




Rowan University
 COLLEGE OF EDUCATION

Pathways to P20 Success

Annual Report
2024-2025





DEAN'S MESSAGE

This year, our College has remained grounded in purpose and guided by a deep commitment to equity and community. In a time of shifting federal policies and rising challenges to education and well-being, we've asked: How can we serve as catalysts for resilience and justice?

We continue to strengthen our collective voice and identity by creating intentional spaces (e.g., DIA Committee, department and college-wide meetings, CASE Summit, faculty research series, etc.) to reflect, collaborate and reimagine educational futures within and beyond our College. Through these efforts, we reaffirm who we are and what we stand for. We are also transforming our core academic work, rethinking curricula, research and institutional practices to not only meet the moment, but to lead meaningful and lasting change.

Our faculty continue to pursue research to address critical issues in the field. Through professional development efforts, we continue to engage directly with schools and communities to build the capacity of teachers and school leaders. And, in spite of recent legislation putting pressure on educational programs throughout the U.S., we remain committed to the ideals of creating access for all students in the area of educator preparation.

The stories shared in this annual report depict the many ways our faculty, students, alumni and partners are advancing educational equity, shaping policy, building community and expanding access locally and globally. These stories remind us that inclusive, supportive environments are essential to a thriving society and that education remains one of the most powerful tools for opportunity and change.

To our alumni, thank you for continuing to carry our mission into your communities and professions. To our donors, your investment sustains innovation, impact and access. And to our internal College community, your dedication, creativity and care are at the heart of everything we do.

Together, we are building a more inclusive, sustainable and meaningful future in education.

Dr. Gaëtane Jean-Marie
Dean

20+ Men of Color Achieve Teaching Certification Through

MOCHA Cohort 2 Completion

As its second and final cohort of students completed their alternate route teaching certification coursework, the Men of Color Hope Achievers (MOCHA) program concluded with great success, keen enthusiasm and transformative journeys.

“Each Fellow had their own story to tell,” said Dr. Ya Vanca Brooks, Assistant Director-Recruitment & Retention Specialist and MOCHA Project Support, “but together as a cohort they persevered and completed the program.”

The MOCHA initiative aligned with the College of Education’s mission to increase the teacher/educator workforce with the idea of enriching education for all. In the current educational landscape, that means focusing on recruiting, preparing and retaining males of color, who are severely underrepresented in the teaching profession, to earn their certification.

“Creating and training a diversified educator workforce matters for students, families and the community at large,” Dr. Brooks said.

With 22 Fellows, the second MOCHA cohort doubled the size of the first cohort. These graduates are now certified educators teaching in schools in Trenton, Bridgeton, Vineland, Paulsboro, Camden, Millville, Burlington, Penns Grove – Carneys Point, Egg Harbor Township and Commercial Township.

“The impact of our MOCHA Fellows will endure as they enter classrooms and communities prepared to help address the teacher shortage and advance diversity in the education profession,” said Dean Gaëtane Jean-Marie. “We are grateful for the partnership of the New Jersey Department of Education, participating school districts and the dedicated MOCHA team, whose collaborative efforts have strengthened the pipeline of future educators.”



What’s Next?

Although the second cohort marked the end of the MOCHA program, other efforts are carrying forward the approach that has proven so effective in supporting the MOCHA Fellows. The College of Education is now moving forward with another initiative, “Recruiting and Inspiring Zealous Educators” (RIZE) Scholars Program.

“RIZE equips future teachers with the knowledge, skills, abilities, mentorship, career pathways, and community needed to thrive in today’s classrooms and inspire the leaders of tomorrow,” said Dr. Brooks.



Mr. Marquise Thomas (left) and Mr. Raymond Domenech, MOCHA Fellows, celebrate their completion of the program.

Hundreds of Candidates ASPIRE to Teach Through Online Alternate Route Certification Program

For decades, alternate route programs have helped aspiring educators in New Jersey obtain teaching certifications. Rowan University College of Education’s ASPIRE to Teach program delivers a curriculum that emphasizes teaching foundations and specific competencies for modern classrooms in a convenient online format. With a presence in more than 50 school districts across New Jersey, ASPIRE to Teach is fast-tracking certification for hundreds of students and changing the landscape of educational communities statewide.

ASPIRE to Teach candidates are working full-time in schools throughout their studies.

“It is this side-by-side approach where their coursework learning is immediately applied, on a daily basis, in their classroom setting that makes the ASPIRE to Teach experience truly powerful,” said Dr. Corine Brown, Director of ASPIRE to Teach and Associate Professor in the Department of Early Childhood, Elementary Education, & Critical Foundations.

Through Teach Camden Initiative, Paraprofessionals Obtained Teacher Certification for Free

Facing a critical teacher shortage and dozens of vacancies across the district, the Camden City School District turned to the Rowan University College of Education for solutions. That collaboration transformed 19 paraprofessionals already working in the district into fully certified teachers free of charge through Teach Camden, an initiative based on the Grow Your Own strategy.

Grow Your Own, explained Dr. Joanne Connor, Senior Associate Dean for External Affairs, is a national model that identifies employees within a district that want to pursue a career in education and supports them in obtaining teacher certification.

“In historically underserved districts like Camden, recruiting and retaining educators can be especially challenging,” Dr. Connor said. “These paraeducators, however, had already demonstrated a deep commitment to their schools and communities. The critical question became how we could accelerate their pathway to certification and support their transition into classrooms as fully credentialed teachers—without losing the momentum or talent already present in the district.”



Former Camden Superintendent Katrina McCombs speaks to paraprofessionals, members of the community, and the press, outlining the Teach Camden program during a joint announcement on Rowan’s Camden campus.

Through educator preparation coursework and a wide range of support via Rowan’s ASPIRE to Teach program, the Teach Camden initiative eliminated barriers to achieving teaching certification for instructional aids and teacher’s assistants. A Summer Institute featured professional development opportunities geared toward new teachers. A four-month intensive tutoring program helped candidates prepare for Praxis Exams. The coursework, along with mentoring, financial support for exam registrations and professional development programs throughout the year, were all delivered free of charge to candidates, with costs paid by the district.

Upon successful completion of the program, participants transitioned into full-time teaching positions within the district, with a commitment to working in the Camden City School District for at least five years.

“This partnership is a critical step toward ensuring that Camden’s classrooms are filled with dedicated, certified educators who

have a deep connection to the community they serve,” noted Dr. Corine Brown, Associate Professor in the Department of Early Childhood, Elementary Education, & Critical Foundations (EEC) and Director of the ASPIRE to Teach Alternate Route Certification Program.

With other districts throughout South Jersey expressing interest in the Teach Camden model, the College of Education is now exploring ways to expand this initiative beyond Camden.

“This model can be replicated to help school districts fill their classrooms with certified teachers,” Dr. Connor said.

