

## Secretary of Higher Education Announces Garden State Graduation Tour

**TRENTON**—Secretary of Higher Education Zakiya Smith Ellis today announced the Garden State Graduation Tour to promote the new State Plan for Higher Education and the Governor’s recommended budget investments in higher education. The tour will consist of a series of campus visits and events focused around college affordability and student success.

Affordability and success are key themes of the recently released higher education plan, “Where Opportunity Meets Innovation: A Student-Centered Vision for New Jersey Higher Education.” Governor Phil Murphy’s FY2020 budget supports the State Plan by funding a statewide free-tuition community college program, the first across-the-board increase in funding to public four-year colleges in more than a decade, and boosts in support for the state’s highly effective Education Opportunity Fund and Tuition Aid Grant programs.

“New Jersey’s colleges and universities strengthen our communities and drive innovation,” said Governor Phil Murphy. “We need to redouble our commitment to ensuring that New Jersey’s students can enroll with confidence in their ability to afford a college education and navigate all the way to a college degree. Students need that assurance, and so do their families, their communities, and their future employers.”

Secretary Smith Ellis will visit campuses across the state to lead conversations with students and other higher education stakeholders about strategies to make college more affordable, including the Community College Opportunity Grant and the recently released higher education state plan. The tour will also include roundtable discussions and question-and-answer sessions. The student-driven tour agenda mirrors the student-centered approach of the state plan for higher education.

“Higher education is where opportunity meets innovation, and New Jersey must offer opportunities that spark innovation,” said Secretary of Higher Education Zakiya Smith Ellis. “The best ideas for strengthening opportunity will come from the people I will meet on this tour – college leaders, faculty, business owners, community activists, and most of all the students themselves. Educating them on the State Plan and listening to their feedback is pivotal to achieving the state’s goal of postsecondary success for all New Jerseyans.”

David Socolow, the Executive Director of the Higher Education Student Assistance Authority (HESAA), will join Secretary Smith Ellis at several stops of the tour. “HESAA’s mission is to help New Jersey families pay for postsecondary education by providing both financial resources and information, and we look forward to hearing from students and discussing new policy options that can make college more affordable,” said David Socolow, Executive Director of the Higher Education Student Assistance Authority. “In support of the vision for higher education set forth by the Governor and the Secretary of Higher Education, HESAA is redoubling our commitment to helping students succeed.”

The Garden State Graduation Tour will include stops across the state:

Date/Time	Event Location
Monday, May 6, 1:30 pm	Hudson County Community College
Tuesday, May 7, 10:30 am	Mercer County Community College
Wednesday, May 8, 10:00 am	Rowan College at Burlington County
Friday, May 10, 10:00 am	Middlesex County College
Monday, May 13, 2:00 pm	Fairleigh Dickinson University
Tuesday, May 14, 11:00 am	Montclair State University
Tuesday, May 14, 2:30 pm	Essex County College
Monday, May 20, 2:30 pm	Stockton University, Atlantic City

**Press availability will be included at the end of each event.**

Space is limited, so please RSVP in advance of events by emailing [oshe@oshe.nj.gov](mailto:oshe@oshe.nj.gov).  
Room locations will be provided upon RSVP.