

## County College of Morris Union STRONG!

by Dee McAree, County College of Morris

In peaceful times, faculty unions can become complacent. While professors are buried in building better curriculum and mastering new technologies, we trust that someone else is minding the store. For the last two decades that was the sleepy union scene at the County College of Morris (CCM), where the same college president reigned for fifty years and faculty enjoyed a relatively stable relationship with the administration. Our union amounted to a handful of people who kept the gears in motion. Our contracts rolled over like tumbleweeds, and our greatest union activity was eating greasy pizza in a stuffy lecture hall.

Then in 2016, CCM hired a new president from Florida who quickly went to work exploiting our weaknesses. He was a fast talker with a heavy hand who pressured student journalists, reduced our Middle States report to promotional material and launched a burgeoning Workforce Development program staffed by non-tenured, non-unionized teachers. Within three years of his arrival, faculty members (many non-tenured) began meeting in a third-floor conference room in a grassroots effort to revitalize our union.

By 2019 new union leadership emerged under our local president James Capozzi, a non-tenured English professor from Virginia State University. A published poet and wicked wordsmith with years of organizing experience, Capozzi stepped up to mobilize membership, particularly non-tenureds inspired by his ethical commitment. At his right hand was our vice president Ian Col-

quhoun, engineer and numbers-cruncher. In 2020, we settled the best contract we had ever seen at CCM, raising stagnant salaries an average of 17 percent. We built a grievance and a communications committee, both chaired by non-tenureds. We launched press releases and tapped into NJEA funding for a PRIDE campaign. We branded a fresh logo and ordered matching T-shirts to build solidarity. When a non-tenured professor with multiple sclerosis received a poor evaluation for missed class time, we pointed to the sick time in her bank and



her legal protections under ADA. When the college pulled our signed, board-approved contract off the table, we made them put it back. When they egregiously changed our pay cycle, we grieved till they fixed it. Each small victory made us stronger and more cohesive.

Then Friday, April 16 happened. Without prior notice

to chairpersons or deans, a college administrator called six non-tenured professors and told them their contracts would not be renewed: Capozzi, our union president just one semester shy of tenure; our grievance chair; our communications chair; the faculty member with MS who called for union representation; and two other active union members. Outrage followed. The college could not claim financial exigency: just three months prior the former president had received a 6 percent pay raise and performance bonus. Instead, CCM claimed “declining enrollment” and dusted off an obscure policy that gave the board the right to adjust tenure and non-tenure ratios.

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Election 2021

## Every Election Matters!

**New Jersey is fortunate.** We are one of two states in the country that has an election every year – and every election matters! This year’s election is especially important for NJEA members. In November, New Jersey will elect a governor and all 120 members of the state legislature, as well as officials at the county and local level. All these elected officials will have an impact on our professional lives, which is why organizing our members around political engagement – particularly in the higher education community – is vital.

The NJEA PAC-Operating Committee endorsed Governor Phil Murphy for reelection. Murphy has shown time and time again that he values public education.

- Vetoed legislation that would have abrogated collective bargaining over health benefits at our community colleges.
- Signed legislation that prevents subcontracting in community colleges and K-12 schools.
- Funded the Community College Opportunity Grant program in his budget, which makes tuition-free community college a reality for many of our students. He then worked with the legislature to sign it into law. In this year’s budget, he furthered higher

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Higher Ed @  
NJEA Convention  
Nov. 5

by Mecheline Farhat, NJEA Higher Ed Committee chair, Bergen Community College

As the Fall 2021 semester began, the academic year started with a disaster: exceptional rainfall that triggered statewide flooding not seen since Hurricane Sandy in 2012 and Hurricane Irene in 2011, and multiple tornadoes. However, the resilience that this state and its professors and education professionals has developed during the nearly two years of living and working during a pandemic circumvented any substantial disruption. With this being said, I want to recognize and commend all my fellow higher education colleagues for your assiduous efforts and dedication to our work, from those who ran virtual student events to those who taught courses from home while navigating the pandemic and the devastating effects of climate change. We see you and thank you, even if others have not.

As chairperson of the NJEA Higher Education Committee, I am committed to collaborating with representatives of the community colleges to identify and address the needs of our members. I plan to continue to meet frequently with Dr. Brian Bridges, Office of the Secretary of Higher Education (OSHE) and his staff to convey our issues, concerns, and needs. During the summer I was able to meet

with OSHE and address numerous concerns, from funding to mask and vaccination mandates. I was also able to meet with various legislators and discuss the decline of full-time, tenure-track professors as well as staff positions across the state. I stressed the importance of full-time tenure-track professor lines as well as a robust student services staff with fair and competitive compensation.

For too long, administrations across the state have aided and abetted in dwindling of academic and student services departments. They permitted full-time lines to vanish, claiming fiscal exigency while the salaries of administrators continued to rise. It is time that we remind the “powers that be” that it is the faculty and staff of an institution who are the heart and soul of a college, and we make our colleges amongst the top in the nation.

