



NEW JERSEY

Association of State Colleges and Universities

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QuickTakes!

Thomas Edison State University President Pruitt is Retiring after 35 Years of Service to the University

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Thomas Edison State University's (TESU) longtime president, Dr. George A. Pruitt, effective December 31, 2017, after 35 years of leading New Jersey's only college or university dedicated exclusively to serving adults. Under his leadership, the university helped redefine higher education in the U.S. and made degree completion more accessible for working adults, including active duty military service members and other nontraditional learners.

He will take a year's sabbatical in 2018 and then serve as a distinguished fellow at TESU's John S. Watson School of Public Service and Continuing Studies.

"Serving as president of this wonderful university has been the single greatest privilege of my professional life," Dr. Pruitt said in a prepared statement. "I have no words to express my appreciation to the trustees, past and present, as well as my colleagues who have joined in the work of transforming the lives of the students we serve."

Brian Maloney, chair of the board of trustees, said the board will form a committee that will oversee a nationwide search for a successor. Dr. Pruitt formally notified the board of his retirement earlier this week, according to a TESU statement.

"It is hard to imagine Thomas Edison State University without George Pruitt as our president," Mr. Maloney said in a statement. "The impact that he has made on our university and on higher education in this country is extraordinary. We are grateful for Dr. Pruitt's remarkable leadership and his record of accomplishment over the past 35 years."

Dr. Pruitt was named the school's third president in December 1982 and has become one of the longest-serving presidents of a college or university in the country.

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Under Dr. Pruitt's leadership, Thomas Edison State University:

- ◆ Became an early adopter of online learning and one of the first schools in the country to offer online courses and degree programs;
- ◆ Inaugurated what became one of New Jersey's largest nursing programs;
- ◆ Became the largest provider of collegiate programs for active duty military personnel in New Jersey and one of the country's largest providers of collegiate programs among senior public institutions serving the military and veterans;
- ◆ Preserved historic buildings to develop the university's campus in Trenton, NJ and transformed a key gateway to the capital city with the development of Glen Cairn Hall;
- ◆ Established the National Institute on the Assessment of Adult Learning to teach educators throughout the world the best practices in the assessment of prior learning and experiential learning;
- ◆ Assumed responsibility for the New Jersey State Library;
- ◆ Achieved university status.

Dr. Pruitt became a national and statewide leader in higher education as president of Thomas Edison State University. He served five secretaries of education under three presidents of both parties during his tenure as a member of the National Advisory Committee on Institutional Quality and Integrity. He continues to play a pivotal role testifying before Congress about the role of accreditation, the impact on adult students of federal initiatives proposed by the U.S. Department of Education and the importance of considering the needs of nontraditional students when determining education policy. Pruitt also served as chair of the Middle States Commission on Higher Education, the regional accrediting body for colleges and universities located in the Mid-Atlantic region. In addition, he was identified as one of the country's most effective college presidents in a study of presidential leadership funded by the Exxon Education Foundation.

In New Jersey, Dr. Pruitt was instrumental in working with other college and university presidents in securing autonomy for senior public institutions of higher learning in the state. He also served as chair of the 50-member New Jersey Presidents' Council and was the only sitting college or university president appointed to Gov. Chris Christie's Higher Education Task Force, which made important recommendations to position New Jersey's higher education institutions for the future.

Prior to his appointment as president, Dr. Pruitt served as executive vice president of the Council for Adult and Experiential Learning. He previously served as vice president for Student Affairs and professor of Education at Tennessee State University in Nashville; vice president, executive assistant to the president and associate professor of Urban Studies at Morgan State University in Baltimore; dean of students at Towson State University in Towson, Maryland; and assistant to the Vice President for Academic Affairs and director of the High Potential Students Program at Illinois State University in Normal, Illinois.

“I could not have imagined the career I have had, and being able to work with such an incredible group of people,” he said. “I believe the future of Thomas Edison State University is bright, and look forward to the next chapter in my career.”