

Governor Christie's 15-Point Education Reform Agenda

Honorary Chairman Governor Chris Christie Is Committed To Delivering A High Quality Education To Every Child While Expanding Access To Affordable Higher Education

NEW JERSEY REFORMS A MODEL FOR THE NATION

Since taking office, Governor Christie has spoken forcefully of his commitment to ensure that every child in New Jersey has access to a high-quality education regardless of their zip code. Acting on that commitment, the historic reforms to the state's K-12 education system he enacted brought together all interested parties from across the political spectrum to do what was in the best interests of students. These sweeping changes can and should be a model for reform for the nation.

- **Reform Tenure To Remove Teachers Who Are Failing Students:** Tenure for teachers should be awarded and retained based on performance. In New Jersey, Governor Christie signed into law the Teacher Effectiveness and Accountability for the Children of New Jersey (TEACHNJ) Act, a sweeping, bipartisan overhaul of the oldest tenure law in the nation.
- **Implement Performance-Based Pay For Teachers:** In order to ensure schools can attract and retain the best and brightest, teachers' pay should be based in part on evaluations and the educational gains of their students. For the first time in New Jersey history, a new contract for teachers in Newark allows them to earn raises and be eligible for additional bonuses based on annual performance evaluations that include measuring student progress.
- **Promote College Readiness:** We must do better at providing early intervention for high school students who are struggling academically or will require remediation in order to attend college. Focusing specifically on students from low income families, college readiness programs can enroll these students in transitional courses before they graduate high school to better prepare them for college. In New Jersey's initial pilot of the College Readiness Now Program, 19 community colleges in partnership with over 60 high schools across the state successfully participated.
- **Provide School Choice For Those In Failing Districts:** Children must not be denied their right to a quality education based purely on the zip code in which they live. Students in struggling districts should have the option of attending a public school outside their district of residence without cost to their parents. Enrollment in New Jersey's Inter-District School Choice Program increased more than 5-fold since the program was permanently signed into law by Governor Christie in September 2010.
- **Expand Access To Charter Schools:** Another way to expand the education options available for children trapped in school districts with the largest achievement gaps is to encourage the best charter school operators. The Christie Administration has increased the overall number of charter schools in New Jersey to 87, opening 35 since the Governor took office while closing 17 poor performing ones. Today, the state has approximately 37,500 students in charter schools.

MAKING HIGHER EDUCATION MORE ACCESSIBLE FOR ALL

Higher education is the key to unlocking economic opportunity for every hardworking, ambitious young American and Governor Christie firmly believes that we should celebrate and encourage every young person who has the drive to go to college. However, spiraling tuition, uncertain value and seemingly insurmountable debt leave many feeling trapped – they feel they cannot afford to forgo further education, yet they increasingly fear they cannot afford to attend college either.

Governor Christie firmly believes that by ensuring students know the quality of the program they are investing in, giving them the flexibility and innovative tools to get the job done, while expanding access to tuition assistance, America can ensure that every young person can affordably develop the skills they need to compete in the modern economy.

Affordability & Student Aid: For too many students, they're caught between a rock and a hard place. They can go to college, struggle to get by, and face crippling debts. Or they can not go to college – and face the loss of economic opportunities and mobility that comes from that. It's time we stop making a college education a choice between the lesser of two hardships.

