



**TESTIMONY
OF THE
NEW YORK PUBLIC INTEREST RESEARCH GROUP
BEFORE THE
JOINT LEGISLATIVE BUDGET HEARING ON HIGHER EDUCATION
FOR THE 2023-2024 BUDGET
February 27, 2023
Albany, New York**

The New York Public Interest Research Group (NYPIRG) is a statewide, nonpartisan, nonprofit organization founded by college students in 1973 to engage their peers in civic life. NYPIRG’s broad programmatic work provides students with a range of opportunities to participate in public affairs and advance responses to social problems that matter most to them. In collaboration with and guided by professional staff—researchers, organizers, advocates and attorneys—students tackle pressing issues while learning and developing professional-level skills that will boost their prospects for success in college, the job market and throughout their lives. Our Board of Directors consists of public and independent college and university students elected from campuses with NYPIRG chapters across the State.

Given the mounting crisis in New York’s system of higher education, we are deeply disappointed with the governor’s budget. While there are elements worthy of support, her plan follows a failed blueprint; a blueprint that shifts more costs onto students and their families, underfunds public higher education institutions, and ignores the necessary steps that must be taken in order to reverse the financial “death spiral” that is engulfing too many public and independent colleges. State underinvestment in higher education not only forces colleges and college students to do more with less, it also hurts the state’s economy.

We recommend that this year a significant infusion of support be injected to all sectors of the higher education system. Specific recommendations for the Legislature to advocate for in the final budget include:

- Reject the proposed tuition hikes.
- Dramatically increase base aid support for CUNY and SUNY, including passage of the New Deal for CUNY and analogous funding for SUNY to reduce the tuition burden and protect quality of education.
- Boost support for community colleges to hold funding harmless to 100% of 2019-2020 levels and increase per-FTE base aid.
- Expand the Tuition Assistance Program to graduate students, increase the minimum awards, extend the income threshold, make aid available in the summer and winter, and extend eligibility for students with Intellectual Disabilities.
- Enhance Opportunity Programs.

- Restore Bundy Aid to historical levels of \$100 million for independent institutions.
- Expand funding to existing and create new student support programs including campus childcare, the Hunger Free Campus Act, mental health services, and reduced price transit fares.

New York’s Higher Education Budget

While usually we would expect budgets to be recognized for what the state could be giving to the people of New York States, this year's budget is rather characterized by what it lacks. This year’s Executive Budget proposal falls short in fulfilling the Governor’s \$1.5 billion, five-year commitment to restore SUNY and CUNY and increase graduation rates at a time when funds are desperately needed. While CUNY and SUNY base aid levels are left essentially flat, the Executive Budget proposes a tuition hike of 3% or the Higher Education Price Index, whichever is lower, and an additional 6% hike at SUNY’s University Centers. New York State should be trying to make education more affordable, not less. Further, critical opportunity programs and funding for campus mental health services were cut in comparison with last year’s final budget and funding for the state’s largest financial assistance program, the Tuition Assistance Program (TAP), remains flat without the necessary expansions to match the needs of today's student body. The state must do all it can to lower the cost of public higher education, as a college degree remains the most effective path to economic mobility.

Over the Years: Underfunding Higher Education In New York

Decades of state neglect – and worse – have taken its toll on New York’s higher education sector. Looking at the roll out of higher education policy named “NYSUNY 2020” in 2011, nearly constant hikes have raised tuition rates by more than 42%. When factoring inflation, the automatic tuition hikes at both SUNY and CUNY have far exceeded the growth in the economy. And while students and their families were asked to shoulder more of the tuition burden, the state did not keep up their end of the bargain to increase state funding.

In fact, policies passed under NYSUNY 2020 created widening gulfs between the financial needs of colleges and the funding levels provided by the State. For one example, prior to 2011, New York would increase the maximum TAP award to match the state’s public college tuition. In this manner, the lowest income students would be protected from the impacts of tuition hikes. In addition, students attending independent colleges and universities would benefit from enhanced affordability by boosting TAP support. The state’s NYSUNY 2020 law de-coupled the maximum TAP award from rising public college tuition rates and decreed that the colleges themselves would have to supplement financial assistance to the lowest income students. This hole – the “TAP Gap” – racked up many millions of dollars every year over the past decade before, laudably, the Governor and Legislature eliminated it in last year’s final budget. However, the financial damage caused by the prior years’ gaps has not been restored. Those previous years’ policies have undermined the financial strength of public colleges and universities today.