However, it is only through the power of many voices acting as one that this can be accomplished. We must stand in solidarity

not only with our local union representatives but with other collective bargaining units. For example, we need to continue to stand with the Faculty Association of the County College of Morris (FACCM), who are relentlessly pursuing correction, restoration, and compensation for the injustice that transpired in April 2021.

Finally, we must endorse and vote for candidates that support public higher education. From local elections to the gubernatorial race, your vote and your voice matter this November. Your voice helped to elect Governor Phil Murphy who has proven his commitment to NJ public higher education through the last four years. He has developed a statewide vision for higher education and signed key legislation such as the Community College Opportunity Grant (CCOG) that provides free tuition for eligible community college students, the ESP Job Justice bill, and the Chapter 78 relief bill. It is imperative to support education-friendly candidates in November.

On behalf of the NJEA Higher Education Committee, I wish you a wonderful and successful fall semester.

## Elections – Fall 2021

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education for students by funding the Garden State Guarantee, thus giving eligible students up to four years of tuition-free college.

- Increased funding for community colleges in this year's budget.
- Made the first full pension payment in the state budget in 25 years.

A budget is a statement of priorities. Governor Murphy has made public education his priority and this clearly shows in his budgets and his actions to support higher education.

**Make sure your members know how important this election is.**

## Union STRONG! (continued from pg. 1)

The “chilling effect” of this union-bust is the subject of our lawsuit now scheduled on the backlogged PERC docket for a hearing in January 2022. While our fired colleagues await the long road of justice, our vice president has taken the reins to protect our local against a college president hellbent on destroying our union, trouncing our contractual protections, and weaponizing enrollment against us.

The administrative barrage of intimidation tactics has been relentless and right out of the Gestapo playbook: the use of police power to intimidate our fired colleagues, certified legal letters to officers' homes accusing us of defamation, “cease and desist letters” to shut down our social media commentary and prevent us from handing out free textbooks to students, blocking union officers

from meetings, pitting staff against faculty, overriding the evaluations of chairpersons, updating the campus “code of conduct,” and canceling the elective courses of

outspoken union members. The latest move delays our campus reopening until October, a tactic to scuttle our campus organizing. And where are our Commissioners and Board of Trustees through all of this? They are running full-page Ledger ads to insulate and protect our president.

But with NJEA's help, we're fighting back in every way: launching a press campaign, mounting a legal defense, building political pressure, and organizing direct action. NJEA president Sean M. Spiller, who attended our July rally through the streets of Dover to “Save CCM,” has

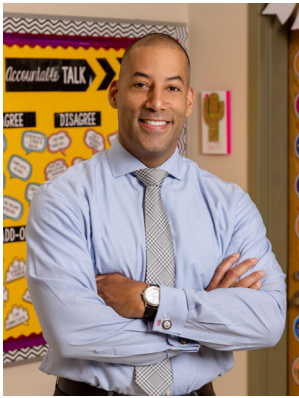
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## County colleges will play a key role in post-pandemic recovery

After eight years serving as an NJEA officer, and many years before that as a member and local leader, I feel immense pride and responsibility as the new president of NJEA. One of my goals as president is to connect even more fully with higher education members whose contributions to our union and to our state are so vital.



As we begin a new school year in unprecedented times, I want to thank all of you for the work that you have done to ensure that students have been able to continue their education during this pandemic. We have faced incredible losses as a result of COVID-19. We have lost colleagues, students, friends and family members; and we have been isolated and shaken. But we have also displayed incredible resilience, and it is truly an honor to work alongside you to fight for our students and our colleagues.

One way that we successfully advocate for ourselves and our students is by engaging in political action. NJEA members are actively engaged in re-electing Gov. Phil Murphy; because we understand that, while we may not always agree, we have an ally in the governor and someone who cares deeply and listens carefully to educators' voices.

Gov. Murphy has shown that he values New Jersey's community colleges. In 2021, he signed into law the Community College Opportunity Grant (CCOG), which guarantees eligible students a tuition-free education for their first two years at any of the state's community colleges.

Currently, tuition and fees are, on average, 62 percent of county colleges' operating budgets. The governor's increase of \$5 million in operating aid is the first our community colleges have seen in 13

years. That increase has never been more timely, as county colleges will play a key role in post-pandemic recovery. We hope that this initial funding increase will be the start of the state moving from its 18 percent support of county colleges to the 33 percent pledged by law.

No one can dispute the power that community colleges have to improve lives and assist our students in reaching their full potential. More than 200,000 students - over half of all undergraduate students in public colleges and universities in the state - are enrolled at New Jersey's community colleges. New Jersey's community colleges also enroll nearly 100,000 students in non-credit programs and partner with thousands of businesses to meet their training and workforce needs.

