

NYPIRG CLOSE UP: THE EXECUTIVE'S HIGHER EDUCATION BUDGET

Below is a summary of NYPIRG's views on the Executive Budget. A more detailed reaction is contained in our testimony delivered to the legislative fiscal committees. The SFY 2021-2022 budget increases tuition, cuts support for public colleges, cuts financial aid programs, and fails to adequately address the needs of low-income students.

Reject the proposed 5-year expansion of public college tuition hikes. Instead, freeze tuition and move to free CUNY/SUNY

Public college tuition has risen by more than double the rate of inflation over the past decade, costing students billions of dollars in additional tuition charges. The Executive Budget calls for adding five more years to New York's automatic annual tuition increases. **NYPIRG urges rejection of that proposal and freezing tuition at the current level.**

Fully Fund CUNY and SUNY: Eliminate the "TAP Gap" and enhance the Maintenance of Effort

Since 2011, New York State has decoupled the maximum TAP award from public college tuition rates and decreed that the colleges themselves would have to supplement financial assistance to the lowest income students. This deepening hole – the "TAP Gap" – has shortchanged CUNY and SUNY for years, starving campus budgets and putting student support services and educational quality at risk. This year, CUNY and SUNY have an estimated \$147 million TAP Gap.

Additionally, while the state promised in 2011 to maintain funding levels as it raised the tuition burden on students, the state has not included funding for inflationary or other mandatory cost increases like electricity and staff contracts. **NYPIRG urges rejection of cuts to public college base aid and urges elimination of historic funding gaps.**

Boost Support for Community Colleges

The job training and re-training for under-employed and unemployed workers provided by community colleges is more critical than ever as New Yorkers look to a post-COVID future. However, the Governor's Executive Budget reduces base aid at CUNY and SUNY community colleges due to enrollment reductions. While base aid per Full Time Equivalent student remains flat, it has long been clear that New York charges one of the highest public community college average tuitions in the nation. **We urge rejection of enrollment-bound funding cuts to community colleges.** Instead, New York should match state funding to the tuition costs borne by college students, on a full-time equivalent basis, while setting a financial floor for covering community college costs.¹

¹ More on community colleges can be found here:

https://www.nypirgstudents.org/pubs/202102/Policy_Close_Up_higher_ed_2.3.21.pdf.

POSITIONS

Reject the proposed 5-year-long automatic public college tuition hikes

Fully fund CUNY and SUNY: eliminate the "TAP Gap" and enhance the state's Maintenance of Effort

Boost state support for community colleges

Overhaul TAP; raise max and min awards, expand to excluded populations

Restore Bundy Aid and CUNY ASAP

Restore campus childcare

Restore and expand mental health services



Overhaul TAP

In the nearly 50 years of its existence, the Tuition Assistance Program has helped four million New Yorkers afford college. But a lot has changed since the program's founding in 1974, and TAP has not kept pace. Updating it to meet the needs of today's students would have significant social and economic benefits. **TAP should be overhauled by: increasing the maximum award to at least \$7,700; increasing the number of semesters of TAP eligibility for all students; restoring eligibility to students in default on federal student loans; restoring TAP grants to graduate students; expanding TAP to individuals who are currently incarcerated; making the program more accessible to part-time students; and making awards available in the summer and winter sessions.**

Restore Bundy Aid and CUNY ASAP

The Governor's Executive Budget cuts CUNY's ASAP program by \$2.5 million and zeroes out funding for Bundy Aid, financial aid for private institutions, by cutting \$35 million. Smaller independent colleges are facing serious financial difficulties exacerbated by the pandemic. For example, recently Concordia College announced that it is closing and the College of St. Rose announced that it is eliminating 25 academic programs and laying off 20 percent of its tenured faculty. CUNY's ASAP assists students in earning associate degrees within three years by providing a range of financial, academic, and personal wrap-around supports. **NYPIRG urges restoration of Bundy Aid and the CUNY ASAP, a program with proven success in increasing graduation rates.**

Restore and Protect Child Care Centers

The cost of child care can be a significant barrier toward accessing a degree. While the average cost of private child care or daycare in NYC can be prohibitively expensive, enrolling a child in daycare at CUNY can cost as little as \$5 a day. It's unsurprising that access to affordable child care increases degree completion rates. A study by Monroe Community College in Rochester, NY, found that student parents that used the child care center there were 30 percent more likely to stay in school. Yet, Governor Cuomo's Executive Budget cuts childcare at SUNY by \$1.1 million dollars and by \$902,000 at CUNY. **We urge restoration of CUNY and SUNY childcare center funding.**

Expand Mental Health Services

From isolation, to lost wages, and public health stress, the COVID-19 pandemic has compounded the anxiety and depression experienced by students. CUNY and SUNY need consistent adequate resources to mobilize a more robust university-based response, however these services are unfunded in the Governor's Executive Budget. Hiring new on-campus mental health counselors and advisors and expanding tele-counseling programs must be a priority and must not burden students with additional fees. **NYPIRG urges enhanced support for these important programs.**

Invest in Safe Campus Reopening and Fund Sustainability

As students, faculty, and staff return to full-scale on-campus learning, investment to ensure a safe and healthy learning environment are critical. From upgrades like better ventilation systems, to daily needs such as working bathroom facilities and soap, a detailed safe reopening plan will be important to instill trust among the public. Additionally, New York's colleges and universities have the opportunity and moral imperative to combat the global climate crisis by dedicating State capital funds for aggressive campus energy efficiency, sustainability, research, and training programs. **We urge support for CUNY and SUNY capital requests.**

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