Additionally, higher education institutions across the nation have been experiencing enrollment challenges, from decreases to nose dives. Nationally during the pre-pandemic period, 4-year public colleges and universities saw a fairly stable undergraduate enrollment. But community colleges saw a significant drop. By spring of 2021, four-year public college enrollment had decreased substantially, and community college enrollment dropped further.¹ Of course, it is not surprising that there was a drop in enrollment that was resulting from the pandemic, but the four-year public colleges slide was clearly the result of the pandemic, while the drop in community college enrollment had been an ongoing problem during the pre-pandemic period.

¹ National Student Clearinghouse Research Center, see https://nscresearchcenter.org/wp-content/uploads/CTEE_Report_Spring_2021.pdf.

NYPIRG has reviewed enrollment data at SUNY and CUNY. For SUNY, even prior to the pandemic, the system was losing undergraduate enrollment from its 4-year colleges and community colleges – which continued through the pandemic. Only SUNY’s University Centers escaped this enrollment slide.² CUNY’s pre-pandemic enrollment trends largely matched the national trends. However, *once the pandemic hit*, CUNY saw significant drops in enrollment.³ For institutions like CUNY and SUNY that are overly reliant on tuition dollars, lost enrollment can translate to financial insolvency quickly.

The experience in the independent sector was similar to SUNY (although not as dramatic). During the *pre-pandemic period*, larger colleges and universities had seen growth in the student populations, where smaller ones have seen losses.⁴

One observation that could be made is that the state’s stagnant population has fueled the decline in enrollments. It is undeniably the case that the state’s college-aged population, those between the ages of 18 and 24, have seen population declines.⁵ However, there can also be no doubt that hundreds of thousands of individuals in that age bracket did not attend college and identifying obstacles to that population’s college participation is worth a close examination.⁶

Now, public reports of a dangerous slide to financial insolvency are increasing:

- All but six of the state-operated SUNY campuses have structural or projected deficits. In total, these institutions have an aggregated deficit of \$160 million.⁷
- CUNY has ordered colleges to slash their budgets by at least five percent and implement a hiring freeze.⁸

² Information obtained from the New York State Data Portal, <https://data.ny.gov/Education/Headcount-Enrollment-by-Student-Level-and-Student-/4fyc-bf8i/data>.

³ Information obtained from the City University of New York, Office of Institutional Research, <https://www.cuny.edu/about/administration/offices/oira/institutional/data/>. Information obtained upon request.

⁴ Ibid, https://nscresearchcenter.org/wp-content/uploads/CTEE_Report_Fall_2019.pdf, page 5.

⁵ U.S. Census Bureau. The Bureau estimates that the 18-24 population declined from 1.98 million in 2010 to 1.74 million in 2021. Annual Estimates of the Resident Population for Selected Age Groups by Sex for New York: April 1, 2020 to July 1, 2021 <https://www.census.gov/data/tables/time-series/demo/popest/2020s-state-detail.html> and Annual Resident Population Estimates by Selected Age Groups and Sex for States, the District of Columbia, and Puerto Rico: April 1, 2010 to July 1, 2019; April 1, 2020; and July 1, 2020, <https://www.census.gov/programs-surveys/popest/technical-documentation/research/evaluation-estimates/2020-evaluation-estimates/2010s-state-detail.html>.

⁶ There are 1.2 million college students in New York State. “New York Colleges Key Statistics,” <https://www.univstats.com/states/new-york/>.

⁷ United University Profession, “UUP 2023 Budget Agenda.” UUP lists Brockport, Buffalo State, Canton, Cobleskill, Cortland, Delhi, Empire State College, Environmental Science & Forestry, Fredonia, Geneseo, Morrisville, New Paltz, Old Westbury, Oneonta, Oswego, Plattsburgh, Potsdam, Purchase, and the University at Albany, as the threatened campuses.

⁸ Bamberger, C., “CUNY Tells Colleges To Slash Budget, Enact Hiring Freeze, *New York Daily News*, February 10, 2023, <https://www.nydailynews.com/new-york/education/ny-cuny-slash-budget-hiring-freeze-20230211-hu4am26jcrbxbgts5dwbimgtoa-story.html>.

