

NATIONAL CONFERENCE OF STATE LEGISLATURES ANNUAL MEETING
TULSA, OKLAHOMA
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Good Morning,

Public college presidents spend a great deal of their time trying to get the ear and attention of legislators and their staffs. Almost always it is because we want something -- usually money, but sometimes for your support of, or opposition to, matters affecting the welfare of our institutions, faculties, or students. I am, therefore, delighted with this opportunity to appear and offer something for you, not from you; namely, a recounting of a public policy success story in higher education and some general advice as to approaches you might use as you consider these same issues in your state.

Normally, I would try to build a logical exposition in a prepared address to inform and support conclusions I would leave you. However, to comply with the format we're using, it is necessary to skip the explanation and go straight to the conclusions to keep within our 5 minute window.

Public higher education in New Jersey in the last 7 years has greatly enhanced the quality of its public institutions and done so in a manner which has increased its cost effectiveness as well as its accountability. This result was achieved because of the following:

First - a nonpartisan partnership and consensus was reached between the leadership of the public institutions, the state legislature, and a visionary Governor that improving public higher education was important, but it needed to be done in a way that achieved specific results and in a manner by which we could tell whether we had been successful or not. The achievements of which we in New Jersey are all so proud could not have been accomplished by some executive declaration, a statutory proclamation enacted by the legislature, or the continued clamor for new resources for which higher education is so well known. It was a true partnership by which the three parties came together; agreed on what the results should be; the institutions were challenged to come up with creative ways of achieving agreed-upon ends; and commitments were made to provide the support to fund them.

Second - a studied examination of governance was undertaken and we concluded that the experience of 35 years of state centralization of public higher education showed no evidence that systems have achieved their original purposes. In New Jersey we made a commitment to distinctiveness and accountability. The national experience with systems is that they do not differentiate; in fact, they homogenize. They don't save money; in fact, they divert money into central administrations that do not enhance accountability. To the contrary, they promulgate regulations that inhibit aggressive or adventurous behavior on the part of presidents and trustees. Indeed the diversion of decision-making authority away from those directly responsible for the enterprises, prohibits those same parties from being accountable for the results.

So, whereas other states have continued to centralize and create state systems, New Jersey went the other way and reinforced the autonomy of our public institutions and their individual boards of trustees within the general context of a statewide, nongoverning coordinating board. We recognized, however, that public institutions share common interests, therefore, we created the New Jersey State College Governing Boards Association which is an advocacy body working on the common interest of state colleges. It is a unusual structure where the central office is controlled by and subordinate to the welfare of the institutions, as opposed to the other way around.

And, finally, we have achieved measurable results. New Jersey public institutions are distinctive and of high quality; a fact that has been recognized throughout higher education in this country. This recognition is a function of concrete performance and recognized record of achievement.

If you infer that I have taken this opportunity to brag about New Jersey, you may be correct; but I want to close with a quote from Mohammad Ali "if you've done it, talkin' about it ain't braggin'." I am sure in the discussion that follows you will have many questions.

Thank you.

George A. Pruitt
President
Thomas A. Edison State College
101 West State Street, CN 545
Trenton, NJ 08625