The Teach Camden partnership highlights the importance of the CED’s strong relationships with P-12 partners, Dr. Brown explained.

“Our ability to recruit and retain qualified teachers in our public schools and Camden City School District’s dedication to investing in its staff and creating career advancement opportunities directly benefit both the students and the broader community,” Dr. Brown said.

Since the post-pandemic relaunch of the redesigned ASPIRE to Teach program in 2021, enrollment has skyrocketed from just 11 candidates to 230 candidates. The program features unique benefits that have contributed to its popularity in recent academic years.

“Candidates enrolled in ASPIRE to Teach always mention the program’s flexible learning pace, fully online program delivery and competitively priced tuition as reasons why they chose ASPIRE as their alternate route program,” Dr. Brown said.

Combining a Pre-Professional Component With a Fully Supported Two-Year Curriculum

Through the ASPIRE to Teach - Certificate of Eligibility (CE) Educator Preparation Program, candidates with either a CE or Limited CE can pursue teaching certification in P-3, K-6 or K-12 content areas in New Jersey.

The program begins with a 50-Hour Pre-Professional Component that consists of five courses, clinical classroom observations and assignments. This component equips candidates who have earned their NJDOE CE or Limited CE with knowledge and skills in the foundations of educational instruction, teaching frameworks, lesson planning and more.

From there, candidates complete a two-year program supported by online coursework, video coaching, Professional Learning Community sessions and individualized support from ASPIRE Lead Instructors.

“ASPIRE to Teach furthers the CED mission to positively impact and develop local and regional educational communities by preparing and supporting professionals through the development of key knowledge, skills and dispositions,” Dr. Brown said.

Teaching Core Competencies in Universal Design and Relationship-Driven Instruction

In addition to helping each candidate develop proficiency across the New Jersey Professional Standards for Teachers, the ASPIRE to Teach curriculum centers on Universal Design for Learning, High-Leverage Practices and Relationship-Driven Instruction. This focus, according to Brown, supports both educators and their students in the classroom.

“As educators representing grade levels and content areas across the P-12 spectrum, we believe creating learning experiences centered on UDL principles and high-leverage practices ensures both P-12 learners and their teachers are strongly connected to learning outcomes,” Dr. Brown said. “ASPIRE Lead Instructors model what it looks like and sounds like to build relationships with candidates, so candidates can then use those instructional strategies in their own classrooms.”

On Campus and in D.C.,

Rowan's Holmes Scholars Support Research and Advocacy

Whether they're meeting with state senators during Washington Week or leading workshops on campus, Rowan University's Holmes Scholars are making an impact.

The American Association of Colleges of Teacher Education (AACTE) Holmes Scholar Program recognizes high-achieving students from traditionally unrecognized backgrounds who are pursuing doctoral degrees in education. Rowan Holmes Scholars have held leadership positions on the national Holmes Council for the past 7 years—making it the only institution to consistently have representation on the national council each year.

Washington Week, in which the Holmes Scholars take a trip to Washington, D.C. to meet with teacher educators and leaders from colleges and institutions nationwide, is a highly anticipated annual event. The experience, held in June 2025, included Congressional visits and opportunities for networking and collaboration.

Closer to home, the Holmes Scholars signature annual event held on Rowan's campus has now broadened attendance. Holmes Scholars from Temple University and Monmouth University attended the Research Bootcamp last year.

"Events and activities such as AACTE's Washington Week and the Holmes Scholars signature annual event at Rowan's campus provide Holmes Scholars with transformative professional development opportunities that extend well beyond the classroom," said **Dr. Raquel Wright-Mair**, Associate Professor in the Department of Educational Leadership, Administration & Research, as well as Faculty Advisor and Program Director for the Rowan University Holmes Scholars.

"These experiences expose students to policy, advocacy and leadership at the national level while cultivating networks of support among diverse scholars across institutions," Dr. Wright-Mair added. "By engaging with policymakers,

education leaders and peers, students strengthen their research, communication and advocacy skills—key competencies that prepare them to become equity-minded leaders in education."

Besides supporting the development of the individual Holmes Scholars at Rowan, hosting and participating in these events expands the College of Education's mission and reach, Dr. Wright-Mair noted.

"These activities position the College as an active contributor to national conversations on equity, access and educational transformation," she said. "By hosting the Holmes Scholars signature annual event, the College creates visibility for its programs, fosters collaborations and demonstrates a tangible commitment to preparing the next generation of scholar-advocates who will carry forward the values of justice, equity and leadership in education."

Dr. Raquel Wright-Mair and members of the Holmes Scholars program attend the College of Education's Graduate Student Research Showcase.



THREADS for EDS Closet Provides Free Professional Clothing for Students

For students entering the teaching field, the cost of professional clothing can be a significant barrier. Created by the Educators for Diversity and Social Equity (EDSE) Club, the Threads for Eds closet opened in Spring 2025 to provide College of Education students with free professional clothing for field placements, interviews and career events.

"Professional clothing helps students make a strong first impression, feel confident and present themselves as professional educators," said **Jaime Groomett**, ¾-time Faculty in Secondary Culturally Sustaining Pedagogy in the Department of Content Area Teacher Education. "With strong support from the College of Education and a generous donor, we turned this idea of removing financial barriers—so students can focus on their teaching and career goals instead of worrying about what to wear—into reality in just a few months."

From the Spring 2025 opening of the closet through June, Threads for Eds provided more than 140 items to over 50 students. Threads for Eds is open to all College of Education students, who can schedule a visit by emailing Groomett.

The quick achievement of the Threads for Eds initiative would not have been possible without Joseph Murphy, a Haddonfield resident and friend of the College of Education, Groomett noted. Murphy generously funded the creation of the Threads for Eds space and provided a reserve for purchasing adaptive or unique clothing items by request.

Murphy, whose sister graduated from Glassboro State College and who considers himself "a friend and champion of Jaime Groomett," first learned about the effort from Groomett directly.

"When I heard what the project was and the amount of funding needed, I realized this was something I wanted to do myself," Murphy said. "I became even more convinced this was a worthwhile cause after I learned that the idea originated with one of the students."

"My decision was fully validated when I was invited to visit and had the chance to meet with those involved, who were dedicated to the success of the future teachers they were helping," Murphy added. "For me, it comes down to the character of the people involved."

Students like **Abigail Morris '25**, one of the leaders of the EDSE Club, played a key role in launching Threads for Eds by helping coordinate donations and organize the closet. Morris initially proposed the concept and helped facilitate its creation as a sustainable resource for future education students.

"By removing some of the financial barriers that dressing like a professional brings in the first few years of a teacher's career, we hope to help clinical interns show up as their best, most authentic self on day one in the classroom," Morris said.

Through this journey, Morris said, "I met many Rowan alums who shared their stories, struggles and advice from their first years after graduation. It reminded me that teaching is a community effort that extends far beyond the classroom."