- The most recent independent college to announce that it is closing its doors is Cazenovia College,⁹ but it has not been the only one to do so.¹⁰

The proposed Executive Budget does not provide the funding needed to stabilize the finances of these community-based economic engines. Nor does the budget adequately address a decade of neglect from the previous administration and the financial toll the pandemic took. The state should be creating a fund to help distressed campuses and increase the largely flat funding for SUNY and CUNY institutions. Not investing holistically in these campuses will only diminish student services and the unparalleled economic opportunity they create.

Institutions Of Public Higher Education Are Economic Development “Engines” That Produce Real Benefits, Unlike Many of the Highly-Touted Projects That In Recent Years Have Produced Little, Other Than Scandal

In addition to boosting racial and economic equity, public higher education helps to strengthen our economy. It is one of the best vehicles to move New Yorkers to financial stability and grow the “middle class.” The research into the economic benefits of investing in higher education has been overwhelmingly positive. There successes are well-documented, but here are some highlights that show a significant return on investment (ROI):

- SUNY’s economic impact in New York State is \$28.6 billion. *For every \$1 invested in SUNY, New York State’s economy benefits the equivalent of \$8.17* and is responsible for nearly 2% of the gross state product.¹¹
- CUNY graduates working in New York State earned a combined \$57 billion annually (\$67,000 on average) in 2019 – \$28.6 billion more than students would have earned without a post-secondary degree.¹²
- CUNY graduates working in New York paid an estimated \$4.2 billion in State income taxes in 2019.¹³
- The average bachelor’s degree holder contributes \$278,000 more to local economies than the average high school graduate through direct spending over the course of a lifetime; and an associate degree holder contributes \$81,000 more than a high school graduate.¹⁴

Community Colleges are also prime examples of what economic development should look like. Research from experts like economist Tim Bartik has shown that **community college workforce education** is one of the most cost-effective ways for governments to create jobs and grow the economy, especially in

⁹ Best Colleges, “This New York College Will Close After Nearly 200 Years,”

<https://www.bestcolleges.com/news/cazenovia-college-new-york-closing/>.

¹⁰ Higher Ed Dive, “A look at trends in college consolidation since 2016,”

<https://www.highereddive.com/news/how-many-colleges-and-universities-have-closed-since-2016/539379/>.

¹¹ The Economic Impact of the State University of New York: Laura Schultz, November 2018

<https://rockinst.org/issue-area/the-economic-impact-of-the-state-university-of-new-york/>.

¹² Comptroller Stringer Analysis: CUNY Graduates Earn Combined \$57 Billion Annually, Highlighting CUNY’s Significant Contributions to Local and State Economies. <https://comptroller.nyc.gov/newsroom/comptroller-stringer-analysis-cuny-graduates-earn-combined-57-billion-annually-highlighting-cunys-significant-contributions-to-local-and-state-economies/>.

¹³ Comptroller Stringer Analysis: CUNY Graduates Earn Combined \$57 Billion Annually, Highlighting CUNY’s Significant Contributions to Local and State Economies. <https://comptroller.nyc.gov/newsroom/comptroller-stringer-analysis-cuny-graduates-earn-combined-57-billion-annually-highlighting-cunys-significant-contributions-to-local-and-state-economies/>.

¹⁴ Rothwell, Jonathan. “What colleges do for local economies: A direct measure based on consumption.” *Brookings*, July 28, 2016, www.brookings.edu/research/what-colleges-do-for-local-economies-a-direct-measure-based-on-consumption/.

comparison to giving money away to businesses via tax abatements, grants, and other forms of business subsidies.¹⁵

New York State and its local governments currently spend in the neighborhood of \$10 billion annually on a broad array of economic development programs, largely benefiting big businesses, with results that leave much to be desired. It's time for New York to begin to redefine "economic development" as improving the quality of life for regular New Yorkers and challenge traditional tax abatement and corporate subsidy style economic stimulus. The state and local governments need to realize true economic development is about investments in public goods like childcare, K-12 and higher education, the public workforce, homecare and affordable housing. These investments benefit individuals, families, workers, businesses and the overall economic health of local communities. *The state should be investing a portion of these billions of dollars in higher education rather than continuing to support programs that simply do not produce the results they claim to.*¹⁶



State investments in SUNY and CUNY may lack the "razzle dazzle" of highly touted economic development projects, but they deliver solid results. Day in and day out these institutions power New York's economy and often are the lifeblood of the communities in which they reside. One former Governor once commented that the "days of wine and roses are over." In the 21st Century, policymakers must demand that the "days of risky economic development programs are over." It's time to focus on investing in programs that work. SUNY and CUNY must be at the top of that list.

