

**A Poll of Likely Voters Shows They See New Jersey State Colleges
and Universities as Doing a Good Job;
Underestimate the Share of Residents Who Attend Them;
Say Higher Tuition Results From Falling State Support;
Reject Idea of More State Control; and
Say Accountability Should Rest with Local Trustee Boards.
Association Responds with a Plan**

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**Press Release
June 28, 2007**

New Jersey residents may be getting much more out of the investment in state colleges and universities than they realize. A recent poll revealed that likely voters are apt to say that New Jersey residents make up about 75% of enrollment at state colleges and universities. In fact, less than one out of six correctly responded that the share was over 90%. Other findings of the poll include: ([Complete Poll Results](#))

- Better than seven out of ten (71%) say the state colleges and universities deliver either an excellent or good education; while only one out of five (20%) say they offer quality that is fair or poor.
- Over half (51%) of New Jersey likely voters say state colleges today are affordable, either very (9%) or somewhat (42%) affordable. About one-third (33%) say they are not very or not at all affordable. Some slippage, possibly a sign of growing concern, is evident; in past polls, state colleges scored slightly better on affordability.
- One-half (50%) of New Jersey likely voters say that state funding cuts to higher education are an extremely important reason for higher college costs today. When asked the principal reason for increases, the largest share cited state funding cuts (17%), followed closely by faculty and administrative salaries (16%). Many (12%) could not cite a main reason.
- While expressing some concerns about public college and university accountability, likely voters say greater involvement by Trenton will result in more, not less, political intrusion by a margin greater than 5:1. They are also more likely to rely on trustee boards over state agencies when it comes to higher education spending: when asked whom they would entrust with spending new funds wisely, they selected nonpartisan trustee boards over state agencies by an 8:1 margin and over the governor and legislature by a 6:1 margin.

These are some of the key findings of a telephone poll conducted May 14-16, 2007 of 655 likely voters by Penn, Schoen & Berland Associates, sponsored by the New Jersey Association of State Colleges and Universities. The poll has a margin of error of plus or minus 3.83 at the 95% confidence level (larger for subgroups).

The poll was released as the start of a broader effort to increase the affordability and efficiency of state colleges and universities through policy changes.

Colleges are seen as a good value. Voters say state colleges deliver high value for the dollar invested. Greater than six out of ten (63%) say they deliver more value: 17% say "a lot more value," and 46% say "somewhat more value," when compared to private colleges and universities.

Capacity Crunch. Six out of ten respondents say that more dorms at state colleges are an important matter. Hampered by a lack of capacity, the Garden State currently ranks 45th among the 50 states in enrollment per capita at four-year public colleges and universities.

Affordability is a growing concern, but cuts affecting quality are not strongly supported. Likely voters see state college affordability waning. Nearly 60% say college is less affordable (somewhat less 40% + a lot less affordable 19%) compared to 2-3 years ago. When asked to give "the primary cause of rising tuition," likely voters most commonly attribute this to "cuts in state funding." Other common responses given include faculty, staff and administrative salaries, and increased spending in other areas.

When asked to identify areas where colleges could save money, there was support, but not strong support, for some of the options proposed in the poll: using more part-time and fewer full-time faculty (21% strongly support), not improving campus facilities as often (19% strongly support), and allowing larger classes (19% strongly support).

ASCU Executive Director/CEO Dr. Darryl G. Greer says the Penn, Schoen & Berland poll seems to indicate that voters want a return to previous higher levels of state support for higher education. "They see this as the way to get back to more affordable tuition and expect the colleges to also keep their promise of preserving access and quality."

New Jersey College Promise announced. Greer says that his association does not see greater state investment as the only answer to the affordability problem. "Given long-term state financial woes, the Association, with full support from our members, is launching a campaign for changes in college and state policy that will allow our state colleges and universities to become the nation's most efficient and, in addition, more innovative and accountable. We are calling this effort **New Jersey College Promise.**"

According to Greer, a key to achieving New Jersey College Promise's lofty goals is protecting colleges from outside political influence and giving them the tools, beyond money, to be resilient, resourceful and innovative.

"There are some messages in these poll results for pundits who blame colleges for high tuition -- and those who say greater state control will mean more efficiency and accountability. Those individuals are clearly at odds with the electorate on these issues."

Voters see room for improvement in spending. One of the goals of the poll was to ascertain whether the image of the state colleges and universities has been tarnished by various state scandals and allegations of corruption. The poll reveals that 61% of likely voters say the institutions are well managed (11% very well managed, 50% somewhat well managed), 21% said they do not know, and only 18% say they are *not* well managed (15% not very well managed, 3% poorly managed). Those who see them as productive have a key statistic on their side: the institutions have been ranked third most productive of their kind among the 50 states by the National Center for Higher Education Management Systems, in a 2005 report.

Nevertheless, many voters remain worried that some things may be amiss, a concern the Association plans to address head-on, says ASCU chief Darryl Greer. When asked about whether they believe the nine state colleges are spending money in ways that are wasteful, voters were more likely to agree: 58% vs. 18%, with 24% saying they do not know. However, when asked the same question about state government there was broader agreement: on wasteful spending, 80% agreed.

The Association plans on using the information about voter views as part of a broad-based effort to craft and promote the New Jersey College Promise across the state. This fall, the project will convene a panel of national experts on college finance, affordability, efficiency and governance, asking them to advise about changes at the college and state policy levels that could enhance New Jerseyans' access to affordable college opportunity.