



The State University  
of New York

## **Joint Legislative Public Hearing**

**New York State Assembly Committees on Ways & Means and Higher  
Education**

**New York State Senate Committees on Finance and Higher Education**

**2020/21 Executive Budget Testimony  
Chancellor Kristina M. Johnson  
February 4, 2020**

Good morning. I am Dr. Kristina Johnson, and I am privileged to serve as the 13<sup>th</sup> Chancellor of The State University of New York.

I would like to thank Chairpersons Krueger, Weinstein, Stavisky, and Glick; members of the Senate and Assembly; and legislative staff for affording me this opportunity to share our perspective on Governor Cuomo's proposed Executive Budget, the progress we have made since last year's hearing, and our vision for the coming year.

I would also like to acknowledge and thank Chairman Merryl Tisch and our entire SUNY Board of Trustees for their leadership and support, the great work of my executive leadership team and, of course, the people who keep our system moving forward: the students, faculty, staff, and leadership teams across our campuses.

Last fall, I completed an in-depth tour of every one of our colleges and universities: 64 in all. The breadth and diversity of SUNY is magnificent, with its community colleges, four-year colleges, graduate and doctoral research centers, medical schools, hospitals, a law school, and a national lab. SUNY also serves its nearly 1.4 million students through the Governor's robust workforce development initiative, which includes non-credit bearing courses, continuing education, and community outreach programs. All told, more than 90% of all New Yorkers are within 30 miles of a SUNY campus.

That proximity is important, and it was deliberate, as SUNY's founding in 1948 was made, in part, because of discrimination routinely practiced at the time by private institutions. The State knew that was no longer tolerable, especially after fighting a war in which so many people of color, women, and immigrants had served bravely at home and overseas. That's why accessibility, affordability, and quality education are at SUNY's core.

Because of the doors that SUNY has thrown open throughout our history, New York today is one of the most highly educated states in the nation.

As you may know, I am an engineer by training. For me, it comes down to the data. Are we creating measurable opportunity for the students we serve? Are we successfully moving our system forward in a way that anticipates emerging economic needs, particularly in the

communities we serve? And, have we created forward momentum so that Governor Cuomo and the Legislature can feel confident that when SUNY asks for your support, you can trust we are doing the most good for as many people as possible? The answers are yes, and I appreciate the opportunity to discuss the progress we have made with the support of Governor Cuomo and each of you here today.

Social mobility is one of the greatest markers of success that we have. I want to share just a few examples that pertain to SUNY:

- *U.S. News and World Report* released its rankings of the nation's best colleges in the fall; 21 of our schools were listed on the National and Northeastern lists, including Stony Brook University, the University at Albany, the University at Buffalo, SUNY Oswego, FIT, and many more.
- 23 of SUNY's 29 four-year colleges were also featured in *CNN/MONEY's* 2019 list of Best Colleges for Your Money, including Buffalo State College, SUNY Purchase, SUNY Old Westbury, SUNY Delhi, and others, while *Kiplinger's* ranked Binghamton University as the top public school for value in the country; 14 other SUNY schools made that select list as well.

SUNY is clearly known for the quality of education we provide. But SUNY is also the largest comprehensive system of higher education in the U.S., and because of our size, we are a game-changer for New York's economy. For this current academic year, we received 371,000 applications. And with three million alumni across the globe, roughly three out of every four SUNY alums remain in New York—living, working, and raising families—five years out from their graduation.

One-third of the state's entire educated workforce holds a SUNY degree.

SUNY hospitals are the heartbeat of local healthcare in the underserved communities they call home: Brooklyn, Central New York, and Long Island. Each SUNY hospital serves higher percentages of people covered by Medicaid and Medicare than the general population seen at other hospitals. And collectively, these serve 1.3 million individual patients every year—many

patients who may otherwise not have had access to the lifesaving care they need. From an educational perspective, our SUNY Health programs graduate one out of every three nurses, one out of every four doctors, and one out of every seven dentists in this state.

Our community colleges sector is critically important to providing for the State of New York an educated workforce for our dynamic economy. They are also the first step for many of our students to realizing their dreams and aspirations for social mobility. We look forward to working with the Governor and the Legislature throughout the budget process to restore the community college funding model included in last year's budget. This program was established in the 2019-20 Budget and sets a "floor" for each campus and includes an FTE increase for colleges with enrollment growth. We hope the Legislature can find agreement on restoration of the "floor" model to 100 percent of 2019-20 levels. Thank you for your important support last year on establishing the floor for our community colleges.