The State University of New York: A Powerful Economic Development Engine

When policymakers think about economic development, they should be thinking in terms of job creation, return on investment (ROI) and stemming the outmigration of residents from the state. SUNY and CUNY not only create jobs, they create substantial tax revenues and keep students in New York well after they graduate. This provides the state with a skilled labor force which is one of the most important aspects of what businesses look for when they choose where to locate.

¹⁵ Bartik, 2019 <https://reinventalbany.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/11/Workforce-Development-Everybody-Says-They-Love-It-But-What-Is-It-November-2022.pdf>.

¹⁶ Chart source, New Yorkers for Fiscal Fairness

According to a 2018 report from the Rockefeller Institute of Government, SUNY is a key driver of the New York State economic engine. *SUNY's economic impact in New York State is \$28.6 billion, which represents a 27 percent growth in overall state economic impact since 2008.*¹⁷

The SUNY system educates approximately 436,277 students, employs 77,900 faculty and staff, and has an operating budget of \$11.2 billion.¹⁸ To put this in perspective, if SUNY were a private company it would be among the ten largest employers in New York State. The SUNY system includes community colleges, four-year colleges, graduate and research centers, medical schools and hospitals, a law school, and significant commercialization activities. SUNY provides a powerful economic stimulus:

- **179,000** direct (77,900 full and part time SUNY employees) and Indirect Jobs (101,500 jobs indirectly supported)
- **Thirty-four percent** of the educated workforce in New York have a degree from SUNY
- SUNY grants over 90,000 degrees each year, more than other institutions in the state, with 78% remaining and working in New York State 2 years after graduation.¹⁹

The City University of New York: A Powerful Economic Development Engine

According to a March 2021 report from the New York City Comptroller,²⁰ State support for CUNY results in a powerful economic stimulus.

- **79 percent** of CUNY graduates work full time in New York State after graduation.
- **Nearly 850,000** CUNY graduates work full time in New York State, representing approximately 10 percent of the total private-sector workforce in the state.
- A new report from the Brookings Institution ranks six of CUNY's senior colleges and six community colleges **among the top 10** four-year and two-year colleges nationwide with the greatest success in lifting low-income students into the middle class. Three other CUNY senior colleges were ranked in the top 25.²¹

Now is the Time to Dramatically Strengthen Investments in Higher Education:

Whether there is a recession or not, the state gets such a high return on investment that it makes no sense NOT to invest in SUNY, CUNY, and independent institutions. If the state wants to stem the tide of people leaving New York, it needs to invest more resources in higher education as graduates tend to stay and work in the state – making significant financial contributions to the economy.

SUNY and CUNY provide job training in areas where there is great demand for workers (nursing and healthcare, technology, agriculture, and teachers to name but a few). New York's community colleges also provide superior job training with a significant return on investment. The state needs to ensure that it invests appropriate resources in higher education to continue to train the workforce of tomorrow.

¹⁷ The Economic Impact of the State University of New York: Laura Schultz, November 2018

<https://rockinst.org/issue-area/the-economic-impact-of-the-state-university-of-new-york/>.

¹⁸ "New York's Largest Private Sector Employers," NYS Department of Labor, accessed September 20, 2018, <https://labor.ny.gov/stats/nys/Largest-private-sector-employers-NYS.shtm>.

¹⁹ SUNY Graduates Post-Completion Wages <https://www.suny.edu/media/suny/content-assets/documents/institutional-research/DOL-report-Issue1.pdf>.

²⁰ Comptroller Stringer Analysis: CUNY Graduates Earn Combined \$57 Billion Annually, Highlighting CUNY's Significant Contributions to Local and State Economies. <https://comptroller.nyc.gov/newsroom/comptroller-stringer-analysis-cuny-graduates-earn-combined-57-billion-annually-highlighting-cunys-significant-contributions-to-local-and-state-economies/>.