- Refocus Student Assistance For Those At The Bottom: Over the last ten years, the only federal student aid programs to be cut have been for the neediest students. The Federal Supplemental Education Opportunity Grant shrunk by 20%. Perkins Loans – one of the oldest and most valuable student aid programs for those with “exceptional financial need” – declined by 54%. Overall, students from families making less than \$40,000 now receive a smaller proportion of all federal higher education aid than students from more well-off backgrounds. Congress should reconsider its spending priorities when it comes to higher education, and properly fund student aid programs for the families at the bottom of the economic ladder.
- Debt Relief In Exchange For Community Service: Governor Terry Branstad of Iowa has proposed establishing Student Debt Reduction Organization (SDRO) tax credits. This would give taxpayers, either individuals or companies, the option to donate to an SDRO in exchange for a tax credit. The SDRO would then be able to award grants towards a student's debt, in exchange for them completing some form of community service.
- Income-Share Agreements: Students would agree to pay some percentage of their future income for a defined period of time in exchange for private financing. Unlike traditional private loans, students whose degrees don't pay off wouldn't wind up getting stuck with crippling repayments. Meanwhile, investors in these programs have strong incentives to help students find a quality program that sets them up for long-term career success. Income share agreements also have the potential to stem tuition inflation, and reward high quality but lower cost programs.

Transparency & Accountability: America needs to encourage universities to run more efficiently – and to introduce greater transparency, accountability and competition into our higher education system. This is about empowering consumers. People will vote with their feet by deciding which colleges to attend, based on whether they're using money wisely.

- Cost Itemization: Colleges should provide much greater transparency about how they're spending their money, both before and after someone decides to become a student. People should be able to know in advance how colleges are spending money, where their resources are going, and how they expect prices to change in the future. And after students are enrolled at college, they should be able to see cost itemization for tuition, so they can know what they're really paying for.
 - Unbundled Tuition For Those At The Bottom: If colleges can break out those costs, they should also unbundle them – allowing students, to just pay for the education and not all the add-ons. While there is huge value in students getting the full college experience, for students from low-income backgrounds those extra costs can mean the difference between going to college at all.
- Link Transparency To Aid Programs: By shining a light on spending, colleges will become disciplined. Americans should demand transparency from every educational institution, and make this a requirement for participating in federal grant and aid programs. In higher education, transparency and legitimacy should go hand in hand.
- Help Institutions Run Leaner And Smarter: Greater transparency will allow schools to analyze and compare their operating costs with other similar institutions. Sharing data is already something that will be transformative. Additionally, schools can be encouraged to review programs with low levels of graduation, and to eliminate those where it is due to a lack of quality or interest from students. And institutions should increase and provide incentives for off-peak classes so that resources and facilities can be maximized and students have more flexibility to get their degrees done faster.

Innovation And Alternative Education Models: Higher education should be for everyone, but that doesn't mean there's a single model for everyone. America should strive to give students lots of different ways to learn, and shouldn't fear alternatives to traditional four-year public universities.

- Stackable Credentials: Right now, students are encouraged to focus on earning one four-year degree, and to get all the training they will need for an entire career in a single burst. But increasingly, students want the flexibility to jump in and out of education as needed – to follow jobs and opportunities when they can, or to return to college later for additional training, as they require new skills and seek career advancement. ‘Stackable credentials’ would allow students to re-enroll at different colleges over time without losing credits.
- Expanding Apprenticeships And High School Training Programs: We should expand the use of apprenticeships, and make them more attractive for young people and employers. Learning on the job is still learning, and for many professions it’s the most valuable experience there is. We should provide tax incentives to cover the cost of apprentice wages and program costs. Students in every state should also have the option to get some sort of on-the-job training before finishing high school.
- Linking Employers And Educators To Develop The Skills The Labor Force Needs: In New Jersey and in Iowa, employers work with community colleges to bring skill training programs onto their sites. This is something that shouldn’t just be offered through community colleges, but through private and for-profit institutions too. Additionally, current regulations make it difficult to offer training programs that can evolve to keep up with the needs of our labor market. If more companies and organizations want to step up and provide valuable training courses, then we should get Department of Education bureaucrats off their backs and rein in onerous regulations.
- Credit For Prior Experience: It should be easier for individuals to earn certification based on their prior learning, professional or military experience, and participation in training programs. If students decide to go on to college, they should still be able to earn credit for the knowledge they’ve earned outside the classroom. The New Jersey PLAN program allows students to earn credit towards their degrees through a Prior Learning Assessment. This shortens the time students need to be in the classroom, lowers costs and expands qualifications to more people.