SUNY's Educational Opportunity Programs (EOPs) are life-changing, and today, we have 10,294 students moving through 48 campus-based programs. Our 12 Educational Opportunity Centers (EOCs) currently have another 11,796 enrolled students—individuals whose family income is an average of \$15,000 per year and who graduate and go on to higher earnings or to continue their education, often at a SUNY campus.

While I know there isn't time to discuss every program, all of this work has been made possible because Governor Cuomo and the Legislature have made college affordability a priority. New York State is, without question, a national leader due to your work.

Students benefit from the Excelsior Scholarship, now in its third year. We can report the first full two-year results with you today. Results from the first two years of the program show that Excelsior program enrollment increased 20 percent in the number of SUNY and CUNY students in the program, leading to 24,000 in the current academic year. Retention rates for first-year students enrolled in Excelsior at community colleges increased 20 percent over those who are not Excelsior students. We are excited to further build on this progress by supporting Governor Cuomo's plan to raise the cap on family income eligibility to \$150,000.

As a result of the Excelsior Scholarship and New York State's and SUNY's significant financial aid for students, today, nearly half of all SUNY students graduate debt-free. So, thank you and the Governor for all that you do to make this a reality for our students. We are committed to using the SUNY System's size, scope and scale to ensure that every student who comes through our doors—on campus or online—has access to the wrap-around supports and services needed to successfully complete their degree. We have put all of our student success initiatives under the SUNY ACHIEVE umbrella and with your support have realized the following:

- **TEXTBOOKS:** Since Fall of 2017, the State's investment in Open Educational Resources has lowered the costs of textbooks and other academic materials for SUNY students across 59 campuses by \$47 million.
- **RE-ENROLL TO COMPLETE:** As a result of SUNY's Provost Innovation Fund Improvement Fund (PIF), we developed a strategy to re-engage students who have dis-enrolled and convince them to return to their studies during the "grace period" before student loan repayments come due. Today, we have re-enrolled more than 8,000 students to SUNY campuses alone.
- **MENTAL HEALTH:** With rising rates of anxiety, depression, and suicide among young adults nationwide, we launched a Student Mental Health and Wellness Task Force, led by SUNY Oswego President Deborah Stanley and SUNY Downstate Health Sciences University President Wayne Riley. Their task is to identify necessary policy changes and develop a comprehensive strategy and consistent practices across SUNY colleges and universities to meet students' mental health needs.
- **FOOD INSECURITY:** At Governor Cuomo's direction, SUNY established our Food Insecurity Task Force in 2018 so that no student had to choose between attending college and being able to afford to eat. SUNY has accessible food pantries on or near every single campus as a result, and in 2019 there were 316,000 visits.
- **SUNY ACHIEVE:** SUNY Achieve refers to a collection of student success interventions, across all of our institutions, with a particular emphasis on scalability. Over 150,000 SUNY students are impacted by one or more SUNY Achieve programs. As an example, we have tackled one of the most significant hurdles that many students face—English

and math. In the past, students who come to our colleges, who based on placement tests are deemed not college ready, were automatically assigned to a semester of non-credit bearing remedial coursework. This caused disillusionment for countless students. We are changing that outcome for thousands of students, and today, thanks to our SUNY Achieve program, 27 campuses have put into place co-requisite English or math programs that involve credit-bearing work with developmental instruction. Pass rates have increased significantly, and we aim to triple the number of students taking these courses by 2023.

- **DIVERSITY:** We have made diversity in our leadership and on our campuses a top priority because we know that students perform better when they are learning from someone whose experience to which they can relate. Our newly created PRODIG program has set the ambitious goal of 1,000 new faculty from underserved communities or women in stem fields by 2030. And less than one year into our launch, we have made 74 new hires, and secured 100 percent participation from state-operated campuses. I am also proud to share updates about a program I know is important to the Legislature—the Hispanic Leadership Institute (HLI) —which is now chaired by our great president from the University at Albany, Havidán Rodríguez, and has just resulted in the promotion of two graduates entering SUNY system administration leadership positions.

Why does all of this work matter? Because higher education, workforce development, economic growth, and opportunity are all inextricably linked. We are rapidly arriving at a place where post-secondary education is becoming increasingly necessary to meet changing economic needs. In the last 10 years alone, as the U.S. economy emerged from the Great Recession, the country created 18.3 million new net jobs for adults 25 and over. A remarkable 89 percent of them went to individuals with at least some college degree.