²¹ Opportunity Engines: Middle Class Mobility in Higher Education, Sarah Reber, Chenoah Sinclair, Tuesday, May 19, 2020 <https://www.brookings.edu/research/opportunity-engines-middle-class-mobility-in-higher-education/>.

The average bachelor's degree holder contributes \$278,000 more to local economies than the average high school graduate through direct spending over the course of a lifetime; and an associate degree holder contributes \$81,000 more than a high school graduate.²² Private, not-for-profit colleges and universities contribute an estimated \$97.6 billion to New York's economy, based on 2019 data. This economic impact grew by 10 percent from 2017 to 2019.²³

Recommendation: The State Must Reject the Proposed Tuition Hikes

As stated earlier, the Governor's Executive Budget follows a failed blueprint that shifts more costs onto students and their families, leaving the state's public higher education institutions overly dependent on tuition dollars, which has proved to be a critical mistake. Since 2011, tuition has risen 42%, with hikes far outpacing family income growth. **The Legislature should reject proposed tuition hikes and allocate funds to move New York toward a tuition-free future.**

Recommendation: The State Must Dramatically Increase Base Aid Support for CUNY and SUNY, including passage of the New Deal for CUNY and analogous funding for SUNY, and increased funding for Bundy Aid for independent colleges and universities.

Given the importance of New York's higher education sector – both in terms of educating the next generation as well as providing an economic stimulus to local communities – it's hard to imagine revitalizing these important entities without significant additional state support. The state must provide funding to make up for revenues lost from enrollment declines and that addresses the decade of disinvestment that preceded the pandemic.

Budget shortfalls at SUNY and CUNY campuses have led to hiring freezes, department elimination, and the erosion of student services and quality of education. Students have experienced firsthand difficulty in getting into the classes they need to graduate, limited services such as library hours, and advisement gaps across the CUNY and SUNY system. According to a CUNY survey, over one-third of CUNY students reported not being able to register for a course. Of those students, nearly 60% couldn't register because the class was not offered at all or there were not enough seats available.²⁴

New Deal for CUNY legislation would support CUNY students by phasing out tuition, setting better student-to-teacher ratios so that students can get the classes they need to graduate and receive adequate individual attention, and increasing the ratio of students-to-mental health counselors. The need for added mental health resources at college campuses could not be clearer. With limited counselors on campus, students may experience long wait-times for services or difficulty being connected to other resources. Analogous funding for SUNY campuses is also needed to reduce the tuition burden and support student services like more class offerings, better advisement, and more mental health services.

The Legislature should increase senior college operating budgets by an additional \$350 million each for SUNY and CUNY, and pass the New Deal for CUNY legislation and analogous funding for SUNY.

For the independent sector, the state's Bundy Aid has become a far smaller source of support than in the past. Given the dire circumstances found among the smaller colleges, we recommend that Bundy

²² Rothwell, Jonathan. "What colleges do for local economies: A direct measure based on consumption." *Brookings*, July 28, 2016, www.brookings.edu/research/what-colleges-do-for-local-economies-a-direct-measure-based-on-consumption/.

²³ Commission on Independent Colleges and Universities, "The Economic Impact of Independent Higher Education in New York," <https://cicu.org/economic-community-impact>.

²⁴ City University of New York, "2018 Student Experience Survey A survey of CUNY undergraduate students," <https://public.tableau.com/profile/oira.cuny#!/vizhome/2018StudentExperienceSurvey/CoverPage>.

Aid be restored to its original levels of support. According to the Commission on Independent Colleges and Universities, Bundy Aid has regularly been cut from \$106.1 million (1990) to today's \$35.13 million.²⁵ We urge that any increase in Bundy Aid be targeted to those colleges which are most financially stressed.

Recommendation: Boost State Support For Community Colleges

As mentioned earlier, community colleges are facing dire financial circumstances, yet are vital to the state's economy. 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. Governor Hochul's Executive Budget holds community college funding harmless against recent enrollment losses, allocating the same level of funding they received last year.

