



**Higher Education
Services Corporation**

Statement by Doris B. González
Acting President
New York State Higher Education Services Corporation

Annual Joint Hearing

To the
New York State Senate Finance Committee
and
New York State Assembly Ways and Means Committee

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New York State Higher Education Services Corporation
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Good morning, Chairs Krueger, Pretlow, Stavisky, Hyndman and esteemed members of the Senate and Assembly. I am Doris Gonzalez, Acting President and Executive Vice President of the Higher Education Services Corporation (HESC). Joining me is Patricia Thompson, HESC Vice President of Grants and Scholarships.

As many of you already know, Dr. Guillermo Linares retired in December after 50 years of distinguished public service. I'm proud to carry forward his legacy at HESC and to continue serving New York's students.

Today, I'm pleased to discuss the 2026-27 Executive Budget recommendations, our agency's successes in 2025, and our collective commitment to ensuring all New York State students have access to education.

Through the steadfast and visionary commitment of Governor Hochul and this Legislature, we continue to expand financial support and opportunities that reaffirm our dedication to student success.

[HESC's Mission and Impact](#)

At HESC, our mission is clear: We help you pay for college. We are guided by our vision of making higher education affordable, accessible, and achievable for every eligible New York student.

In the 2024-25 academic year, HESC distributed over \$935 million in financial aid to more than 294,000 students through our 30+ grant, scholarship, and loan forgiveness programs.

2026-27 Executive Budget Highlights

Governor Hochul's 2026-27 Executive Budget reinforces the commitment to advancing New York's higher education system by allocating \$1.02 billion to HESC financial aid and scholarship programs. This includes over \$827 million for TAP, building upon a year of transformative progress.

The Next Chapter for TAP

In 2025, we consolidated Part-Time Study, the Part-Time Scholarship Award Program, and Part-Time TAP into a single, unified Part-Time TAP program. In addition, the minimum required credit hours per semester were reduced from six to three credits to be eligible for Part-Time TAP. These changes made it easier for more part-time students to qualify for the financial support they need.

These changes also build on historic improvements, including raising the maximum income threshold, which so far has opened the door for 135,000 students who previously were not eligible due to income limits.

TAP Performance Report

While TAP does not cover all costs associated with going to college, it makes a difference for students. Since inception, 50 years ago, 6.3 million New Yorkers were awarded \$31 billion, solidifying TAP's role as a cornerstone of student success.

The March 2025 TAP Performance Reports looked at student cohorts from 2013 to 2017, which revealed that over 70% of these students graduated. Notably, TAP recipients at SUNY four-year colleges and independent institutions achieved completion rates exceeding 75%, far surpassing the national average of 62%. These findings, alongside the 2024 TAP Difference Report, underscore the need for continued investment to bolster New York's educational and economic future.

Enhancing New York Scholarship Programs

Masters in Education Teacher Incentive Scholarship:

Governor Hochul's 2026-27 Executive Budget proposes key enhancements to various programs, including the Masters in Education Teacher Incentive Scholarship. Recognizing the importance of early childhood education, the post-graduation service obligation is being expanded to include workplaces that provide public pre-K programs, such as Head Start and community-based organizations. In addition, an extra \$1 million in funding is being allocated to support more awards.

Veterans Tuition Award

Enhancements to the Veterans Tuition Award (VTA) are providing robust services to veterans and their families. Beginning in the 2027-28 academic year, eligible veterans can transfer their unused award eligibility to a spouse, a child up to the age of 26, or a financial dependent. To be eligible, veterans must have served in combat or completed at least four years of active duty. VTA provides awards that can be used for tuition at undergraduate, graduate and approved vocational training programs.

These updates enhance flexibility for veterans and their families while building on previous improvements that have already expanded access for students. This is evident in the 61% increase in applications received for 2024-25 compared to 2023-24, with preliminary data indicating further growth in 2025-26.

Scholarship for Academic Excellence Program

Starting with the class of 2027, changes to the Scholarship for Academic Excellence (SAE) will allow scholarships that are declined by the first awardee to be reassigned to the next most qualified high school student. The SAE program provides 8,000 scholarships annually to top students pursuing higher education in New York. These updates help maximize the program's impact and ensure awards are fully used.

Building on Success: Continued Investments in Free Community College for Adult Learners

The Executive Budget builds on the success of the Governor's Opportunity Promise Scholarship program, expanding opportunities for adult learners ages 25 to 55. An additional \$12.5 million will extend eligibility to students with prior undergraduate degrees who choose to pursue a nursing degree and expand the list of qualified fields of study, giving students more career options while at the same time, helping to strengthen the workforce in high-demand fields.

Since Fall 2025, nearly 12,000 adult learners have enrolled in SUNY and CUNY, underscoring its impact in empowering New Yorkers and addressing workforce shortages.

Increased Outreach in Support of Universal FAFSA Completion

We understand the importance of making sure all students know about the resources available to them. In 2025, HESC's outreach efforts led to unprecedented success, solidifying New York's position as a national leader in FAFSA completion. Along with our partners, as of February 13th, HESC helped elevate New York to fifth in the nation for FAFSA completions, with over 50% of high school seniors already submitting their 2026-27 applications, well above the national average of 43%.

We hosted 310 virtual and in-person events, a 35% increase from the prior year, reaching over 18,000 attendees.

With our FAFSA Ready Training Program, we equipped counselors and educators with the information they need to help guide students through what can often be seen as a daunting financial aid process. We also recognized that it's never too early or too late to spread the word about college aid, so we expanded our texting program to include middle school families and adult learners. We now have more than 68,000 text subscribers.

Modernization Efforts

This year marks a pivotal year for HESC in building modern, efficient platforms to better serve our students, families, and educational partners. We began in May 2024 with our redesigned website, that attracts 3 million visitors annually, underscoring its role as a vital resource for families navigating the financial aid process.

We made significant progress in 2025 when we released the Student Aid Processing Portal Request for Proposal and developed a comprehensive Financial Aid System modernization roadmap that is using agile methodology, to improve the user experience and so much more.

Call Center Migration

I am pleased to report that next month, HESC will start taking incoming calls from students, which we had not been able to do since COVID. Through a contract with the Office of Children and Family Services Call Center, which will be handling level 1 support, we will reduce wait time and improve the delivery of service.

Closing

I thank Governor Hochul for her unwavering dedication to New York's students; thanks also to State Operations Director Jackie Bray, Deputy Secretary of Education Maria Fernandez, and NYS Budget Director Blake Washington for their invaluable partnership and support.

Together, with the continued commitment of the Governor and Legislature, New York remains at the forefront of advancing equitable access to higher education, empowering students, and strengthening the future of our state.

Thank you.