ALUMNI PROFILE

Alum's Gift in Memory of Wife Establishes Annual Scholarship for Educational Leadership Students

In November 2024, retired Superintendent of Upper Darby School District in Pennsylvania, **Dr. Joseph Batory '70**, a Glassboro State College alumnus, established the Dr. Joseph Batory Scholarship in the College of Education's Department of Educational Leadership, Administration and Research (ELAR). Inspired by the passing of his wife Joan—also an alum—and reflecting his lifelong commitment to education, the scholarship

supports ELAR graduate students pursuing careers in P-20 leadership with a one-time award of \$5,000.

The Inaugural Joseph Batory Scholarship was awarded to Tamicha Adams, a student in the Ed.D. program who serves as a senior academic advisor in NJIT's Martin Tuchman School of Management.

"This donation is meaningful to the Department because it helps our students offset the cost of obtaining an advanced degree while also teaching them about the power of philanthropy," said Dr. Joanne Connor, Senior Associate Dean for External Affairs and Associate Professor of Educational Leadership. "For Dr. Batory, this is an amazing way to continue to impact the field of education, about which he is extraordinarily passionate."

The award-winning retired superintendent has since generously delivered three additional scholarships for students in the College of Education, and since November 2024 has also provided an annual scholarship for a student majoring in environmental studies at Rowan.

Noting that his Glassboro educational experiences opened his eyes to the possibility of a career in educational leadership, Dr. Batory said, "The scholarship awards at Rowan University are meant to encourage and develop successful career educators into the future."

Faculty and leadership from the College of Education (clockwise from top-left): Dr. Hajime Mitani, Dr. Joanne Connor, Dr. Molly Fisher, Dr. Stacey Leftwich, Dr. Melissa Awenowicz, and Dean Gaëtane Jean-Marie with Dr. Joseph Batory and Lauren Catalano, Associate Director of Development.



STAFF PROFILES

Balancing Work and Life Demands, College of Ed Staff Further Their Own Educations

At Rowan University's College of Education, continuing one's education isn't just theoretical advice. It's a practice our dedicated staff live by. Colleen Migeot, Michael Fromm and Heather Cappuccio are all staff members who have recently graduated from programs at Rowan while maintaining full-time jobs in the College.



Colleen Migeot, M.A.
Placement Coordinator
M.A. Higher Education, 2025



Michael Fromm, M.A.
Communications & Events
Coordinator
M.A. Strategic Communication, 2025



Heather Cappuccio, M.A.
Budget & Finance Coordinator
M.A. Higher Education, 2025



Angela Felisa Steward
Secretarial Assistant 2
for the Dean's Office
B.A. Sociology, Expected 2028



Crystal Toomer
Office Assistant to the Office
of Educator Preparation
B.A. Leadership & Social Innovation,
Expected 2028

Colleen Migeot, who has been employed at Rowan since 2013 and serves as Placement Coordinator for the Office of Clinical Experiences, earned her M.A. in Higher Education in 2025 and began the Ed.D. in Educational Leadership program in Fall 2025.

"My initial motivation was personal—I wanted to prove to myself that I could earn a master's degree," Migeot said. "But somewhere along the way, I found that I truly love learning."

Migeot hadn't planned to pursue a doctoral degree, but "the day after my final MA class ended, I felt unexpected sadness because I had no classes to look forward to the following semester," she said. "That's when I knew I wasn't finished."

Michael Fromm, who serves as Communications and Events Coordinator for the College of Education, graduated with a Master's in Strategic Communication in 2025.

"I wanted to pursue this degree because I wanted a refresher in my industry," said Fromm, noting how much the world of communications has changed since he earned his bachelor's degree.

Fromm's studies proved challenging, particularly in the last year of the program.

"I was tasked with writing a thesis, as well as passing a comprehensive exam, all while moving into a new house, having a baby, taking paternity leave and maintaining this job at the College," Fromm said. "But the challenge was worth it, and I am a better person for it."

Heather Cappuccio, Budget & Finance Coordinator for the College of Education, earned her MBA in May 2025 after being inspired to go back to school herself while homeschooling her elementary-age daughters during COVID.

"Balancing work, eight-week courses and time for family and friends was challenging and could not have happened without the support of my husband, along with strong time management skills," Cappuccio said. "On commencement day, walking into the room and knowing my now-teenage daughters were there to witness me walk across the stage made all the challenges and sacrifices worthwhile."

Other College of Education staff, including Angela Felisa Steward and Crystal Toomer, are working through studies as well.

Angela Felisa Steward, who has been employed at Rowan since December 2013 and currently works as Secretarial Assistant II in the Office of the Dean, expects to complete her BA in Psychology by Spring 2028.

"After many years working in administrative support, I wanted a career that was more personally meaningful and impactful," she said. "I was motivated to return to school so I could earn a degree working directly with our youth—supporting the whole child academically, socially, emotionally and physically."

Crystal Toomer, Office Assistant to the Office of Educator Preparation, expects to complete her Bachelor of Arts in Leadership & Social Innovation with a concentration in Supporting Mental Health in 2028—40 years after graduating from high school.

After pausing her college studies to get married and start a family, Toomer considers finishing her bachelor's degree to be a "personal quest."

"I always felt the need to finish what I started, and now I am blessed to be able to do that," she said. "I'm teaching my children that you should always finish what you start and that it is never too late."

Through their coursework, College of Education staff have achieved personal and professional development.

"I am now a more effective worker, leader, colleague, supervisor, policy creator and critical thinker, equipped to make thoughtful and informed decisions across all areas of my life," Migeot said.

"Our staff's pursuit of higher education is an act of leadership, one that expands possibility and elevates our collective impact," Dean Gaëtane Jean-Marie said. "I am deeply proud of their commitment to grow, even when the path requires sacrifice and resilience. Their progress inspires us all."

ALUMNI PROFILE

Alum and 2023–2024 New Jersey State Teacher of the Year Delivers Keynote at CED Pinning & Induction Ceremony

For distinguished educator **Joseph ("Joe") Nappi, '05**, returning to campus to deliver the keynote speech at the College of Education's Teacher Pinning & Induction Ceremony—where undergraduate students who have reached the halfway point of their studies recite an affirmation committing themselves to the field of teaching—was "a bit of a full-circle moment."

"I wanted to share with students why I was still excited to teach as I approach my 20th year," said Nappi, a Social Studies Teacher at Monmouth Regional High School. "I wanted the students to hear about the impact that they can have in this profession and why it is worth the sacrifices that come with dedicating yourself to serving others."

Over the course of his career, Nappi has been recognized with numerous honors. He was named both 2023–24 Monmouth County Teacher of the Year and 2023–24 New Jersey State Teacher of the Year, as well as being selected as one of four Finalists for the 2024 National Teacher of the Year. He was also named Facing History and Ourselves Upstander of the Year Awardee for 2024. In 2025, Nappi received the 2025 NEA Foundation Award for Teaching Excellence and a Horace Mann Award for Teaching Excellence.

