

Darryl G. Greer / Partnerships are key in addressing college affordability

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The April 15 Press editorial, "Controlling college costs/New ideas needed," focused appropriately on a timely, important topic, but it missed the mark regarding some of its assumptions and possible remedies.

The editorial is entirely correct that a college degree carries high value, not just in making more money during a lifetime, but also for an overall improved quality of life. Recent research indicates that this is true globally, not just in America. And it is correct, too, that the cost of college continues to rise, adding to the personal debt of students and families, and perhaps discouraging too many citizens from starting or completing college.

But the critical issue to recognize in looking for a remedy is not that students pay too much - rather, it's that they pay too big a share of college costs at public institutions, which 80 percent of all New Jersey students attend.

Two decades ago, with more robust state investment, students paid about 35 percent of educational costs, while the state paid about 65 percent. Today, the reverse is true. Students pay about 65 percent to 70 percent of educational costs, largely because of significant state disinvestment that shifted the burden to students and families. The state has pulled back so much from funding responsibilities that Richard Stockton College of New Jersey receives about the same state funding as it did about 10 years ago, placing greater pressure on tuition and fee increases and cost-containment practices. At the same time, enrollment at colleges, such as Stockton, has increased significantly, without state support.

Beyond public disinvestment, the major elements driving costs are not the remedy. Neither, as the editorial suggests, will reining in administrative salaries lead to a solution. Salaries of college administrators are a relatively small part of the spending picture. A major portion of administrative costs is in providing student services - from residence-hall advisors to library staff, police, and more.

The editorial very sensibly supports a study commission to review who New Jersey wants to

Such a study is long overdue in