The rate of community colleges' tuition hikes over the past decade far outstrips inflation. Every community college in New York State has increased tuition in excess of higher education inflation.²⁶ And community college tuition increases have exceeded those allowed for the four-year public colleges. Since the first year of SUNY2020, more than half of the SUNY community colleges (16 of 29) and all CUNY community colleges had tuition rate increases that exceeded the rate approved for the SUNY four-year public colleges and universities.²⁷

The state should be covering 40% of the costs of educating a student at a community college. However, there is a huge discrepancy between the tuition paid by students and the aid provided by the state. In the current fiscal year's budget, the state has pledged to provide \$2,947 in aid for each full-time student attending community colleges. None of the state's community colleges have tuition levels set under \$4,300, much less \$3,000. In fact, average community college tuition is above \$5,000,²⁸ roughly 70% higher than the amount of state support. **The Legislature should create a stable minimum funding floor for community colleges at 100% of the 2019-2020 funding level and increase per-FTE base aid to \$3250.**

Recommendation: Support Education Equity By Overhauling The Tuition Assistance Program For The Modern Student

New York State's Tuition Assistance Program (TAP) is a generous program that commits the state to aid the neediest college students—both in public and independent institutions. It is TAP that offers “free tuition” to the vast bulk of college students attending public college and contributes to the affordability of attending independent colleges and universities. In the nearly 50 years of TAP, the program has helped four million New Yorkers afford college.²⁹ But a lot has changed since the program's founding in 1974, and

²⁵ CICU, <https://cicu.org/legislation-policy/state-aid-programs/direct-institutional-bundy-aid>.

²⁶ For tuition costs for the academic years 2010-11 through AY 2019-20, we relied on the National Center for Education Statistics (a federal agency) to obtain the data necessary to calculate our estimates. We used its Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System.” Using the option to “compare institutions,” we obtained student population and tuition data used to do the calculations. The data was obtained at <https://nces.ed.gov/ipeds/use-the-data>. Accessed September 2020. For tuition costs for AY2020-21, we reviewed each of the community colleges' websites to obtain current charges.

²⁷ SUNY tuition for Academic Year (AY) 2010-2011 was \$4,970. The so-called “rational tuition” policy allowed for \$300 annual increases for 5 years, or a total of \$1,500 by July 2016. NY's re-instituted annual tuition increases for AY 2017-2018, 2018-2019, and 2019-2020 by allowing for three \$200 dollar increases, bringing tuition to \$7,070 at SUNY, hence tuition has increased 42%. SUNY community college tuition increased, on average, 43%. Similar increases were approved for the City University systems as well. Its community colleges also exceeded increases beyond those approved for the four-year college and universities within its system. Calculations performed by NYPIRG.

²⁸ *Supra* 6

²⁹ Former New York State Sen. Jose Peralta And Former Assemblyman Francisco Moya, “Make college more affordable by making more Tuition Assistance Program (TAP) grants available,” New York Daily News, November

TAP is behind the times and student loan debt is reaching a crisis level: 2.4 million New Yorkers now hold outstanding student loans.³⁰ Updating it would have significant social and economic benefits.

TAP should be realigned with the needs of the students and families of today. It should cover more of the cost of tuition for those who qualify and be flexible enough to meet the needs of all types of New Yorkers, not just the “traditional” straight-from-high-school-to-college full-time student that it was initially designed to serve.

NYPIRG urges the Legislature to fix TAP by:

- Re-extending TAP eligibility to graduate students
- Increasing the minimum awards from \$500 to \$1000, which would largely just keep up with inflation³¹
- Making aid available in the summer and winter sessions
- Extending eligibility for students with Intellectual Disabilities in CTP programs
- Increase the highest income level for TAP award eligibility to at least \$125,000
- Increase the number of semesters of TAP eligibility for all students, recognizing that the majority of students take longer than four years to complete a baccalaureate degree, and allow for summer and winter TAP awards.
- End the \$100 per-year cut to students’ TAP grants in their last two years of school.
- Restore eligibility for TAP to students in default on federal student loans.

Recommendation: Enhance Opportunity Programs

NYPIRG supports the Governor’s call for increased funding for New York’s opportunity programs. Opportunity programs, which are designed for educationally and economically disadvantaged students, have a steady track record of success in increasing retention and graduation rates among the most at-risk students. NYPIRG urges your support of the governor’s proposal to provide \$24 million, or a 10 percent increase, to fund higher education opportunity programs and training centers administered by CUNY, SUNY and independent colleges.