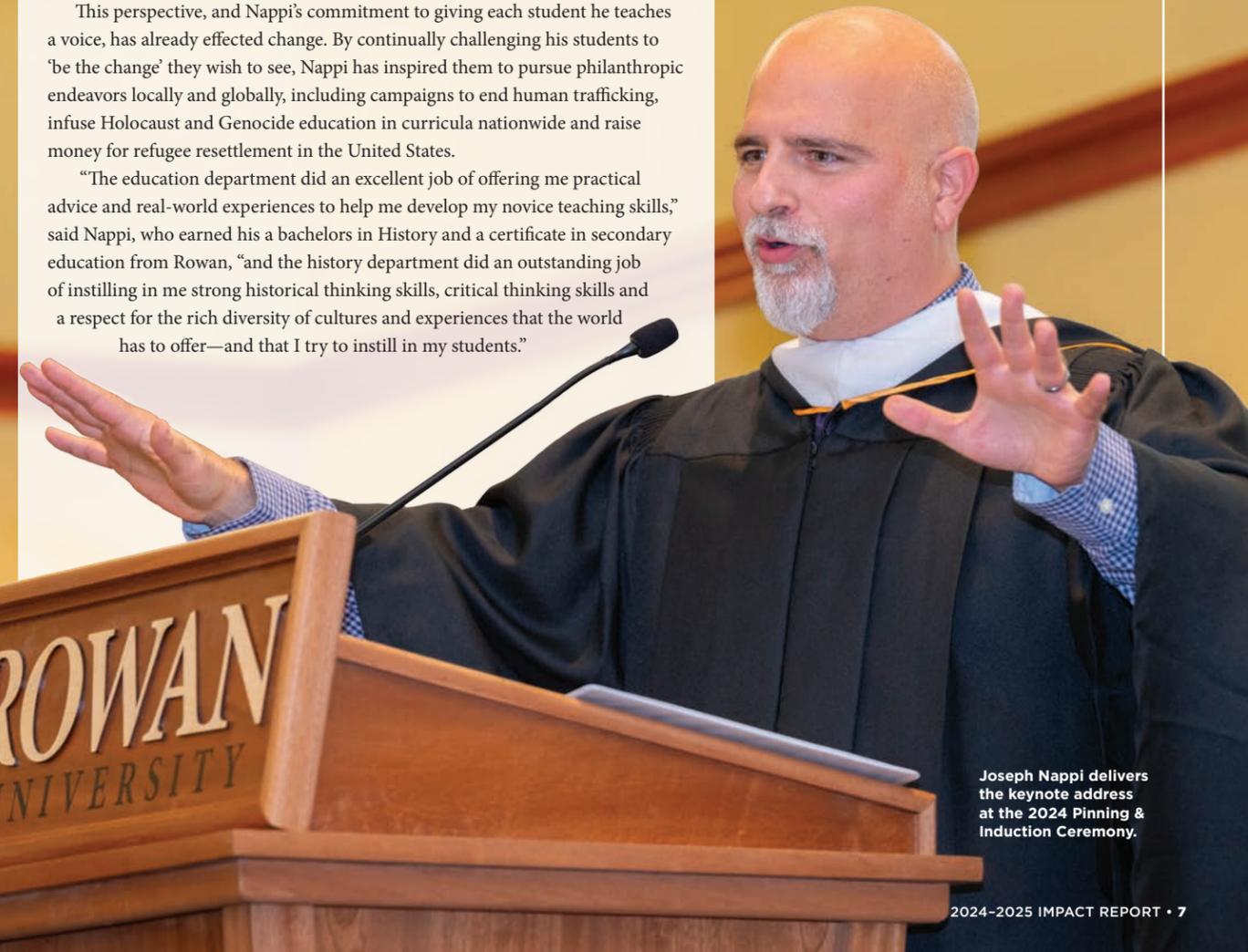
As he shared stories from his career of the students he helped, Nappi provided a positive message that resonated with students who often find themselves inundated with reports on the challenges in the field instead of its opportunities.

"I view teaching as a practical strategy to change the world," Nappi said.

This perspective, and Nappi's commitment to giving each student he teaches a voice, has already effected change. By continually challenging his students to 'be the change' they wish to see, Nappi has inspired them to pursue philanthropic endeavors locally and globally, including campaigns to end human trafficking, infuse Holocaust and Genocide education in curricula nationwide and raise money for refugee resettlement in the United States.

"The education department did an excellent job of offering me practical advice and real-world experiences to help me develop my novice teaching skills," said Nappi, who earned his a bachelors in History and a certificate in secondary education from Rowan, "and the history department did an outstanding job of instilling in me strong historical thinking skills, critical thinking skills and a respect for the rich diversity of cultures and experiences that the world has to offer—and that I try to instill in my students."

"I wanted the students to hear about the impact that they can have in this profession and why it is worth the sacrifices that come with dedicating yourself to serving others," said Nappi.



Joseph Nappi delivers the keynote address at the 2024 Pinning & Induction Ceremony.

College of Ed Faculty Showcase Research in Presentation Series

Our faculty does more than tackle contemporary issues in education through innovative research. Through the College of Education's Research Talk Series and OWLS Talks, faculty members share their findings and fresh insights with the community to effect change.

The Opportunities to Work Like Scholars (OWLS) Talks, hosted by the College of Education's Diversity in Action (DIA) Committee, presented a workshop model for CED researchers to highlight their important work in the areas of equity and access for all students from preschool through graduate school.

In her OWLS Talk presentation "Erasing Race in Shaker Heights: Exploring Detracking in an 'Antiracist' Town" in September 2024, **Dr. Margaret Thornton**, Assistant Professor in the Department of Educational Leadership, Administration & Research (ELAR), addressed the detracking program in Shaker Heights, Ohio, and shared her recent data collection work.

"Residents of Shaker Heights take pride in the city's desegregation efforts of the past but have struggled to determine how to desegregate classrooms and advanced programs," said Dr. Thornton, whose primary area of research is culturally responsive school leadership. "My research examines how school leaders can target between-class segregation that often keeps kids of color and poor kids out of advanced classes. Work in this area is now more important than ever."

Dr. Kara Ieva, professor in the Counseling in Educational Settings Program in the Wellness & Inclusive Services in Education (WISE) Department, gave the OWLS Talk presentation, "How Do We Support Teacher Well-Being in the Current Educational System? Exploring Educator SEL (EduSEL) Research" with co-presenters **Dr. Beth Wassell**, Professor of Language Teacher Education in the Department of Content Area Teacher

Education (CATE), and **Dr. Cathy Brant**, Associate Professor of Early Childhood, Elementary Education & Critical Foundations (EEC). Dr. Ieva and her co-presenters drew attention to the connection between the current educational landscape and teacher well-being, presented research studies and their implications, engaged attendees in dialogue through guided questions and modeled wellness activities for the audience.

