

“Everyone has data, but it doesn’t bridge between the sectors,” he said.

New Jersey just received \$5 million in federal grants to expand the state’s NJSMART data system, to track students from preschool through the workforce.

Jane Wellman, founding director of the Delta Project on Postsecondary Costs, Productivity and Accountability said the economic crisis has put colleges under more scrutiny. Issues include the colleges’ ability and willingness to cut costs, and students who are not prepared for college and require expensive remediation.

John B. Wilson, president and CEO of the Association of Independent Colleges and Universities in New Jersey said there are 14 private colleges in the state that must be included on policy issues. He said he has seen some commitment from Gov. Chris Christie for higher education, but when there is no willingness to pay taxes, it’s hard to get financial support.

Gov. (Thomas) Kean was the last governor to really support higher education,” he said.

A recent Stockton/Zogby poll of parents of high school students found while 76 percent said state colleges should get more funding, only 19 percent were willing to pay higher taxes.

Wilson said families also need to be more educated about college costs, and the importance of saving money for college through such venues as tax-free college savings plans.

Speakers said higher-education policy is typically driven more by politics than data on what is actually needed to maintain a steady revenue stream and control costs. John Walda, president and CEO of the National Association of College and University Business Officers said public/private partnerships should be encouraged to help defray costs. But, he said, colleges are also important for their larger benefit to society and their communities.

“There must be a change in the relationship between colleges and the government,” he said. “There must be some sharing of responsibility for funding.”

Richard Novak, senior vice president of the Association of Governing Boards of Universities and Colleges said Stockton’s center could gather data and be an objective voice for positive change in the state. He said the college’s new polling institute could help gauge public opinion of the issues and advocate for change.

“No one else is really doing that right now,” he said.

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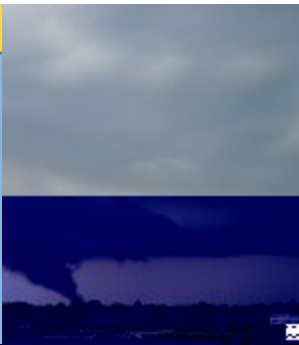
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