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## Sweeney Visits Stockton to Stump for Ballot Initiative

The New Jersey Senate President spoke about the need to invest in higher education in New Jersey through the 'Building Our Future' Bond Act.

By [Anthony Bellano](#) | [Email the author](#) | October 25, 2012

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State Senate President Stephen Sweeney (D) called the [Building Our Future Bond Act](#) the most important issue facing the state this election cycle, outside the presidential election, and recognizes it's time for the state to pick up some of the burden for funding public institutions.

Sweeney made these remarks Wednesday morning, Oct. 24, during his visit to the [Richard Stockton College of New Jersey](#).

Sweeney spoke about the need to keep more New Jersey students interested in the science and math fields in the state when they go to college.

According to Sweeney, about 35,000 students leave the state to attend college upon graduating from high school, translating into about a \$7 billion loss for New Jersey.

"Once they leave, they stay wherever they're going," Sweeney said. "They don't come back. We're exporting our future."

The bond would allocate \$750 million to the state's public research universities as well as public, private and community colleges. It is Public Question #1 on the ballot in the November elections (see the attached .PDF from the [League of Women Voters](#), which analyzes the issue).

Institutions receiving funding would finance 25 percent of the project. The bond is repaid over 25 years.

"This is for classrooms and labs, not athletic fields and dorm rooms," Sweeney said.

According to [votesmart.org](#), bond proceeds would be allocated in the following ways:

- \$300 million for public research universities;
- \$247.5 million for State colleges and other State universities;
- \$150 million for county colleges; and
- \$52.5 million for private institutions with an endowment of \$1 billion or less.

Opponents of the bond argue Sweeney's point that the bond is specifically for academic needs, saying it doesn't address the non-academic concerns some institutions face. They also say the \$750 million falls short of the \$6 billion identified by college and university presidents identify as needs.

Some believe that during the current economic decline, the state shouldn't be asked to take on more debt.

"Our last investment in higher education was in 1988," Sweeney said. "Those who believe we can afford any more debt have to recognize our kids are not learning in the best facilities, and that we need to start making investments."

Stockton would apply money from the bond toward its new [Unified Science Center](#). According to college officials, Stockton graduates 18 percent of the total number of science and math graduates throughout the state.

The college can afford to complete two-thirds of the center, and it is being built in such a way that the final third can be added on.

Sweeney, Stockton President Herman J. Saatkamp, Special Assistant to the President Sharon Schulman, William J. Hughes Center for Public Policy Director Daniel J. Douglas, and representatives from the Building Our Future Foundation and the media toured the Pomona Campus, making a stop at the Biology Lab in the college's F-Wing.

According to Saatkamp, the lab was built in the 1970s and has seen no remodeling since.

"This state, unlike every other state, doesn't provide funding for its colleges," Saatkamp said. "All the major universities in the other states provide bonding, but New Jersey doesn't do that, which is why we rank 47<sup>th</sup> in higher education."

Since Saatkamp became Stockton President 10 years ago, the college has undergone a major transformation, including the addition of a [new Student Center](#), a [Johnny Rockets](#) on campus, new facilities for faculty and staff and the acquisition of the [Seaview Hotel and Golf Resort](#).

As a result, enrollment at Stockton College has also increased. This year, the college boasts 8,400 students, including its largest freshman class in history.

"We've done our own bonding to this point to meet our needs, but we've reached a point where we don't want to do anymore bonding" to alleviate the cost to the students on campus, Saatkamp said.

In July, the college increased tuition by 3 percent, meaning an increase of [\\$1,000 in tuition for some students over the last two years](#).

"They're doing everything they can," Sweeney said. "But they need labs and they need expansion. They're doing their part, but the state's not doing its part."

The Stockton Student Senate held a "Burritos, Ballots and The Bond" event Tuesday night in which 300 students signed up for absentee ballots, Student Senate President A.J. Vervoort said.

"We educated students on the bond and we also ensured we could make the mail-in voting as easy as possible," Vervoort said. "Mail-in voting is important because many students won't vote because they can't drive home to do it."

Those voting on the ballot questions and for school board candidates via mail-in ballot in this year's election will find both on the reverse side of the ballot, due to the number of federal, state and local elections this year.

The Student Senate will also call alumni and local residents for support.

"I understand the role it plays in moving New Jersey's education system forward," Vervoort said. "New Jersey is one of the few states that hasn't invested in higher education, and that's a problem."

The bond was passed in both houses of the legislature with just two total dissenting votes. A recent Stockton Polling Institute statewide poll showed 72 percent support for the bond, and nearly 200 businesses throughout the state support the bond act.

"This is great for New Jersey students, and the business community strongly supports the passage of this bond act," Southern New Jersey Chamber of Commerce President Debra DiLorenzo said.

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**[9:05 pm on Thursday, October 25, 2012](#)**

Maybe if the colleges cut their pensions, they could have money to make improvements that actually benefit students.

Do pensions help students?

Does more debt help anyone?

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