Engagement like the OWLS Talks "helps build community and further connections with others on a professional and personal level," Dr. Ieva said.

In addition to the two OWLS Talks, the College held a series of Research Talks throughout the 2024-25 academic year.

Dr. Hao-Jan Luh, Assistant Professor in the Department of Wellness & Inclusive Services in Education (WISE), presented "Cultural Adaptation of the Resilience Education Program in Taiwan: An Exploration with Focus Group Interviews." The presentation focused on cultural adaptations needed for implementing a social emotional learning program, Resilience Education Program in Taiwan (REPiT). These cultural adaptations include language, intervention content, school policies, and so forth. The findings will inform experimental studies and larger scales of REPiT implementation.

Dr. Magdalena Martínez, ELAR Associate Professor, presented "Charting a Path Forward after a Crisis: Hispanic Serving Institutions (HSI) Lessons on Collaboration, Leadership and Communication." Drawing on case studies and insights from Hispanic Serving Institutions, this project highlighted the pivotal role of collaboration, leadership and effective communication in fostering resilience and driving positive change.

Dr. Kate Kedley, Associate Professor in the Department of Critical Literacy, Technology & Multilingual Education (CLTM), presented "LGBTQ Young Adult Literature, Social Movements and Teachers, English Language Arts and Secondary Education." This presentation on LGBTQ book bans covered the history of book bans and

challenges, as well as the rights and responsibilities of K-12 teachers in making sure students have access to information.

Dr. Beth Wassell presented "Re-learning to Teach: An Autoethnographic Exploration of Language Teacher Educator Identity in the K-12 Classroom," in which she explored how returning to high school teaching after 20+ years as a university professor reshaped her professional identity as a language teacher educator. Those insights, she noted, now guide her work with future teachers.

Drs. Kate Seltzer and Rebecca Linares, both Associate Professors of English as a Second Language and Bilingual Education in the CLTM Department, presented A Framework for Critical Advocacy for Multilingual Learn-

ers: Insights from the Field. They discussed the central framework of a forthcoming book on critical advocacy for multilingual learners and highlighted the voices of advocates for multilingual learners who live and work in a variety of contexts across the U.S.

The OWLS Talks and Research Talk Series are an important way to celebrate, highlight and support faculty members' work, Dr. Seltzer noted.

"Showcasing how faculty in the CED are doing work that is more than just scholarly—i.e., that impacts practice on urgent topics like supporting multilingual and immigrant students—helps position the CED as a leader in these areas," she said.

"My research examines how school leaders can target between-class segregation that often keeps kids of color and poor kids out of advanced classes. Work in this area is now more important than ever," said Dr. Thornton.



From left to right: Dr. Kate Kedley, Dr. Kate Seltzer, Dr. Beth Wassell, Dr. Kara Ieva, Dr. Rebecca Linares, and Dr. Hao-Jan Luh.

NextGEI Programming

Highlights Discoveries and Innovations in the Field of Education

Entrepreneurship isn't just for the business world. As the CED's new Next Generation Education Initiative (NextGEI), presented in partnership with the Rowan Center for Innovation & Entrepreneurship (RCIE), showcased through events held throughout the Spring 2025 semester, innovative discoveries can transform the field of education.

"Education is different today, and we need to approach how we educate children with an entrepreneurial mindset," said **Dr. Joanne Connor**, Senior Associate Dean for External Affairs, who inspired the initiative when she presented the idea that programming of this nature was needed to Advisory Board member **Greg Carlisle**.

"In education, we've got to make sure that we are abreast of what's happening, because we are the innovators," Connor said. "We are the original influencers."

Proudly sponsored by TD Bank, NextGEI's series of programming promoting the entrepreneurial mindset reflects the numerous challenges in education today, from changes in federal legislation to the impact of AI and more.

"What excites me most about NextGEI is how it bridges two areas that might not normally connect—entrepreneurship and education," said **Jessica Vattima**, RCIE director. "Rowan is not only preparing future teachers to succeed in the classroom but empowering them to model creativity, resilience and opportunity-seeking for the next generation of students."

In the classroom, discoveries and innovation might translate into developing state-of-the-art K-12 programs, creating support programs that meet the needs of today's students or coming up with different social opportunities for students.

"Educators are inherently entrepreneurial and innovative, and they're constantly in discovery mode," Connor said. "The NextGEI programming focuses on those people who are constantly looking at the world around them and trying to figure out what gaps exist in the field of education and how to fill them in a creative way—which often involves partnerships."

One of the most well-received NextGEI events was "From Startup to Success: The Journey of Building Your Own Business," by **Nick Bayer**, CEO & Founder of Saxbys.

"The NextGEI initiative perfectly aligns with what we believe at Saxbys: that real transformation happens when you combine innovative thinking with hands-on experience," said Bayer. "I'm incredibly excited about NextGEI's mission to connect students, faculty, staff and alumni to ideas that shape and advance education in innovative ways."

In sharing his entrepreneurial journey authentically—both the triumphs and the failures—Bayer helped the audience connect with the idea that success isn't just about financial returns, but about creating meaningful impact in one's community.



From left to right: Dr. Joanne Connor, Nick Bayer, Jessica Vattima, and Joe Divis.

"The future belongs to those who can adapt, innovate and lead with empathy, and initiatives like NextGEI are helping prepare Rowan students to be exactly those kinds of leaders our world needs," Bayer said. "Whether you become a teacher, engineer, social worker or corporate leader, the entrepreneurial skills of critical thinking, team development, financial management and community leadership will serve you throughout your life."

Other events held during NextGEI's inaugural semester included:

- Introduction to Entrepreneurship in Education with **Jessica Vattima**, **Krissy Taft** and **Claire Smith** (founders of Hilight), & **Shaila Saini** (student and owner of Lushious Beauty)
- Developing a Business Plan with **Krista Collings** and **Malcolm Davis** (TD Bank)
- Collaborating for Innovation Creating Educational Technology Together with College of Business Professor **Greg Payton**
- Assessing A Company's Needs & Access to Capital with **Darlene Andfield** & **Gary Gilmore** (TD Bank)

The impact of bringing an entrepreneurial mindset to the classroom is important for teachers but potentially even more so for students, according to Vattima.

"Imagine a generation of kids learning early on that failure isn't the end of the world, that they can think outside the box, identify opportunities and create an impact larger than themselves," she said. "That ripple effect is huge."

That impact also strengthens the CED's reach and recruitment capabilities, according to Connor.

"There's not enough people that are thinking entrepreneurially about education," Connor said. "NextGEI is important because it is a way for us to think differently about education, and in doing so, we can attract more students to the University and to the College of Education specifically."