We need legislators who value, respect, and understand the pivotal work that you do every day. I am proud to fight for your interests and the interests of the students we all serve.

## Union STRONG! (continued from pg. 2)

pledged the strength of our 200,000 rank and file across the state. Mecheline Farhat, NJEA's Higher Education Committee Chairperson, spoke out against the "tyrannical administration" at CCM. Bergen Community College Faculty Assn. President Tobyn DeMarco attended a recent meeting where he encouraged our membership to stand strong during "dark days" that he once lived through at Bergen Community College.



There's an old adage, "A union is only as strong as its weakest member." Morris is under intense pressure from a dangerous bully president who wants to break us, but with the help of our higher ed colleagues and supporters, we're holding steadfast and NJEA strong.

If you would like to submit an article for the Spring 2022 issue of the HE News, submission deadline is January 1, 2022 to [reg29\\_Higher\\_Ed@njea.org](mailto:reg29_Higher_Ed@njea.org).

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Christopher Mueller

**Retired (NJREA)–**  
Thomas Harrington

**Union –**  
Paul Belmonte

**Warren –**  
Kerry Frabizio

**NJEA Higher Education delegation to:**

**Executive Committee –**  
Peter Helff

**Delegate Assembly (DA) –**  
Mecheline Farhat

## Join Higher Education @ NJEA Convention on Friday Nov. 5

Advance registration is required for both events. Seating is limited.

Reservation/registration deadline is October 25, 2021.

Proof of being fully vaccinated or a negative PCR test (within 72 hours) required. Masks are required. Social distancing will be in place.

**9-10:30 a.m.**

### Breakfast & Brainstorming

**Pearl Ballroom – Sheraton AC**  
Convention Center Hotel

**Cost: FREE**

New policies have dramatically changed life on campus. Let's discuss the hot topics for student, faculty, and staff success in this brave new world. Breakfast is served at 9 a.m. Brainstorming begins at 9:30 a.m.

Join us virtually or in person. There is no cost to attend the breakfast & brainstorming.

**To register, contact**  
NJEA's Higher Education office at [HigherEd@NJEA.org](mailto:HigherEd@NJEA.org) or 609-689-9580 by Oct. 22.

**1-2:30 p.m.**

### NJEA Higher Ed Luncheon

**Crown Ballroom – Sheraton AC**  
Convention Center Hotel

**Cost: \$29**

Let's celebrate and network together. Please join your fellow higher education members for our annual convention luncheon.

**To reserve a seat for lunch,** send a check for \$29 payable to NJEA/HE

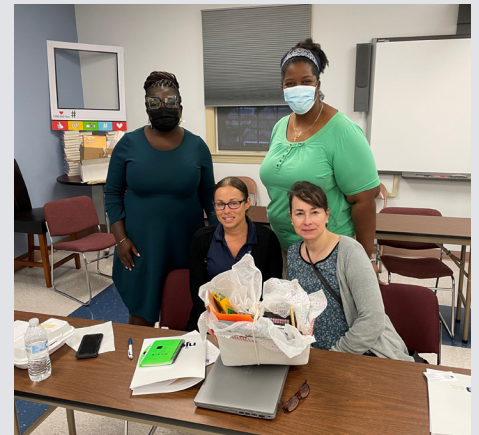
**NJEA Highed Ed Luncheon**  
WSFS  
PO Box 13661  
Philadelphia, PA 19101-3661

For questions, contact NJEA's Higher Ed office at [HigherEd@NJEA.org](mailto:HigherEd@NJEA.org) or 609-689-9580 by Oct. 22.



## Camden Leaders Kick Off the Membership Year

Andrea Wilson and Marisol Torres, Camden Co. Clg. Assn. of Administrative Personnel, attended the first UniServ Region 3 and Camden County Council of Education Associations (CCCEA) Local Presidents meeting of the new school year. NJEA Vice President Steve Beatty and NJEA Secretary-Treasurer Petal Robertson joined the event which was hosted by CCCEA. Members labeled over 250 postcards that will be distributed to NJEA members in the county in an effort to get out the vote. While the occasion provided updates on areas of advocacy and professional development, the highlight of the night was the cheesesteak food truck. Tickets were earned for labeling postcards as well as starting or increasing PAC donations. This fun and informative event was closed out with a drawing for great prizes.



Pictured (standing) – Petal Robertson, NJEA Secretary-Treasurer; April N. Brown, President, Camden Co. Council of Ed. Assns.; (seated) – Andrea L. Wilson, Treasurer, and Marisol Torres, Membership Chair, Camden Co. Clg. Assn. of Administrative Personnel

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## SAVE THE DATE

**Nov. 5, 2021 – Higher Education**  
at the NJEA Convention

**March 11-12, 2022 – NEA**  
Higher Education Conference  
(in conjunction with the NEA  
Leadership Summit)

**April 8-9, 2022 – NJEA Higher**  
Education Conference