New York State has several opportunity programs: Search for Education, Elevation and Knowledge (SEEK), Linking Employment, Academics, and Disability Services (CUNY LEADS), Educational Opportunity Program (EOP), Higher Education Opportunity Program (HEOP), College Discovery (CD), and others. These programs take a comprehensive approach to college access and affordability by building in academic counseling, mentoring, and often providing waivers for related costs such as transit, textbooks, and child care.

SUNY’s EOP provides access, academic support, and supplemental financial assistance to students from disadvantaged backgrounds, many of them the first in their families to attend college. According to SUNY, graduation and retention rates of Educational Opportunity Program (EOP) students compare favorably to that of the general student population at comparable schools. First year retention, where a student re-enrolls

10, 2014 New York Daily News, <https://www.nydailynews.com/new-york/peralta-moya-students-tap-financial-aid-article-1.2003490>.

³⁰ U.S. Senator Schumer, “Schumer Announces Plan To Immediately Cancel Up To \$50,000 In Student Loan Debt Per Student Across Upstate NY; With 2.4 Million New Yorkers Owing Almost \$90 Billion, Senator Leads Charge To Take Immediate Action In 2021 To Attack Student Debt Crisis,” September, 2020, <https://www.schumer.senate.gov/newsroom/press-releases/schumer-announces-plan-to-immediately-cancel-up-to-50000-in-student-loan-debt-per-student-across-upstate-ny-with-24-million-new-yorkers-owing-almost-90-billion-senator-leads-charge-to-take-immediate-action-in-2021-to-attack-student-debt-crisis>.

³¹ U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, CPI Inflation Calculator, https://www.bls.gov/data/inflation_calculator.htm.

for a second year, for SUNY senior college EOP students is 91% percent,³² whereas first year retention rates for the general student body at SUNY senior colleges is approximately 84%.³³ The six-year graduation rate for EOP students is 73%,³⁴ whereas the SUNY-wide senior college rate is 68% – similar results exist for opportunity programs found in the independent sector.³⁵

CUNY’s ASAP assists students in earning associate degrees within three years by providing a range of financial, academic, and personal supports including comprehensive and personalized advisement, career counseling, tutoring, waivers for tuition and mandatory fees, MTA MetroCards, and additional financial assistance to defray the cost of textbooks. ASAP also offers special class scheduling options to ensure that ASAP students get the classes they need, are in classes with other ASAP students, and attend classes in convenient blocks of time to accommodate their work schedules. As students approach graduation, they receive special supports to help them transfer to 4-year colleges or transition into the workforce, depending on their goals. Graduation rates for ASAP students are more than double that of their peers who are not enrolled in these programs.³⁶ **The Legislature should restore cuts to opportunity programs in the Executive Budget and enhance funding for these proven programs.**

Recommendation: Expand funding to existing and create new student support programs including campus childcare, the Hunger Free Campus Act, mental health services, and reduced price transit fares

Campus Childcare: CUNY and SUNY child care centers are a unique and powerful tool for socio-economic mobility in New York City. The cost of child care can be a significant barrier toward accessing a degree. According to the Institute for Women’s Policy Research, just 8 percent of single mothers who enroll in college graduate with an associate or bachelor’s degree within six years, compared with 49 percent of women students who are not mothers.³⁷ Single mothers with only a high school diploma are over three times as likely to live in poverty as single mothers with a bachelor’s degree.³⁸ 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.

Mental Health Services: The pandemic has not only affected students financially but also physically and mentally. The pandemic has been an emotionally taxing time for students as they are isolated and had to quickly adjust to an online learning environment. Student support services have struggled to keep up with student needs. Whether it is grief counseling or help needed for juggling classes, work, and other responsibilities, students are struggling to schedule appointments with mental health experts on campus when they need them most.

³² State University of New York’s Office of Opportunity Programs, <http://system.suny.edu/ooop/>.

³³ Retention Rates for First Time, Full Time Students in a Program: SUNY Data Analysis and Trends SUNY System Administration Office of the Provost May 2014 Draft <https://www.suny.edu/media/suny/content-assets/documents/powerofsuny/performance-management-system/DRAFT-Retention-Rates-Background-Report.pdf>.

