South Jersey Leaders Issue Key Principles on Higher Education Reform Plan for Region

Governor’s Proposal Provides Framework for Elite Research University & Economic Engine for South Jersey -- Leaders Urge Existing University Identities be Respected; Programs at Rutgers & Rowan be Protected; Fair Allocation of Higher Ed Resources

TRENTON – Key South Jersey leaders today endorsed the idea of a “once in a generation” opportunity for Rutgers University and Rowan University to partner under Governor Christie’s proposal for revamping higher education in southern New Jersey and issued key principles on the historic plan.

“Governor Christie has shown true leadership in providing the framework for higher education in southern New Jersey to reach unprecedented heights – it is now incumbent on us to respect the history, degrees, and programs under Rutgers and Rowan and respect both universities’ identities as this partnership takes shape,” said Senate President Steve Sweeney (D-3).

The benefits of the proposal are well documented. Southern New Jersey has a higher education capacity crisis with roughly 30 percent of New Jersey’s population living in South Jersey but with only 12.5 percent of the state’s undergraduate seats located there. Currently, only 24% of residents in the South Jersey region have a bachelor’s degree or higher compared to 28% nationally and 37% in northern New Jersey. A college degree typically quadruples the average individual’s earnings potential.

General Assembly Majority Leader Louis D. Greenwald (D-6) said that this new higher education partnership would leverage more state and other resources and become a “higher education powerhouse for the region and for the nation.” Greenwald noted that both campuses have “strong reputations, traditions and alumni bases that should be respected under this new model to ensure the region is unified behind fostering growth and greater investment.”

The establishment of a first-tier comprehensive research university – one of the select few in the nation that would have both a law school and a medical school – would ensure southern New Jersey would be in a position to attract new research grants, elite graduate and undergraduate students, and receive fair funding levels. Only roughly 55 cents for every tuition dollar of a Rutgers-Camden student stays on the Camden campus.

“A recent $1.5 billion-plus list of proposed capital expenditures from Rutgers University showed that less than 10% of the funds were to be dedicated to its Camden campus. We need to implement this partnership to ensure an improved delivery of higher education and resource allocation to our region,” said Senator Donald Norcross (D-5), whose district includes Rutgers-Camden.

Few have questioned the merits and enormous potential associated with the proposal. Opposition has stemmed from the proposed elimination of the Rutgers name in southern New Jersey. To that end, the leaders recommended minimum core principles be adopted in implementing the proposal:
• A comprehensive research university in southern New Jersey should serve to be a capital of educational excellence and economic growth for the region and increase access to higher education for the state and especially the region;
• This new partnership should address the regional needs of business and science by developing undergraduate and graduate allied health and life-science programs; enhancing existing professional degree and liberal arts programs; spurring job creation and economic growth; and generating cutting edge research through partnerships with industry and other organizations;
• Southern New Jersey should receive its fair share of higher education resources;
• The history, degrees, accreditation and identities of both Rutgers and Rowan should be respected;
• Rutgers’ and Rowan’s existing programs should be preserved and jointly developed into a comprehensive public research university that will benefit the region and the State;
• Under the new partnership, students enrolled in or admitted to Rutgers Camden at the time of the partnership’s formation at a minimum should be able to choose, upon their graduation, from which university to receive their diploma.

“These are key principles that can be incorporated under the governor’s bold vision for higher education in southern New Jersey,” said Assembly Higher Education Committee Chairwoman Celeste Riley (D-3), “including respecting Rutgers history and traditions while at the same time capitalizing on the exciting expansion of Rowan and its new medical school in the City of Camden.”

Former General Assembly Speaker and Rowan Professor Jack Collins said that the proposal “respects each campus while still revolutionizing higher education in New Jersey for the better.”

Assemblyman Whip Wilson (D-5) added “Plain and simple, our commitment to the City of Camden must and can be preserved. In creating this partnership, fortunately, we can and should do so in a way which will not threaten – only bolster and broaden – the delivery of higher education for our region.”

Senators Fred Madden (D-4) and James Beach (D-6), Assembly members John Burzichelli (D-3), Paul Moriarty (D-4), Angel Fuentes (D-5), Pam Lampitt (D-6), Herb Conaway (D-7), Troy Singleton (D-7) and Assemblywoman-elect Gabriela Mosquera (D-4) also endorsed the core principles today.