As Visiting Lecturer and CASE Summit Speaker, Distinguished Educator

Linda Tillman

Supports CED Faculty and Educators in the Community

As a renowned public-school educator who also has been appointed Professor Emerita of Educational Leadership in the School of Education at the University of North Carolina-Chapel Hill and was a Distinguished Visiting Professor at Loyola Marymount University, Dr. Linda Tillman is an authority on both issues in K-12 education and challenges that college faculty members face in attaining promotion and tenure.

"I believe we are still grappling with precisely how to respond to or address the challenges that we are facing as a community of educators," Dr. Tillman said.

As part of an ongoing commitment to faculty development and academic excellence, the College of Education and the Center for Access, Success & Equity (CASE) hosted a faculty development series focused on navigating the promotion and tenure process and preparing for promotion to full professor during the spring semester featuring Dr. Tillman.

"It is very important to provide consistent, long-term support to all faculty, but it is particularly important for pre-tenure faculty who will be working for five to six years to meet the expectations for promotion and tenure," Dr. Tillman said. "Support in the form of peer mentoring, regular check-ins with the Dean, participation in professional development and opportunities to reflect on their work—what

they have accomplished and what they still need to do—are extremely important for pre-tenure faculty."

Through a combination of group sessions and individualized mentoring opportunities, Dr. Tillman provided tailored guidance, practical strategies and critical insights to support their academic advancement and professional development for both tenured and pre-tenure faculty.

Tillman delivered the keynote address at the 2025 College of Education Summit: Reshaping the Future. Centering on the theme of "The State of Education: Building Pathways for P-20 Success," the Summit addressed current challenges, innovative practices and collaborative strategies that support success from early learning through postsecondary education.

In her address, Dr. Tillman emphasized the critical role of persistence for educators as they navigate the evolving challenges in today's educational landscape. She focused specifically on three pathways to P-20 success: pathways of possibility, pathways to partnerships and the pathway of persistence.

"Dr. Tillman encouraged participants to remain steadfast in exploring and implementing innovative methods of teaching and learning, even in the face of setbacks," said Dr. Tyrone W. McCombs, CASE Executive Director. "She highlighted the importance of cultivating and sustaining meaningful partnerships, both within educational institutions and with external agencies."

The 2025 CED Summit also featured breakout sessions facilitated by the following faculty members, showcasing their current research and scholarly contributions:

- Dr. Andrea Hawkman, Associate Professor of Social Studies Education in the Department of Content Area Teacher Education (CATE), and Dr. Kate Seltzer, Associate Professor of English as a Second Language and Bilingual Education in the Department of Critical Literacy, Technology and Multilingual Education (CLTM): "Faculty Frontlines: Research Perspectives on Reshaping the Future of Education"
- Dr. Shelly Zion, Professor, Department of Educational Leadership, Administration and Research (ELAR): "Shifting Mindsets: Designing Public School Systems that Develop Civic Participation, Counter Political Polarization and Cultivate Democracy"
- Dr. Cecile Sam, Associate Professor, ELAR, and Dr. Jill Perry, Associate Professor, CATE, "Mind the Gap: Understanding the Digital Divide in Generative AI Use in Education"





Meet Thomas Perren,

Sixth-Grade Teacher Certified Through Alternate Route Program for Men of Color

For **Thomas Perren**, now a sixth-grade Language Arts Teacher at West Avenue School in Bridgeton, New Jersey, the Men of Color Hope Achievers (MOCHA) program was “a blessing.”

“I was fed positive thoughts that I didn’t even have about myself,” Perren said of the program. “I was told I can do it when I really didn’t feel like I could do it.”

Perren was one of 22 students in the second MOCHA cohort. In May 2025, the other MOCHA Fellows completed an alternative route program dedicated to recruiting, preparing and retaining males of color who already have a bachelor’s degree in other areas to earn their teaching certification. (Read more about the MOCHA program’s completion and what’s next on page 2.)

“Here I sit in the classroom right now, in total control of what I’m doing and the direction where I’m going,” said Perren, whose background was in public assistance services.

Perren was selected to speak at the June 2025 Closing MOCHA Ceremony, an experience that he called an “indescribable honor.” Offering words of encouragement and advice to the cohort of MOCHA Fellows—including prioritizing being present over being perfect, building a rapport with students and paying encouragement forward by supporting new teachers—he used his remarks to reflect on the challenges he and his peers overcame and the growth they experienced during their two-year journey.

“The Rowan community can take great pride in knowing that this group of educators will carry forward the College’s values through their exemplary representation,” Perren said. “The efforts of the MOCHA program fostered academic excellence, leadership and community engagement among male students of color—key values that align directly with the institution’s commitment to equity, access and student success.”

GRANT HIGHLIGHTS

CED Faculty Attain Funding to Further Research and Outreach

In the College of Education, our faculty are contributing directly to K-12 education in our local communities and to the broader field of education. Some of the highlights of the considerable grant funding our faculty members have obtained to support their research and outreach efforts include the following.

Learning Resource Center-South

The Learning Resource Center-South (LRC-S), a New Jersey Department of Education grant-funded project that promotes the practices of inclusive education, by offering professional development for educators and school administrators, family and community events, a full resource library, and production services, was awarded \$1.25 million in NJDOE funding for the period from July 2025 through June 2026.

Leading the project are principal investigators **Dr. Amy Accardo**, Department Chair & Associate Professor of the Department of Wellness & Inclusive Services in Education (WISE) and **Dr. Brianne Morettini**, WISE Department Chair and Professor, with leadership support from **Dr. Estyr Bomgardner**, who took on the role of director of Professional Development and Education Services in Fall 2024.

“This award strengthens the College’s leadership in advancing inclusive education, equity and family engagement across New Jersey,” said Dr. Sarah Ferguson, Dean’s Fellow for Research and Associate Professor in the Department of Educational Leadership, Administration and Research. The renewal of funding underscores Rowan’s longstanding partnership with NJDOE in supporting teachers, schools and families.

Early Childhood Leadership Institute

The Early Childhood Leadership Institute (ECLI) received a continuation award of \$1,965,802 from the New Jersey Department of Human Services for the period from July 1, 2025, through June 30, 2026.

Led by principal investigator **Dr. Zeynep Isik-Ercan**, Professor & Department Chair in the Department of Early Childhood, Elementary Education & Critical Foundations, the ECLI strengthens leadership capacity among New Jersey’s early childhood professionals, advancing quality and equity in early learning settings statewide.

“This continuation funding directly supports the College’s vision of preparing and empowering professionals who serve young children, families and communities through evidence-based leadership training,” Dr. Ferguson said.

Project T.H.R.I.V.E.

