



The Education Trust—New York

Testimony for Joint Legislative Public Hearing on the 2022-2023 Executive Budget Proposal: Postsecondary Education

Greetings chairpersons and honorable members of the legislature. Thank you for the opportunity to offer this testimony as you review the 2022-2023 Executive Budget.

I am Dr. Dia Bryant and I am honored to serve as the executive director of The Education Trust—New York. Ed Trust—NY is a non-profit and non-partisan research, policy, and advocacy organization that works to advance educational equity from birth through college and into the workforce. Our mission is to attain educational justice through research, policy, and advocacy that results in all students – especially those from low-income backgrounds and communities of color—achieving at high levels from birth through college completion and entry into the workforce. Our work is data-centered and student-focused, and we work in close partnership with civil rights, education, parent, and business organizations across the state including the New York Equity Coalition, the Raising NY coalition, and the REACH NY network. The REACH NY network, in particular, is focused on postsecondary equity.

Equity is central to our mission and drives our advocacy for the communities we serve. We believe educational equity is achievable in New York through policies that address systemic barriers and opportunity gaps to ensure that all New Yorkers have access to a high-quality postsecondary education that results in personal fulfillment, family-sustaining wages, and civic participation.

Here are a few data points from our work with the REACH NY network that guide our understanding of the historical and current inequities in postsecondary education and highlight the urgency to improve educational equity in New York:

- **Addressing equity gaps in postsecondary outcomes.** One of our recent reports reveals that White residents are almost two times as likely to hold a postsecondary degree as American Indian, Black, and Latinx residents in New York. Further data revealed that White students are 1.6 times more likely to complete their certificate or degree than American Indian, Black, and Latinx students at both public 2-year institutions. A similar pattern of inequity emerged at 4-year institutions where completion rates at institutions with the lowest share of Pell recipients are 1.6 times greater than at institutions with the highest share of Pell recipients. ¹
- **Ensuring pathways from college-to-workforce lead to family-sustaining wages.** Despite equivalent investments of time, institutions and fields of study can lead to significant gaps in median earnings. Half of the median earnings for fields of study toward an Associate's degree are below \$28,000, which is only slightly above the 2019 Federal Poverty Line for a family of four, which was \$25,750. Additionally, median earnings are higher at institutions that serve the smallest shares of Pell-eligible students and American Indian, Black, and Latinx students than at institutions that serve the largest shares of Pell-eligible students. ²

- **Increasing access to and improving mental health resources and other wraparound services.** Our poll assessing the higher education landscape during the pandemic revealed that students are experiencing unmet basic needs and gaps in access to mental health services and psychological supports. One in three students from low-income backgrounds expressed concerns with affording basic expenses like food, housing, and tuition, and more than half of these students reported skipping or reducing meals as a result of the pandemic. Additionally, while three-quarters of students expressed the need for mental health services and counseling, only one-quarter of students report their schools providing these critical supports. ³

Governor Hochul's 2022-2023 Executive Budget includes several key investments to improve access and affordability in higher education and increase preparedness for participation in the workforce. The Executive Budget recognizes the incredible toll the ongoing pandemic has taken and continues to take on New York's people and its economy. To get New York back on track, help the State economically recover, and prepare New Yorkers to join a more educated and highly-skilled workforce, we urge lawmakers to protect the provisions that aim to foster more equity for all residents and consider other critical equity proposals that would benefit the State and its residents for years to come.

