



AS CHRISTIE SUGGESTS WAYS TO IMPROVE COLLEGES, RESULTS ARE MIXED BACK HOME

JOHN MOONEY | JUNE 16, 2015

Governor's measures have made state's system more efficient but aid to poorer students, funding for higher education have declined



Credit: Governor's Office/Tim Larsen

Gov. Chris Christie delivers a speech last week at Stockton State University. He called for dropping the Common Core State Standards but keeping the PARCC testing associated with those standards.

When Gov. Chris Christie last week put forward his **15-point plan** for the nation's education system, more than half of it dealt with higher education - an area in which the governor has had mixed results in his own state.

The plan, presented during a **speech at Iowa State University** in Ames, included ideas for improving the quality of colleges and universities, while making them more accessible and affordable.

Christie called for more transparency and efficiency in college finances, describing the sector as profligate and in need of reforms. He called on institutions of higher education to itemize their costs and said they could be saving money by being "leaner

and smarter" in their operations.

He also called for more innovation and creation of alternative programs, including "stackable" certifications and more internships linking higher education and industry.

Meanwhile, Christie said rising costs are putting higher education out of reach for many, especially those at the bottom end of the economic scale.

"For too many students, they're caught between a rock and a hard place," Christie said. "They can go to college, struggle to get by, and face crippling debts. Or they cannot go to college - and face the loss of economic opportunities and mobility that comes from that. It's time we stop making a college education a choice between the lesser of two hardships."

Back home, however, the Christie administration has hardly been showering the New Jersey's public colleges and universities with cash, with state operating aid dropping nearly 10 percent since 2009.

In addition, financial aid for the state's neediest students has taken a hit, including Christie's proposed 19 percent cut in the NJ STARS program at community colleges and a 3.9 percent cut to the Education Opportunity Fund for low-income students.

But there have also been strides, such as the state's first capital-improvements bond act for higher education, the first in 30 years.

