this decision might not "directly" impact your bottom line as a business person or your own tuition bill as a student or parent of a student shouldn't mislead you into thinking that the decision will have little impact on the economic future of your state.

Since it was established in 1997, the OSRP has succeeded in keeping an increasing number (approximately 50 percent more) of New Jersey's academically talented high school students in-state for their college education. Why is this important? Primarily because studies have long shown that, in the majority of cases, when a student leaves the state for college, he or she does not return after college. New Jersey, in fact, leads the nation in the net loss of college students to other states. That means that very few of the thousands of students who leave New Jersey for higher education are replaced by out-of-state students.

With the elimination of OSRP, the concern about how many students we are losing is exacerbated by the concern about which students we are losing.

Merit aid has helped us keep many of our academic stars in the state, where they continue to reside and work after graduation. These students fill vital roles that benefit our economy, health-care system, educational system and quality of life. At The College of New Jersey, where I serve as president, 72 percent of our OSRP students major in the sciences and engineering. In addition, the number of OSRP students majoring in nursing and education has increased every year.

In New Jersey, we are facing a shortage of nurses and highly qualified teachers. OSRP was helping to address those problems. It has also helped to retain the top science and engineering majors who are vital to our economy, which is so linked to the pharmaceutical and telecommunications industries.

If the evidence on hand proves true, however, many of our best students will leave New Jersey, now that OSRP has been eliminated. Eighty percent of OSRP graduates from TCNJ are employed in New Jersey, 94 percent reside in the state, and almost all of them cite this scholarship program as a primary reason for choosing to go to school in-state. Alarming, though, 86 percent of top scholars who are admitted to but do not attend The College of New Jersey leave the state for their higher education. So it is clear that losing OSRP will lead to the loss of even more such students.

Some might argue that these students and their families can afford to pay for college and that it is more important to provide need-based aid than merit aid. Both are valid perspectives, but they miss two important points. First is the evidence of the number of students who have been kept in-state with OSRP scholarships, and second is the relative size of our state merit programs and our need-based programs. In the last year it was fully funded, OSRP received approximately \$13 million in state funds (the state of Georgia provided 30 times as much through its merit program the same year), as opposed to the more than \$250 million set aside for need-based aid from the state. The state of New Jersey did not have a merit program that was outsized in comparison to that of other states, and that program was significantly smaller than the state's investment in need-based aid. The question should be: Is this relatively small investment in OSRP worth the retention and eventual contributions of these very talented New Jersey citizens? I think it is.

While I am thankful that Governor Jon Corzine recognizes the absolute need for increased support of higher education and I am appreciative that he has proposed, despite the state's significant financial constraints, additional higher education funding for fiscal 2008, I remain hopeful that New Jersey can find the means to reinvigorate its commitment to merit aid for high-achieving students.