

# Report: New Jersey college students leaving state for lower-cost education

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New Jerseyans spend \$30 billion a year on K-12 education, and then nearly half of students leave the state for college. Business officials, legislators and educators are trying to figure out how to stop the bleed.

“Outmigration to this extent robs New Jersey of its future workforce, squanders taxpayers’ investment in one of the finest and most expensive K-12 educations in the country, and threatens the state’s reputation for a highly educated workforce,” said NJBIA President and CEO Michele Siekerka.

An updated version of the [New Jersey Business and Industry Association’s report](#) on young adult out-migration released last week shows that the students are still leaving at an alarming rate, and most of them are first-time college students. Forty-three percent of New Jersey’s first-time post-secondary students go to college in another state.

The report looked at the migration patterns of New Jerseyans ages 18 to 34 and found an overall loss of 205,824 residents between 2007 and 2017. Those ages 18 to 24 accounted for nearly 60% of young adult outflow from New Jersey, but only 36% of its inflow during the same period.

This loss of students not only impacts the future workforce, but also impacts state colleges and universities.

Bob Heinrich, chief enrollment management officer for Stockton University, said that students are much more conscious about debt when they chose a college than in the past.

“Students realize it’s a significant investment for themselves and their family, and there’s a lot of hesitancy to graduate with significant amounts of debt,” Heinrich said. “There’s no guarantee that you’re going to graduate and get a job right away.”

New Jersey is considered to be a “high student debt state,” with the Class of 2017 graduating with an average \$32,247 of student debt.

The cost of higher education in New Jersey plays a role in students’ decisions to leave the state, and has been cited by Gov. Phil Murphy and Sen. President Steve Sweeney when discussing reform initiatives this year.

“In the 2018-2019 academic year, New Jersey has the fourth highest tuition and fees in the nation at public four-year institutions. In total, 61% of New Jersey college graduates in the Class of 2017 had some form of school debt,” the update states.

Colleges like Stockton are responding to the outmigration by offering more competitive programming and targeting students in regions that previously weren’t a focus.

“The impact that it has on the college is that we were essentially competing for a smaller number of students,” Heinrich said. “This is actually the first time that we’ve had more applications from North Jersey than we had from our local region.”

He said they are also trying to find ways to make college more affordable by expanding need-based scholarships and not just academic awards.

“We try to close the gap using institutional dollars,” he said. “That’s been pretty effective in helping to keep students in state that otherwise may have left.”

The initial report was released last year with 13 recommendations that focused on aligning education to the needs of the private sector, and some of those strategies have been put into place including the Higher Education Branding Campaign from the New Jersey President’s Council; voter approval of \$350 million bond for expansion of Career and Technical Education (CTE) at county vocational schools and \$50 million toward county colleges; college affordability legislation and laws to make apprenticeships more accessible.

“Young adults are the future of New Jersey’s workforce, and they will ultimately be the drivers of the state economy,” the update states. “In order to ensure a successful future for the Garden State, New Jersey must first attract and retain these young adults.”