³⁴ *Ibid.*

³⁵ SUNY Fast Facts, https://www.suny.edu/media/suny/content-assets/documents/FastFacts_2018-Flyer.pdf.

³⁶ City University of New York, “Significant Increases in Associate Degree Graduation Rates: CUNY Accelerated Study in Associate Programs (ASAP) (March 1, 2018),” see: http://www1.cuny.edu/sites/asap/wp-content/uploads/sites/8/2018/03/ASAP_Program_Overview_March_2018.pdf.

³⁷ Institute for Women's Policy Research, “Investing in Single Mothers' Higher Education: Costs and Benefits to Individuals, Families, and Society.” <https://iwpr.org/publications/investing-single-mothers-higher-ed/>.

³⁸ *Ibid.*

Currently CUNY only has one mental health advisor for every 2,700 students.³⁹ Students struggle to schedule appointments with counselors, sometimes having to wait weeks or months to get an appointment. Anna Compton, a student at Hunter College, was continuously referred off campus despite asking for on-campus assistance, which then led to longer wait times for a counseling session.

Students are also struggling receiving proper advisement to be able to graduate on time. Students have run into trouble with long wait times and miscommunication when trying to schedule appointments with advisors to enroll in classes needed to graduate. To remedy these issues students are facing and more, **NYPIRG calls for the passage of the New Deal for CUNY legislation (S.4461/A.5843) and analogous funding to SUNY** to, among other things, fund enough mental health counselors to meet the ratio recommended by the International Accreditation of Counseling Services of one advisor for every 1000 full time students.

Food insecurity was already an epidemic before the pandemic. Startlingly, the number of food-insecure New York City residents has doubled since the onset of the pandemic, from 1.2 million to nearly 2.2 million, roughly 25% of the population.⁴⁰ Nearly 40% of Black families in NYC are struggling with food insecurity. The level of worry CUNY students have about running out of food because of lack of money is more than three times higher in 2020 than in 2018 and 54% of CUNY students reported a decrease in their own income due to COVID-19.⁴¹ NYPIRG commends the work of CUNY and SUNY staff, often in collaboration with our campus NYPIRG chapters, student governments and the community at large, to stock and maintain food pantries. **NYPIRG urges the Legislature to support the Hunger Free Campus Act to include monies in the budget to support the operating expenses of food pantries across campuses at SUNY and CUNY.**

Student Transit Fares: In a city like New York, mass transit defines where you live, where you play, and where you go to school. It is the great equalizer of opportunity and why accessible, affordable, and safe transportation is so important. For New York City's college students, affording a Metrocard swipe or Omny tap can be the difference between earning a degree or dropping out altogether. A recent survey by the Center for an Urban Future found that affording a Metrocard was the biggest financial barrier cited by students and advisors when discussing college costs. Acknowledging the importance of mass transit to education equity, New York City's K-12 students receive free Metrocards, yet that resource doesn't exist for higher education. And with housing and food cost increases outpacing wage growth in the City, the need to address transit affordability to support educational attainment could not be more pressing. **NYPIRG urges the Legislature to support MTA fare discounts and free transfers for college students, and to provide state funding for the expansion of Fair Fares to include all current CUNY students and other New Yorkers at 200% of the federal poverty level.**

In conclusion, ecovery from the COVID-19 pandemic runs through CUNY and SUNY, but New York's public higher education institutions and financial aid programs need additional state funding to make it happen. The State can save its social programs from suffering massive cuts without asking the most vulnerable to pay for it. In order to provide a quality and affordable higher education for all New Yorkers, the State must commit itself to freeze tuition, substantially increasing public funding this year and modernizing existing financial aid programs to meet students' needs. Thank you.

³⁹ Professional Staff Congress - CUNY, Executive Budget Testimony, February 4, 2020
<https://nyassembly.gov/write/upload/publichearing/001101/002253.pdf>.

⁴⁰ AARP, Disrupt Disparities 3.0, <https://states.aarp.org/new-york/disrupting-racial-ethnic-disparities>

⁴¹ CUNY Urban Food Policy, The State of Food Security at CUNY in 2020: An Assessment and Recommendations, <https://www.cunyurbanfoodpolicy.org/news/2020/05/20/the-state-of-food-security-at-cuny-2020>.