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From the President's Desk

T.S. Eliot may have said that April is the cruelest month, but for those of us who work at colleges and universities, September and October are a real grind.

Despite the ongoing attacks on higher education, it's been energizing to watch you and your colleagues stand up to protect it, as I visit local membership meetings, host the Council legislative breakfasts, knock doors on labor walks, and join virtual phone banks. Your hard work getting out the vote paid off with the election of Mikie Sherrill, the pro-labor, pro-education, and pro-working class gubernatorial candidate.

The CNJSCL kicked off the semester with an Executive Retreat, outlining strategic priorities for the year, and our ad-hoc committees are already

moving: researching professional development opportunities, preparing for negotiations, and building membership.

The past two months also brought major movement in the NJCU-Kean merger process. The CNJSCL issued a demand to negotiate impact of the Definitive Agreement, has begun working with AFT National to protect collective bargaining rights through legislative language, and will prepare for future negotiations as details unfold.

I'm proud of what we've built together this fall, and this is only the beginning.

With gratitude and solidarity,

Emari DiGiorgio



Heather McGovern, Tara Luke, Emari DiGiorgio, Senator Andy Kim, and Ben Saracco at the Burlington CLC Labor Walk, October 25, 2025.

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WEBSITE/SOCIAL/EMAIL



CNJSCL Executive Retreat at the Rutgers Labor Center on Saturday, September 20, 2025: Mike Heller, Bruce Howard, Ed Shannon, Matt Wund, Tara Luke, Bill Calathes, Emari DiGiorgio, Dina Boero, Sam Kennedy, Alex Sperling, Mary Wallace, Laura Field, and Sue Tardi.

CNJSCL Exec Retreat: Solving Mysteries & Shaping the Future

Who put a knife in the Godmother? Before diving into strategy, Council leaders kicked off the year by cracking a “family business” murder mystery, a reminder that solidarity, trust, and collaboration matter, especially in high-stakes moments. With a gubernatorial election, a merger between two Council schools, a higher-ed task force, and contract negotiations on the horizon, this year will bring plenty of real-world plot twists.

After the icebreaker, the retreat moved into a backcasting exercise designed to turn long-term vision into actionable steps. Participants imagined the Council in Fall 2027 at its strongest — contract wins secured, adjuncts protected, tenure lines defended, members strike-ready, locals mobilizing in unison, and a clear voice in state policy. Then, working backward, leaders mapped the milestones needed to get there: deeper delegate engagement, regular campus mobilization, member

education, coordinated bargaining goals, and visible, shared branding to strengthen identity across locals.

From there, the group identified concrete tasks for the next 90-180 days — setting the foundation for a Council that wins by organizing, planning, and acting together.

In support of these priorities, Council has created and charged five ad hoc committees: the Leadership Development Committee, the Statewide Contract Surveys Committee, the Parental Leave Proposal Committee, the Open Negotiations Research and Strategy Committee, and the Adjunct Membership Drive Committee. Delegates were invited to join these ad hoc committees at the October 10th meeting, and each committee will be asked to provide a brief written update in advance of the December Delegate Assembly Meeting.





President Emari DiGiorgio welcomes attendees to the October 22nd CNJSCL legislative breakfast.

Over 200 Members Show Collective Power at Two Legislative Breakfasts!

That's right! This fall, hundreds of Council members came together at not one but two legislative breakfasts—demonstrating the collective power of our voices when we speak as one. By bringing faculty, faculty librarians, and staff from campuses across New Jersey into direct conversation with lawmakers, the Council of NJ State College Locals showed the strength of unified advocacy and our shared commitment to protecting high-quality, accessible public higher education. Both breakfasts laid the foundation for you and your colleagues to have a strong voice in two critical conversations happening right now in the New Jersey legislature: the proposed Task Force on Higher Education Governance and Funding (S3771/ A4812) and legislation on the Kean/ NJCU Merger.

On October 10, 2025, over 80 members from Stockton, TCNJ, and Rowan shared their concerns with six Assembly persons: Carol Murphy, Cody Miller, Dan Hutchinson, William Spearman, and Tennille McCoy. AFT members advocated for a fair funding formula, improved funding for campus infrastructure, increased resources for libraries and information literacy with the rise of AI, and for the Governor's office to stabilize health care costs by renegotiating their contracts with healthcare companies and hospitals.