New, middle-skill jobs are in health care, information technology, advanced manufacturing, renewable energy, and other fields that require education and training beyond high school. The growing demand for these jobs has driven up wages, while individuals without the needed education have been held in lower-paying positions, creating a more and more unequal society

nationwide. Data correlates with poorer health and declining life expectancies, demonstrating an unwinding of the great achievements of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century.

As a result of the robust, high-quality education SUNY provides, given the exceptional workforces we train, and innovative research that comes out of our campuses, we are uniquely positioned to build on the momentum we've created. I know because we're seeing that confidence from external partners turn into major investments in our programming. For example:

- Increase of \$136 million in FY19 over FY18 for sponsored research expenditures;
- The U.S. Department of Energy just selected Brookhaven National Laboratory, which is co-managed by Stony Brook University and Batelle, as the host for its multi-billion-dollar electron-ion collider. The collider will probe the mysteries of the most powerful force in the universe—the strong force that holds the nucleus of an atom together;
- Empire State Development partnered with Cree to bring the world's largest silicon carbide fab to SUNY Poly Marcy Nanocenter, creating over 600 new careers in the process.

Indeed, research is at the core of our DNA. Further proof of this was communicated to me early on October 9<sup>th</sup> when I got a call from Binghamton University President Harvey Stenger. SUNY's Distinguished Professor Dr. M. Stanley Whittingham was awarded the Nobel Prize in Chemistry in 2019, a tremendous recognition for his contributions to the development of the lithium-ion battery.

These developments do not happen in a vacuum. The resources provided to SUNY by Governor Cuomo and the Legislature set the pathway for us to welcome and educate the next generation of leaders—the workers that businesses need to locate to New York and succeed. In the process, we lift up New Yorkers who might otherwise not have the opportunity to find their passion.

Two new programs proposed by Governor Cuomo in the Executive Budget, that I hope will garner your support, will help us to take the next step—establishment of the:

- SUNY Global Cannabis Center for Science, Research, and Education
- Offshore Wind Training Institute

The Executive Budget demonstrates a powerful commitment to the role SUNY plays in our statewide and local economies and builds on the momentum we have seen in recent years by investing in our infrastructure, academic competitiveness, and student supports.

Governor Cuomo has included \$550 million in capital funding for Critical Maintenance—crucial funding that helps to keep the lights on at about 1,850 SUNY-operated buildings—as well as a new \$300 million matching program that can be used for new construction or major renovations, including STEM-focused academic buildings. The Executive Budget also provides \$150 million in capital funding for SUNY’s three hospitals—\$50 million each—as well as the State share for most of the community college projects that secured local sponsor support.

Our use of capital funding is wise, addressing our most critical needs while also utilizing new technologies not found on any other campus in the U.S., and have the potential due to our size and representation across the state to shift existing and support emerging markets. This is important as we move towards net-zero emissions by 2050. SUNY is exceeding the goals of the Climate Leadership and Community Protection Act, which calls for a 40 percent greenhouse gas reduction by 2030. Right now, we’re already at a 39 percent reduction, and have several exciting initiatives rolling out in 2020 that I look forward to sharing with you.

As I already mentioned, the Governor’s proposed budget protects higher education’s opportunity programs and takes the next step on free tuition by expanding the Excelsior Scholarship. To compete and deliver the quality education that SUNY is known for requires resources. That’s why we are also grateful that the Executive Budget provides full support for employee benefits at our State-operated campuses and continues Maintenance of Effort and operating support provisions that invest in our state-operated campuses.

We are asking for support to offset increased contractual obligations as well as additional funding for programs such as:

- Restoration of the Community College funding floor established in last year’s budget



- Child Care at Community Colleges
- Mental Health Tele-Counseling
- Small Business Development Centers
- Graduate Diversity Fellowships
- Hispanic Leadership Institute

We will also be monitoring the Medicaid Redesign Team's forthcoming recommendations as they relate to our three hospitals. As I mentioned earlier, SUNY's hospitals are safety-net hospitals, serving the most vulnerable populations in their communities. They are also the major economic engines for the communities they serve, having a combined economic activity of over \$6 billion. They generate over \$800 million in tax dollars, and have approximately \$1.8 billion in annual payrolls, which means they not only provide care, but act as the foundation for other small businesses in the region. In order to allow SUNY hospitals to invest in improved services, SUNY asks that the State continue to explore ways to provide help to these vital institutions.

There is so much to be proud of, and it is my honor to be with you today sharing only a snapshot of the progress SUNY is making. I also recognize that our work is just beginning, as we continue to transform SUNY, the largest system of higher education, to meet the evolving needs of our students and economy. I look forward to working with all of you during the upcoming legislative session and would be happy to take any questions.