Through her T.H.R.I.V.E. project, which stands for “Transforming, Holding Space, Reflecting, Inspiring, Valuing, Empowering,” PI **Dr. Kara Ieva**, Professor in the Counseling in Educational Settings Program in the WISE Department—in collaboration with **Dr. Beth Wassell**, Professor of Language Teacher Education in the Department of Content Area Teacher Education (CATE) and **Dr. Cathy Brant**, Associate Professor of Equity in Teacher Education in the Department of Early Childhood, Elementary Education & Critical Foundations (EEC)—is working to address significant attrition among novice and minoritized educators by developing a sustainable professional development and coaching model.

Funded by a \$374,998 grant from the New Jersey Department of Education during the period from June 2025 through May 31, 2026, the project builds Communities of Practice with a focus on educator social-emotional learning (SEL), targeting first- to third-year teachers in under-resourced districts.

“Project THRIVE is designed to address teacher retention and development through a healing-centered, equity-informed and sustainable instructional coaching model,” Dr. Ieva said. “By building both the human and systemic capacity of our partner schools, Project THRIVE exemplifies Rowan’s commitment to ensuring educational opportunities for all learners and transforming education for future generations.”

This project aligns with the College’s mission to sustain and diversify the teaching workforce while promoting holistic well-being for educators and students, noted Dr. Sarah Ferguson, Dean’s Fellow for Research.

“The initiative highlights Rowan’s innovative approach to addressing urgent statewide challenges in teacher retention,” Dr. Ferguson said. “By centering wellness and cultural responsiveness, the program positions Rowan as a leader in innovative, equity-driven approaches to teacher retention.”

Grow Local: ASPIRE Educator Pathways for South Jersey

An award of \$260,000 from the New Jersey Department of Education is supporting Grow Local: ASPIRE, a one-year initiative to recruit, prepare and certify 12 paraprofessionals from high-need South Jersey districts.

The program—led by PI **Dr. Kerry Cormier**, ¾-time Lecturer in the WISE Department, with collaborators **Dr. Issam Abi-el-Mona** (Associate Professor, CATE), **Dr. Brooke Hoffman** (Lecturer, CLTM), **Dr. Corine Brown** (Associate Professor, EEC) and **Dr. Michelle Damiani** (Associate Professor, WISE)—offers a fully funded, job-embedded pathway to teacher certification through Rowan’s ASPIRE to Teach program for paraprofessionals in partner districts such as Gloucester Township, Lindenwold and Woodstown-Pilegrove.

“The countywide ‘Grow Your Own’ strategy embedded in the program supports the diverse and immediate needs of each district partner while enabling Rowan to coordinate resources, leverage existing partnerships and ensure broader program reach,” said Dr. Cormier. “Grow Local aligns with the College of Education’s mission by removing financial barriers, providing high-quality, embedded support and forming strong university-district partnerships, as Grow Local will empower paraprofessionals to become certified teachers and lifelong advocates for inclusive, high-need classrooms.”

“The project exemplifies Rowan’s regionally responsive leadership in tackling educator shortages through district-engaged initiatives and cohort-based support structures,” Dr. Ferguson said. “This program emphasizes ‘Grow Your Own’ models of teacher recruitment, ensuring sustainable impact in local communities.”



CED Celebration Breakfast Honors Alumni Achievement, Engagement and Service

At the College of Education Celebration Breakfast in May 2025, the College recognized three exceptional alumni. **New Jersey Senator Troy Singleton** was honored with the Award for Community Service. **Dr. Corlette Mays** received the Award for University Engagement. **Dr. Al Lewis** was “deeply honored” to accept the Award for Outstanding Achievement.

“Rowan shaped who I am as a professional and as a person,” said Dr. Lewis, Superintendent of Glassboro Public Schools. “The rigorous coursework and caring mentorship of my professors taught me to think critically, lead with empathy and expand equity in every decision. The foundation I gained at Rowan has been central to fostering thriving, people-focused learning environments.”

Whether they are starting a new program, forming creative partnerships or seeking grant opportunities, CED alumni like Superintendent Lewis, Senator Singleton and Dr. Mays are making a difference.

“These alumni are individuals who see the needs that exist within the profession and are coming up with innovative ways to meet them,” said **Dr. Joanne Connor**, Senior Associate Dean for External Affairs. “These awards are a way for us to honor those who are engaged in that innovative type of discovery within the field of education.”

While 2025 marked the first College of Education Celebration Breakfast, the event carried forward the inaugural alumni awards presented during the Centennial Soiree in 2024.

“The Celebration Breakfast is a meaningful new tradition that honors those who support student learning, engagement and innovation,” said **Dr. Joseph Lizza**, Senior Director of Student Centers & Campus Activities. “Events like this offer a valuable opportunity to connect, reflect and celebrate our shared mission, strengthening our community.”

According to Dr. Lizza, who served on the event committee, one of the most important aspects of the planning process was ensuring that all of the individuals being celebrated were recognized thoughtfully and genuinely.

“While we wanted to spotlight the award recipients, we also aimed to foster a meaningful celebration that included everyone, highlighting the collective work we all do to support student learning and engagement, whether in K-12 or higher education,” he said.

In addition to honoring the excellent work CED alumni are doing, the Alumni Award events have also fostered deeper connections between the College and alumni in the field.

“By building these relationships with our alumni, it opens up the conversation about the needs they have in their districts and how we can work together to solve them,” Dr. Connor said.

Images from top: Dean Jean-Marie takes a selfie with guests of the Celebration Breakfast. Alumni Award for University Engagement winner **Dr. Al Lewis** (right) with his family and guests. **Crystal Toomer** and **Dr. Stacey Leftwich** welcome guests to the event. **Dean Jean-Marie** welcomes those in attendance, with Alumni Award winners and presenters listening from the stage.



MEDALLION CEREMONY

Celebrating the Achievements of the College of Education’s Finest Graduates

Each year, the Medallion Awards confer the highest honors on the College of Education’s exceptional graduating seniors, alumni and faculty members. While the individual Medallion Awards recognize different accomplishments, including academic pursuits, excellence in teaching and service leadership, each one distinguishes the recipient as an exceptional member of the Rowan University community.



Robin Haskell McBee Award for Exemplary Teacher Leadership recipient **Evi Kampouri Lagonik** with family at the Medallion Award ceremony.

The College of Education proudly recognized the following recipients at the 2025 Medallion Ceremony.

