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## NEW JERSEY MOVES TOWARD FREE COMMUNITY COLLEGE

*Gov. Phil Murphy plans \$45 million in grants for low-income students that will start in second semester of coming school year*

By Kate King  
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New Jersey Gov. Phil Murphy is gearing up to make the state's community colleges tuition-free with \$45 million in grants for low-income students that will start in the second semester of the coming school year.

The grants would fully cover tuition costs for an estimated 15,000 full- and part-time students who are already receiving some financial aid and whose families earn an average annual income below \$45,000, the governor's office said.

Mr. Murphy, a Democrat who took office in January, said he believed making community college more accessible to New Jersey residents would help the state generate the talent needed to attract technology and startup companies. The governor estimated that it would cost up to \$200 million in total to make community college free for all students by 2021.

"Community college is a linchpin opportunity for us," the governor said Thursday at an event at Mercer County Community College in West Windsor.

The funding is included in Mr. Murphy's first budget proposal, which calls for about \$1.7 billion in new taxes and other revenue and is subject to approval by the Democratic-controlled state legislature. Lawmakers have until the end of June to finalize the state's budget for next fiscal year.

Senate GOP leader Tom Kean said he would look for ways to make college more affordable without raising taxes.

"What we shouldn't do, is force overtaxed families to pick up the tab for Governor Murphy's spending-spree," Mr. Kean said in a statement.

Mr. Murphy's budget proposal also includes \$5 million to help defray the additional costs New Jersey's 19 community colleges would face due to increased enrollment.

"We believe we can achieve the ultimate objective of free community college for everybody, irrespective of your circumstances, within three years," he said.

New Jersey would join a handful of other states, including New York, Rhode Island, Tennessee and Oregon, in making community college free.

In New York, a program signed into law a year ago by Gov. Andrew Cuomo provides free tuition to many students at state colleges but requires them to stay in the state for several years after graduation or pay the money back.

More than 75,000 students applied for the scholarship last year. The state had budgeted for 23,000 students at an expected cost of \$87 million. State officials said last year that some of the applicants likely wouldn't be eligible for the scholarship and they didn't expect a funding shortfall.