Initiative 3:

Connecting Adults to Opportunity

Currently, more than 3 million New Jersey adults have not completed high school, have no education beyond high school, or have obtained some college credits but no credential, certificate, or degree. In an economy that requires more skilled employees, these individuals will have reduced opportunities for a family-supporting career. Adults with a post-secondary credential or degree will have a far better chance of having a family supporting career in today's economy.

The New Jersey Council of County Colleges and its Center for Student Success, the state's community colleges, and numerous partners will lead an effort to identify and then implement effective strategies for increasing the number of adults in New Jersey who earn post-secondary credentials, certificates, or degrees. This initiative will work to build new and strengthen existing partnerships with state and local government, businesses, workforce development organizations, community and faith-based organizations, and others to increase the number of adults who get on, stay on, and finish the path to complete industry-valued, post-secondary credentials, certificates, and degrees. A special focus will be placed on the unique needs of working adults, those with some college credits but no degree or credential, adults with disabilities, immigrants and refugees, veterans of the military, and individuals who are incarcerated or formerly incarcerated.

Adults face a range of barriers when attempting to earn a post-secondary credential. Some adult learners have been out of educational systems for a while and need transitional assistance such as advising, coaching, and tutorials. Adult learners also face situational barriers when studying at community colleges. Adult learners often have the responsibilities of satisfying the immediate needs of their families, responsibilities of being a spouse and an employee, multiple financial responsibilities, and limited time to devote to college. These barriers impose significant challenges for adult students who often struggle to find the time to attend face-to-face classes, avail themselves to services such as libraries, advising, and tutoring to complete assignments on time, and to study for exams.

Simply stated, New Jersey will only reach its 65% by 2025 goal if more adults return to community college and successfully complete post-secondary credentials. New Jersey's community colleges, led by the Council's Center for Student Success, will launch the Connecting Adults to Opportunity Initiative. The first six months of this initiative will be dedicated to building partnerships with employers, government, community and faith-based organizations, and others and to developing a plan for future action.

To inform this plan, the Center for Student Success will identify the barriers that prevent adult learners from getting on, staying, and completing a path to a post-secondary credential; analyze data on current adult learners; and seek input from adults themselves, academic researchers, experts, and possible partners. The Center for Student Success will identify current practices and policies in use for recruitment/outreach, delivery, and support services for adult learners, and will identify New Jersey-based best practices, policies, and innovative solutions community colleges have developed and implemented that support adult learners. The action plan will also include recommendations to state government leaders to shape policy to assist adult learners. Finally, the action plan will include recommendations for partners to support this effort in a holistic fashion. Following the development of the action plan, the New Jersey Center for Student Success will use professional development, convenings, coaching, and collaborative initiatives to support New Jersey's community colleges in this effort.

The Connecting Adults to Opportunity Initiative will work to

✔ **Increase the number of adults who get on, stay on, and finish the path to complete industry-valued, post-secondary credentials, certificates, and degrees to ensure that 65 percent of New Jerseyans in the workforce hold a post-secondary credential by the year 2025.**

Key Tasks:

- Develop a strategic action plan based on analysis and best practices and expansion of partnerships
- Support college efforts through professional development
- Build statewide partnerships to support college efforts

Key Partners:

- State Government
- Employers and Industry Associations
- Workforce Development Organizations
- Community and Faith-based Organizations