On October 22, 2025, over 130 members from Ramapo, Montclair, William Paterson, Kean University, and NJCU met in Rutherford with six legislators, including the chairs of the Senate and Assembly Higher Education Committees: Joseph Cryan, Linda Carter, Chris Tully, Lisa Swain, Raj Mukherji, and Clinton Calabrese. Members and legislators had an in depth conversation about the merger between Kean and NJCU, improving resources for EOF and first-generation students, adjunct healthcare, and the increase in administrators coupled with the decrease in tenure-track faculty and student support staff at our campuses. A special shoutout to Local 2274 - Ramapo, who turned out 48 members!

By gathering over 200 members in Collingswood and Rutherford, you and your colleagues communicated to legislators that your working conditions and students' learning conditions are inextricably linked. You showed that you are paying attention, care about the future of higher education in New Jersey, and have unique insight into your students' educational needs. All the legislators were impressed with the members and are eager to keep the conversation going. Watch out for further opportunities to create structural change at the state level.

LEGISLATIVE BREAKFAST SNAPSHOT



Higher Ed Labor Leaders Met with Rep. Mikie Sherrill: Funding, Freedom to Teach, and Affordability

Union leaders from New Jersey's colleges and universities met with then-Rep. Mikie Sherrill on October 13, 2025, to press core issues: stable public funding, research capacity, academic freedom, real accountability, and affordable health care for all campus workers. Matt Wund, President of TCNJ AFT Local 2364, noted, "Mikie Sherrill understands the value of New Jersey public higher education as a driver of opportunity and broad prosperity. She recognized the many challenges we face in delivering affordable, high-quality education..., and she underscored partnering with the Council to shape policy."

Sherrill warned that H.R.1 would dismantle recent gains in access and affordability, including expanded Pell Grants and support for HBCUs. She pledged to defend federal aid, challenge harmful federal actions, and expand support for first-generation and low-income students so in-state tuition stays within reach for working families. Members highlighted threats to research and graduate education. Sherrill called the challenge "generational" and committed to protecting science funding while leveraging public-private partnerships to keep New Jersey's labs strong and its innovation economy growing. She also vowed to strengthen oversight, improve campus governance, and prevent crises like the NJCU-Kean merger through regular strategy meetings with labor and presidents, aligning programs with workforce needs, and insisting on financial discipline for every public dollar. She asked unions to help shape practical oversight and accountability measures that prevent the next crisis, not just react to it.

On academic freedom and campus safety, Sherrill said the state can keep people safe while strengthening First Amendment protections and resisting efforts to restrict curricula or punish institutions for protecting speech. She emphasized coordination among Northeastern states to defend evidence-based policy and to push back when federal funding is used as leverage against campuses. Health care affordability, especially for adjuncts who often teach full-time loads across institutions without affordable coverage, drew urgent attention. Sherrill called for real competition in the public employee health market, transparency in hospital pricing, and reforms to lower drug costs. Mary Wallace, President of MSU Adjuncts AFT Local 6025 and Council Adjunct Representative, noted, "Mikie Sherrill listened closely to our questions and responded thoughtfully. New Jersey needs to stay blue, and I believe Mikie will be tough on issues important to New Jerseyans."

With Governor-elect Sherrill heading to Drumthwacket, the Council looks forward to continued partnership to protect access, defend academic freedom, sustain research and innovation, and ensure that the people who make our campuses run can afford to live and thrive in New Jersey. Our work continues, and we will remain a strong partner—and a strong voice—every step of the way.





Bill Calathes, Emari DiGiorgio, and James Castiglione in Beijing, China.

As NJCU/Kean Merger Advances, Council Builds Legislative and Bargaining Strategy

Significant steps in the proposed merger between New Jersey City University (NJCU) and Kean University unfolded this fall. In October, the Hanover Report—an external, third-party analysis evaluating NJCU's academic programs, enrollment trends, financial landscape, and regional workforce needs—was released to the public, providing additional context for the restructuring effort. On October 1, 2025, NJCU and Kean signed and approved the Definitive Agreement, marking the next phase of the merger process.

In response, on October 10, 2025, the Council of New Jersey State College Locals formally issued a demand to negotiate impact. While no negotiations have yet begun, as the full implications of the Definitive Agreement remain unclear, Council has moved proactively. President Emari DiGiorgio has worked through AFTNJ President Jen Higgins to engage the AFT national legislative team in drafting proposed revisions to the Kean Act that protect union rights, including tenure, seniority, and title parity.

