



NEW JERSEY

Association of State Colleges and Universities

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Op-Ed: Education Infrastructure in New Jersey – If We Build It, They Will Stay

NJ Spotlight
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We're retaining about as many college students as we can accommodate; the outmigration issue is really an underinvestment problem.

Lost in debate over New Jersey's outmigration issue – described in a [recent report](#) by the New Jersey Business and Industry Association (NJBIA) and highlighted by Governor Chris Christie in his budget address on February 16 – is the fact that New Jersey is doing an excellent job of retaining just about as many of its college students for whom we have capacity. [A study by the College Board](#) indicates that 93 percent of first-time students at public four-year colleges in New Jersey were residents of New Jersey – one percentage point behind Texas for best state in the country at enrolling home-state residents.

A better-known statistic is that [far more students](#) leave New Jersey to attend college than come here for their degree, a net loss of about 30,000 students every year. How could we squeeze those 30,000 students back into New Jersey to go to college? One estimate indicates that our institutions of higher education would [need to expand by 44 percent](#).

To address the concern about outmigration raised by NJBIA and the governor, we believe that investing in higher education and creating more classrooms and academic facilities will help us keep more of our young citizen, their talent, and ultimately their contribution to New Jersey's workforce and fiscal wellbeing.

New Jersey's public institutions are serving more students than ever. Between 2003 and 2013, New Jersey had the sixth-highest increase – 22 percent – nationally in full-time equivalent (FTE) enrollment at public institutions, serving [263,893](#) students in 2013. Demand remains strong. Some of the institutions who are members of the New Jersey Association of State Colleges and Universities (NJASCU) are reporting increases of four percent to five percent – and even higher – in applications over this time last year for regular decision.

There is a simple reason why we have so few college seats for our students. For decades, New Jersey shortsightedly underinvested in higher education infrastructure. New Jersey

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provided no capital funding for higher education between fiscal year 2003 and fiscal year 2004, and [was one of only seven states](#) that failed to invest in higher education capital needs between 2012 and 2014.

We are slowly reversing that trend. In 2012, New Jersey's voters – with a [strong “yes” vote of 63 percent](#) – approved a \$750 million bond issue for higher education construction, the first state-backed financing for higher education in New Jersey since [1988](#). Also in 2012, New Jersey renewed over \$560 million in other bonds for projects targeting capital improvements, technology, and equipment.

You can see results of that investment on our campuses. Buildings for programs in [engineering](#); [environmental](#), [health](#) and other [sciences](#); [business](#); and [nursing](#) are all underway or completed.

The investment trend in higher education infrastructure continues to grow. Another [\\$180 million](#) in bond funds recently became available, and NJASCU institutions look forward to the announcement of awards.

New Jersey's investment in the operation of its public four-year institutions, however, is a significant cause of concern. In fiscal year 2016, appropriations for operating expenses at New Jersey's senior public colleges and universities were cut over \$34 million representing a 7.3 percent loss at the state colleges and universities – to pay for projected increases in fringe-benefit costs. The governor's proposed fiscal year 2017 budget would provide level operating funding, a hopeful sign that appropriations are stabilizing.

Besides money, New Jersey can cut red tape that constricts construction projects at the state colleges and universities. The 30-year-old State College Contracts Law has failed to keep up with modern contract strategies – such as design-build and construction-manager-at-risk – that would enable the institutions to complete projects more efficiently and cost-effectively. A law authorizing public-private partnerships was a great success. [Projects](#) providing classroom and retail space, [bookstores and student apartments](#), [campus-altering residence halls](#), and even [brand-new campuses](#) were built with private financing to help our institutions stretch their resources. The law expired in August 2015, and we hope to get it renewed.

Investment and deregulation would pay off for New Jersey. People educated in New Jersey tend to stay in New Jersey. Out of over 518,000 alumni from our NJASCU institutions, more than two-thirds (363,000) reside here. Many of these alumni are the “best and brightest” who have chosen to stay and give back in New Jersey, as reflected in our [alumni profiles](#).

It is critically important to our state's future that our graduates stay and work in New Jersey. New Jersey's workforce, more and more, demands workers with an advanced education. Jobs requiring a postsecondary education in New Jersey will increase from 62 percent in 2010 to 68 percent in 2020, according to the Georgetown University Center on Education and the Workforce.

The percentage of jobs in New Jersey requiring a bachelor's degree will be the highest of any state in 2020, at 29 percent. The member institutions of NJASCU produced over 63 percent of the bachelor's degrees in New Jersey in 2014, making us the engine that will help drive the state's workforce.

With NJBIA's report and the governor's focus on outmigration, we welcome the opportunity to help explain one of the root causes of higher-education outmigration in New Jersey: lack of investment. We look forward to working with our elected officials and the business community to make higher education a more prominent budget priority to keep New Jersey's college students here.

Michael W. Klein is Executive Director/CEO for the New Jersey Association of State Colleges and Universities, a nonprofit, nonpartisan higher education association. The Association's nine members are: The College of New Jersey, Kean University, Montclair State University, New Jersey City University, Ramapo College of New Jersey, Stockton University, Rowan University, Thomas Edison State University and William Paterson University.