Amelia Biermann
Cecil F. Miller Special Education Award

Alexander Blaker
The Cone Award for Teaching Individuals with Disabilities

Madison Burlingame
Susan Taber Excellence in Elementary Mathematics Education Award

Deja Cook
John A. Rocco Postbaccalaureate Award for Excellence in Secondary Teaching

Nicole Hanson
Evelyn Slobodzian Excellence in Reading Award

Kristine Height
Daniel P. Stanley Health and Exercise Science Alumni Award

Evi Kampouri Lagonik
Robin Haskell McBee Award for Exemplary Teacher Leadership

Annabella Lee
Excellence in Elementary Education

Abby Morris
Ida and Jeff Margolis Award for Social Studies and Multicultural Teaching

Megan Murie
Thomas J. Gallia Award for Excellence in Secondary Science Teaching

Rania Saba
Larry Marcus Award for Excellence in Educational Leadership, Doctoral Studies

Erica Sanchez-Villanueva
Marion Rilling Award for Excellence in Early Childhood Education

Stephanie Scarpa
Robert L. Donaghay Award for Excellence in School Nursing

Connor Shields
Leonard L. Mancuso Award for Excellence in Secondary School Student Teaching

Kayla Williams
Stanton B. Langworthy Award for Excellence in Foundations of Education

Wendy Yanarella
Charles Cammarota Award for Counseling in Educational Settings





Camden City Schools Superintendent Delivers

Commencement Address

Superintendent Katrina McCombs delivers empowering words to the College of Education's graduates at the Commencement Ceremony.



Graduating College of Education students received insights and advice from an educational leader who has been in the field for more than 30 years. **Superintendent Katrina McCombs** was selected as Commencement Speaker for the 2025 College of Education ceremony.

Poised at the time to begin her new role as acting assistant commissioner for education for the New Jersey Department of Education in a matter of months, McCombs was known as a dedicated state district superintendent of Camden City Schools. In this role, she had shepherded the state-run district through years of challenges while advancing student achievement, expanding early childhood education and strengthening family and community engagement.

In her Commencement address, McCombs urged graduating College of Education students to keep a "CUP" on their desk throughout their career as a reminder to "Create Unending Possibilities."

"Always remember that at the heart of all you do, no matter how challenging things may get, you are assigned and called to Create Unending Possibilities in your students," McCombs said. "No matter their zip code, socioeconomic status or ability, each and every child deserves your absolute best. They each deserve to be motivated, inspired and challenged to be and to become their very best."

But to be prepared to rise to that challenge, McCombs said, educators must "continuously fill your cup with self-care, positivity and faith to keep your personal well from running dry."

"This will enable you to continue to pour into and create those unending possibilities in your students," McCombs said. "Surround yourself with people who will pour the very best into you. Create a circle made up of critical friends and those who will love and support you without condition. Most importantly, love yourself unapologetically and without condition."

IMPACT REPORT

ADMISSIONS

1,383 UNDERGRADUATES | 731 GRADUATES

TOTAL APPLICANTS

2,114

GRADUATES

251 UNDERGRADUATES | 240 GRADUATES

TOTAL GRADUATES

491

RESEARCH FACTS

34 PROPOSALS SUBMITTED

13 AWARDS RECEIVED

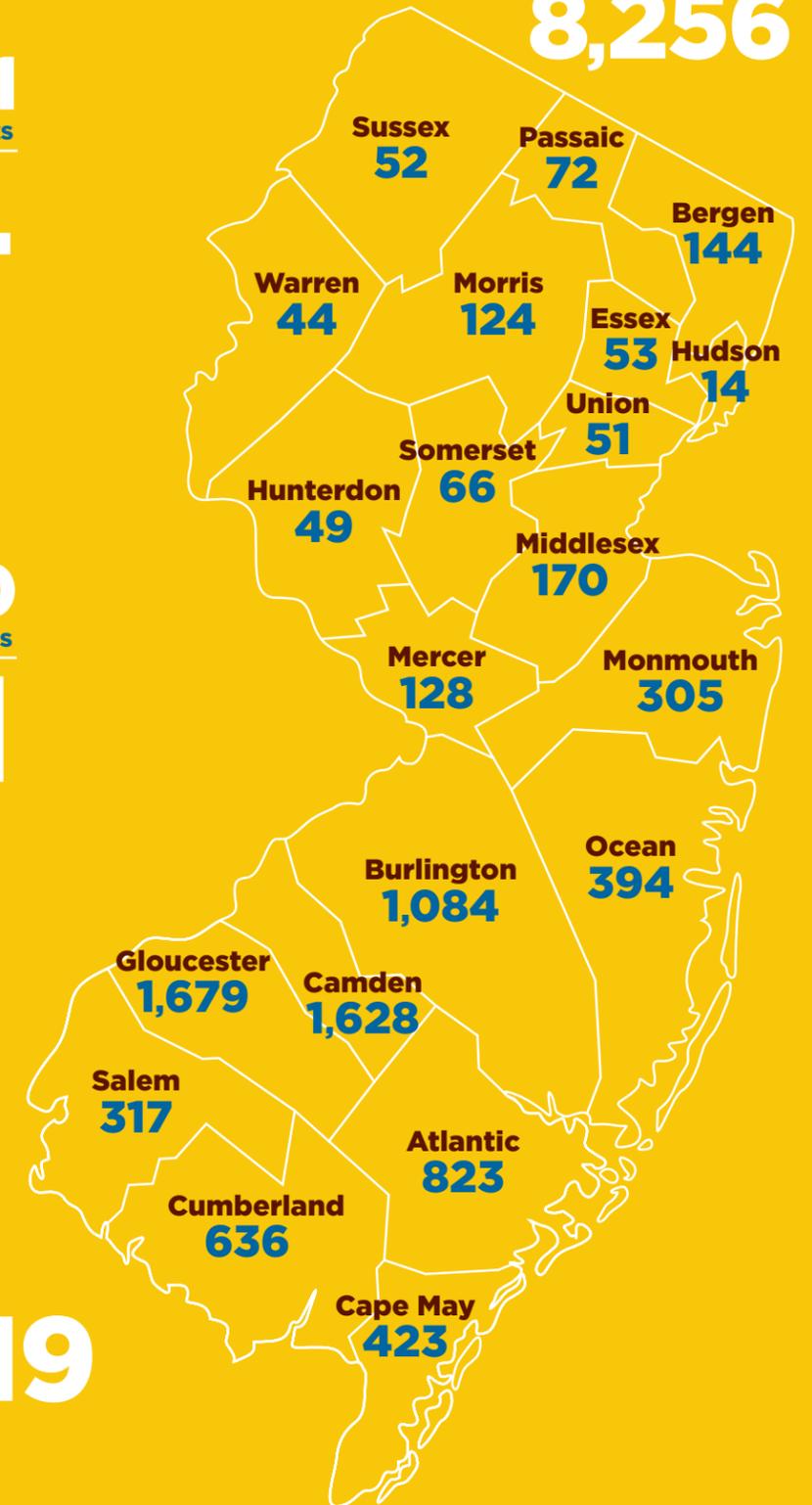
SPONSORED RESEARCH AWARDS

\$4,439,019

ALUMNI

GRADUATES WORKING IN EDUCATION, PER NJ COUNTY...

GRAND TOTAL = 8,256





201 Mullica Hill Road
Glassboro, NJ 08028

Phone: (856) 256-4752
Web: rowan.edu/education
Email: Education@rowan.edu