

Poll: Voters not warm to Christie plan to upend N.J. university system

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Megan DeMarco/Statehouse Bureau

By



Tony Kurdzuk/The Star-Ledger

Gov. Chris Christie appears in this January file photo.

TRENTON — Less than a quarter of New Jersey voters support Gov. Chris Christie's plan to fold Rutgers-Camden into Rowan University, according to a Rutgers-Eagleton poll released today.

According to the poll, 57 percent of registered voters disapprove of the proposal, which would result in Rutgers losing its satellite campus on Camden to Rowan, including the law and business schools there; 22 percent approve of the move, and 21 percent of voters say they are unsure.

Last month, Christie announced the recommendations of a special committee he established to study the creation of major research institutions in New Brunswick, Newark and Camden.

In addition to combining Rutgers-Camden and Rowan, the task force recommended reorganizing and renaming the Newark-based University of Medicine and Dentistry of New Jersey and merging UMDNJ's Robert Wood Johnson Medical School with Rutgers' New Brunswick campus.

The proposal to combine Rowan and Rutgers-Camden has been the most controversial aspect of the plan, with websites and Facebook pages — many created by Rutgers-Camden students and alumni — dedicated to opposing it.

"Gov. Christie's plan to merge Rowan and Rutgers-Camden may be the most unpopular idea he has put forward to date," said David Redlawsk, director of the Rutgers-Eagleton Poll.

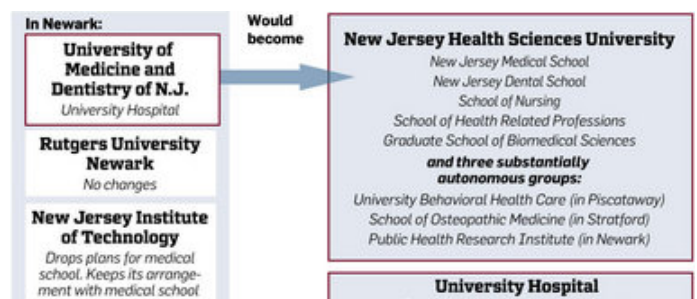
According to the poll, the proposal is unpopular even among Republicans and Christie supporters. About a third of Republicans polled approve of the reorganization, and 49 percent oppose it.

Among Democrats, 16 percent approve and 67 percent oppose the plan. Independent voters are opposed by a ratio of 2 to 1, with almost 25 percent unsure.

In South Jersey, 19 percent of voters support the merger and 71 percent oppose it. The highest support for the plan comes from northwestern New Jersey and the shore counties, where 27 percent approve and 44 percent disapprove.

"The stunning thing about these numbers is simply how negative voters are about the plan," Redlawsk said. "We thought those living in South Jersey would be more supportive than most, since the proposal is put forward as significant enhancement for the region. But the reality is this is a deeply disliked proposal."

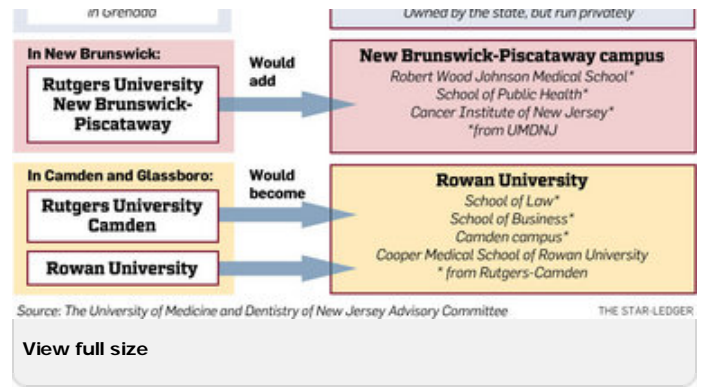
Christie has not put forward an executive reorganization plan or a bill



that would authorize the changes. A spokesman said yesterday the governor is working with legislators and representatives from the schools to determine the next steps.

The poll surveyed 914 adults from Thursday to Saturday.

A regularly scheduled meeting of the Rutgers board of governors is to take place this afternoon in Camden, and members of a group called "Stop the Merger" plan to rally outside before it begins.



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