Among these critical equity investments in postsecondary education and the workforce are:

- **Committing to increasing statewide attainment.** The Executive Budget includes a comprehensive plan to make higher education in New York more affordable and accessible and to help two-thirds of New Yorkers earn a high-quality postsecondary credential or degree by 2030. Achieving this goal means that 6.5 million additional residents will hold a postsecondary degree in the next eight years. Now more than ever, economic opportunity and financial security are intertwined with educational attainment. Improving attainment in New York by 2030 requires a commitment to improving postsecondary outcomes for all races and ethnicities in every New York region. For example, to close the postsecondary attainment gap in the New York City region, the overwhelming majority of these degrees would need to be awarded to Black and Latinx residents. Similar inequities exist outside of New York City, where nearly 1-in-2 of the additional postsecondary degrees would need to be awarded to Black and Latinx residents. ⁴
- **Improving access to higher education financial aid.** The Executive Budget also includes several key investments into making college more affordable for all students. This includes a \$150 million commitment to expand the Tuition Assistance Program (TAP), allowing part-time students and students who have been impacted by the criminal justice system to participate, as well as a 10% increase in financial support for students who are economically disadvantaged. The proposed budget also expands the types and number of high-quality workforce credentials that will be eligible for state funding. An additional \$24M has been allocated to support students historically underserved by the education system through opportunity programs and training centers at CUNY.

There are areas within the Executive Budget that offer some room for additional equity-informed investments. Given the ongoing challenges that our education systems continue to encounter, we ask the legislature to prioritize these issues as legislative and budgetary processes continue:

- **Adopting an equity-focused attainment goal.** An equity-focused attainment goal should ensure improvements in attainment outcomes are aligned with current and future regional labor needs and support students from historically underserved backgrounds in earning a college degree or high-quality, industry-recognized workforce credential. To achieve this, the State should pursue a postsecondary equity agenda that:
 - Establishes interim benchmarks and definitive measures of success that drive improvements in postsecondary outcomes with an equity lens. The attainment goal should also require state leaders at all levels to focus on the postsecondary academic and non-academic needs of groups of students that too often go underserved;
 - Creates a statewide early childhood-to-workforce data system to support institutions in identifying and addressing equity gaps in the educational pipeline and assess the ongoing impact of the pandemic on postsecondary and workforce outcomes. The data system should include college enrollment, persistence, and completion data and key workforce indicators, such as wage and employment data; and,
 - Strengthens consumer protection and protection for borrowers by providing oversight and improving program approval processes for schools that receive funds from federal and state aid programs. The State should include measures of access and quality, including workforce outcomes, as part of its accountability standards.
- **Strengthening college-to-workforce pipeline.** Governor Hochul’s proposed budget commits to producing a well-trained and educated workforce with specific investments to rebuild New York’s healthcare and teacher workforces. To prepare students for in-demand jobs and upwardly mobile careers, operational support for SUNY and CUNY should be directed toward programs and initiatives that promote career exposure and development, including but not limited to increased academic and career advising, internship opportunities, and other critical supports to prepare students for the workforce. Investments focusing on strengthening the pipeline from postsecondary completion to workforce outcomes will help ensure a more equitable higher education system and put all New Yorkers on the path to earning a family-sustaining income and meeting their full potential.

We thank you for this opportunity to appear before you and discuss strategies to improve educational equity in New York for all students. We are grateful for your leadership on these critical issues, and we are hopeful to see the aforementioned items and any other equity provisions prioritized in the budget. The Ed Trust–NY team is available to discuss the items herein and would like to offer our team as a resource as the committee continues to think about and design an equitable path toward postsecondary and economic recovery.

In partnership,

Dia N. Bryant

¹ REACH NY, “Aiming Higher: How improving postsecondary equity and attainment will put New York State on the path to a bright future” (New York, NY: 2020). Available at: <https://newyork.edtrust.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/12/Aiming-Higher.pdf>.

² REACH NY, “Beyond Attainment: A look at postsecondary pathways that lead to higher earnings” (New York, NY: 2021). Available at: https://newyork.edtrust.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/04/Beyond-Attainment_F_4.12.2021-1.pdf.

³ See <https://NewYork.EdTrust.org/Covid-19/> for additional details.

⁴ REACH NY, “Aiming Higher: How improving postsecondary equity and attainment will put New York State on the path to a bright future” (New York, NY: 2020). Available at: <https://newyork.edtrust.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/12/Aiming-Higher.pdf>.