Dear Friends:

New Jersey’s community colleges have flourished since the Higher Education Restructuring Act of 1994 granted autonomy to community college boards of trustees. Our community college trustees and presidents have guided our institutions through rapid enrollment growth, changing student needs and shifting workforce requirements.

New Jersey’s community colleges this year saw a state budget increase of $7.6 million in direct operating aid. That’s a 5 percent increase over the prior year’s budget. This recent increase brings community college state funding to $163.4 million – the highest level of state funding ever provided to New Jersey’s 19 community colleges.

Another victory in this year’s state budget is a $5.8 million increase to the New Jersey Student Tuition Assistance Rewards Scholarship. NJ STARS launched in the fall of 2004 with a little over 900 freshmen enrolled in the program. In 2006-2007, statewide NJ STARS enrollments grew over 50 percent compared to 2005-2006. Over 3,000 NJ STARS students are now enrolled at our 19 community colleges. NJ STARS is so successful that at least a half dozen other states have enacted or proposed similar scholarship programs for community college students.

Another major success for our community colleges is the Chapter 12 community college building and renovation fund. A few years ago, the Council championed a law that increased the program by $200 million. This year, the Governor and State Legislature provided a $6 million increase in the debt service necessary to fund this program. This important funding is providing our community colleges the money they need to renovate current and build new classrooms and labs to meet our growing enrollments.

For many years, the Council worked hard to advocate for a state financial aid program for part-time community college students, many of whom are among the neediest of all college students. A few years ago, the state responded by enacting Tuition Aid Grants (TAG) for part-time community college students. This year, the state has appropriated almost $5.5 million for part-time TAG. The New Jersey Higher Education Student Assistance Authority, the state authority that coordinates all state-sponsored financial aid, recently reported that this increased funding will help over 11,000 part-time community college students.

Another victory for community college students this year is historic legislation that will ease transferring from a community college to a state four-year college or university. The General Assembly and Senate unanimously approved new transfer legislation that will require new statewide articulation agreements to better ensure the smooth transfer of community college credits to senior public state colleges and universities. Our victory here is a shared one. Students gain because they will avoid the cost of repeating courses that duplicate ones that they took at a community college. The state similarly gains big time because it does not have to provide financial support for the same courses twice.

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This year, to help implement the new transfer legislation, our community college presidents approved a new statewide general education framework that all of our colleges have agreed to implement by no later than the fall 2008 semester. This will strengthen our ability to seek smoother transfer of community college general education courses, since we will have a common general education framework.

Our presidents are also working with the New Jersey Department of Education to align high school graduation requirements with college readiness. This year, the presidents approved common cut scores for the math placement test used on our campuses. Students scoring at or above the cut score will be automatically exempted from elementary algebra. The presidents have also directed our campus academic officers to develop a similar recommendation for common English cut scores in the coming year. Because of these efforts, the College Board has offered our colleges a statewide contract for the ACCUPLACER placement test that will result in substantial savings to our colleges.

One of the Council’s greatest successes is the New Jersey Community College Consortium for Workforce and Economic Development, launched in 2004. Now in its third year, the Consortium has trained over 10,000 employees at businesses and government agencies throughout the state, and disbursed $1 million in earned revenue to our colleges. Most recently, the NJ Department of Labor and Workforce Development awarded a $1.88 million grant to the Consortium to launch a basic skills training program with the NJ Business & Industry Association. The grant will provide 440 computer, communications and math courses to up to 8,000 workers in NJBIA-member companies.

A major challenge our community colleges face collectively is the accelerating cost of health care insurance. As a matter of fact, our school districts, local municipalities and counties face the same challenge. This year, the Council worked diligently with a coalition consisting of the New Jersey School Boards Association, the New Jersey League of Municipalities and the New Jersey Association of Counties to advocate for health insurance reform. As a result, Governor Corzine recently signed into law Chapter 62, P.L. 2007, legislation that reforms the State Health Benefits Program (SHBP). The legislation now permits local employers that participate in the SHBP to negotiate employee contributions to health insurance costs. At the state level, public employees recently ratified new contracts that require all employees to pay 1.5 percent of their annual salaries for health care costs. If community colleges achieved similar contract provisions, we would save over $10 million annually.

For the 2007-2008 year, the Council will continue to advocate for adequate state funding to community colleges. We will also work to implement the transfer legislation and the new changes to the State Health Benefits Program. The Council and Workforce Consortium will work with the NJ Department of Labor and Workforce Development and the Governor’s Office of Economic Growth to deploy community colleges in support of the state’s economic growth strategy. In addition, the Council will continue to offer the best in trustee education, faculty workshops and statewide student recognition through events and services including: the annual Trustee Conference; Trustee Education Seminars; the annual New Jersey Community College Best Practices Conference; Phi Theta Kappa Day; the Trustee Ambassador Program; and the NJ STARS Student Ambassador Program.

On behalf of the entire Council leadership team, I am most appreciative for the dedication and hard work of my fellow trustees. Your commitment contributes to the redemption of countless minds and gives hope to legions of individuals. Our students will enjoy a better future because of your efforts.

Thank you!

Yours truly,

Dr. Richard D. Wellbrock
Chairman