Additionally, at the invitation of Kean University President Lamont Repollet, labor leaders Bill Calathes, James Castiglione, and Emari DiGiorgio participated in a university delegation to Wenzhou-Kean University. Kean University AFT Local 2187 President Castiglione commented, "While I found the Wenzhou-Kean University campus to be impressive, I came away more appreciative than ever that we here in New Jersey have the right to have a union that advocates for our terms and conditions and our shared values including academic freedom." NJCU AFT Local 1839 President Calathes added, "The trip strengthened our shared commitment to collaboration, transparency, and union solidarity as we prepare for the forthcoming NJCU-Kean merger, ensuring that faculty voice and collective representation remain integral to the transition process."

LOCAL SPOTLIGHT

Local 1904 | Montclair

On Saturday, September 27th, Local 1904 joined Local 6025 to celebrate Homecoming on campus. The day was filled with school spirit and meaningful connections among students, their families, our unit members, and retirees. Local 1904 used the occasion to raise awareness about its scholarship programs, which aim to reduce financial barriers to degree completion. Members are encouraged to continue promoting these opportunities to students by directing them to the [Local 1904 website](#) for more information.

These scholarships are one of the ways that Local 1904 invests in the University community and supports student success.

Upcoming Events:

Professional Staff Information Session: ABC's of Membership

Date: Tuesday, November 4th

Time: 1:30pm-2:30pm

Location: Cohen Lounge/Dickson Hall

November Membership Meeting

Date: Wednesday, November 5th

Time: 2:00-3:30pm

Location: Zoom

Watch your email for RSVP information.



PDC Resolutions, Open Enrollment, & the State Health Benefit Plan Agreement

In October, the Plan Design Committee (PDC) took action to advance the implementation of the State Health Benefit Plan **agreement** for state employees. The resolutions required to enact the MOA passed with majority support from all State representatives and most labor representatives. These resolutions — numbered #2025-09 through #2025-13 — move forward the contractual changes negotiated for state workers.

The State has confirmed that October's Open Enrollment **did not** reflect the new MOA plan design changes. Because enrollment systems were already in motion before the agreement was finalized, and IRS rules require Open Enrollment before January 1, the options in October were based on current plans and rates. Members in NJ15 should note that premiums will initially rise based on SHBC-approved renewals.

A second Open Enrollment, reflecting the new reduced costs and plan updates, is expected once the State programs the changes and receives required federal review. While not yet formally scheduled, the State has indicated the second enrollment period will likely occur after January 1, 2026. Please note that the \$45 GLP-1 copay will be effective January 1, 2026, NOT November 1, 2025.



SIGN UP FOR COPE

Members who contribute to the Committee on Political Education (COPE) understand the importance of politically engaging candidates and elected officials in the struggle of the labor movement. This fall, COPE plans to focus on Get Out the Vote activities to ensure the governor and legislature center the interests of higher education and organized labor.

Fill out a [COPE membership card](#) TODAY to start or to increase your contribution. The minimum deduction is \$.50 per pay period.

AFT Local 2274, Ramapo College of New Jersey (Mahwah) seeks an individual to fill the role of Office Manager. The position is part-time/20 hours per week on-site. Screening of applicants begins November 15th with a start date of January 5, 2026. For a full job description, email judepernot@ramapoaft.org.



Have a feature idea or update for the *VOICE*?

[SUBMIT CONTENT HERE.](#)

SAVE THE DATE - DELEGATE ASSEMBLY MEETING



Friday, December 5, 2025, 6pm

Edelman Fossil Park & Museum
of Rowan University

66 Million Mosasaur Way

Sewell, NJ 08080

Standing Together at No Kings Day Rallies

On October 18, 2025, CNJSCL locals joined the nearly seven million people at over 2,700 events who attended the No Kings Day of Peaceful Action, demonstrating our shared commitment to labor and democracy.



IN MEMORIAM

DR. MICHAEL L. FRANK

OCTOBER 11, 1950 - OCTOBER 16, 2025

The Stockton Federation of Teachers, Faculty Librarians, and Professional Staff mourn the loss of Dr. Michael Frank, Professor Emeritus of Psychology and former President of SFT 2275.

Mike's voice was one that relentlessly advocated for the members of the union and helped to shape SFT 2275 into the strong and robust union that it is today.



COUNCIL of NEW JERSEY STATE COLLEGE LOCALS AFT/AFL-CIO



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Emari DiGiorgio
President



Legislative Priorities

Pending legislation in the New Jersey Assembly and Senate would create a Task Force on Higher Education Governance and Funding, providing an opportunity to strengthen New Jersey's higher education system. As policymakers consider reorganizations, such as the proposed Kean University–NJCU merger, decisions must be transparent, accountable, and student-centered, while preserving institutional missions, regional access, and the rights of faculty and staff who sustain academic quality. The Council of New Jersey State College Locals (CNJSCL) is committed to partnering with legislators to create an affordable, high-quality higher education system that serves students first.

Each of the following is detailed on the reverse side:

- **Champion Affordability and Student Success**
- **Adopt a Student-Centered, Equitable Funding Formula with Stakeholder Input**
- **Enhance Fiscal Oversight and Accountability**
- **Reinvest in Instruction and Campus Infrastructure**
- **Protect Institutional Missions and Regional Access**
- **Uphold Academic Integrity and Job Protections in Reorganizations**
- **Stabilize Healthcare Costs to Sustain Educational Excellence**
- **Protect Civil Rights and Support Immigrant and International Students**

We Want to Work with You

The Council of New Jersey State College Locals AFT/ AFL-CIO wants to work with you to achieve these goals. We represent over 10,000 faculty, NTPs, professional staff, librarians, and adjuncts at nine public colleges and universities: Ramapo College of New Jersey, Stockton University, The College of New Jersey, Rowan University, Montclair State University, New Jersey City University, William Paterson University, Kean University, and Thomas Edison State University. Here is our contact information:

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Champion Affordability and Student Success. Ensure that New Jersey residents have access to an affordable, high-quality education at our public colleges and universities through sustained state investment, not unfunded mandates. Increase appropriations to support tuition reduction, experiential learning, and faculty-student mentorship programs that foster academic excellence, timely graduation, and workforce readiness. Expand funding for EOF, academic support, and student counseling: programs that not only change individual lives but also underpin the social and economic health of our state.

Adopt a Student-Centered, Equitable Funding Formula with Stakeholder Input. Reform New Jersey's higher education funding model to prioritize equity and opportunity, while ensuring faculty and staff voices are represented in funding decisions. Create a fair, transparent formula that recognizes each institution's role in serving first-generation and economically disadvantaged students, improving retention and graduation rates, and driving regional development. Current inequities have pushed institutions toward unsustainable fiscal practices and rising tuition. A reformed formula will let our public colleges and universities focus on what matters most—educating students and serving communities.

Enhance Fiscal Oversight and Accountability. Promote excellence and build trust in public higher education through responsible stewardship of state resources. Implement stronger fiscal oversight to limit administrative expansion, require independent financial audits, and guarantee union representation in governance and budgetary processes. Ensure that state dollars directly support instruction, student services, and community-facing initiatives.

Reinvest in Instruction and Campus Infrastructure. Create a dedicated capital funding program for New Jersey's public colleges and universities. Modernize classrooms, laboratories, and facilities to support innovation and access, from research hubs in urban centers to regional campuses that anchor local economies and expand opportunity.

Protect Institutional Missions and Regional Access. Preserve the unique missions of each public college and university, especially those serving underserved or geographically isolated regions. From South Jersey to Hudson County, our institutions are essential anchors in their communities, driving social mobility, cultural vitality, and local economic resilience. Require stakeholder consultation—faculty, staff, and students—before any reorganization or merger. Institutions best serve their students when decisions are made with, not for, the people who teach, advise, and support them.

Uphold Academic Integrity and Job Protections in Reorganizations. Safeguard the rights, rank, and union representation of faculty and staff in any merger or reorganization. These protections preserve institutional knowledge, academic continuity, and the stability that students rely on to succeed. The Legislature should amend the *Kean University Act* to include explicit statutory language guaranteeing job security, seniority, and collective bargaining continuity for NJCU employees, ensuring that equity for students extends to the workforce that serves them.

Stabilize Healthcare Costs to Sustain Educational Excellence. Address escalating healthcare costs through cost-containment reforms, greater transparency in premium setting, and oversight of the State Health Benefits Plan. Expand access to affordable healthcare for adjunct faculty, whose contributions are vital to institutional success. Sustainable healthcare ensures that institutions can continue to attract and retain the educators and professionals who make student success possible.

Protect Civil Rights and Support Immigrant and International Students. New Jersey's public colleges and universities serve diverse communities of learners. Federal actions that target immigrants or restrict international students threaten civil rights gains, disrupt campus safety, and erode belonging for students of color and first-generation families. The State must reject discrimination in all forms and protect access to higher education.