

**Written Testimony of Commissioner Dr. Betty A. Rosa**  
**New York State Education Department**  
**Joint Legislative Higher Education Budget Hearing February 24, 2026**

Good morning, Chairs Krueger, Pretlow, Stavisky, and Hyndman. And good afternoon to the members of the Senate and Assembly who are here today. My name is Dr. Betty A. Rosa, and I am New York's Commissioner of Education. I am joined today by Senior Deputy Commissioner Dr. Jeffrey Matteson, Deputy Commissioner of Adult Career and Continuing Education Services and the Office of Special Education, Ceylane Meyers-Ruff, Deputy Commissioner of Higher Education, Dr. Bill Murphy, and Assistant Commissioner of the Professions, Dr. Owen Donovan. I also want to acknowledge and thank Chancellor Lester Young and the members of the Board of Regents, who are watching today.

The New York State Education Department is entrusted with one of the most complex and interconnected educational systems in the nation. At the heart of our work is a simple but powerful mission: to raise the knowledge, skills, and opportunities of all New Yorkers.

This mission is embodied in three guiding principles. Each of our budget priorities is grounded in equity, access, and opportunity. Our requests represent the resources necessary to turn those principles into outcomes for students and families across our state.

### **OPPORTUNITY PROGRAMS**

The Executive Budget includes important investments aligned with the Regents priorities, particularly in opportunity programs such as the Higher Education Opportunity Program (HEOP), the Science and Technology Entry Program (STEP), the Collegiate Science and Technology Entry Program (CSTEP), and the Liberty Partnership Program (LPP). These programs have transformed lives for decades and remain essential pathways to upward mobility.

However, the Executive Budget proposal reduces the funding of these programs to previous levels. We believe the proposed levels are insufficient. We respectfully request restoration to last year's funding levels and additional targeted increases are made to expand access as follows:

**HEOP** continues to demonstrate extraordinary impact. Students in HEOP achieve retention rates equal to their peers at participating institutions, clear evidence that when access is paired with support, students succeed. An additional **\$4.9 million** would extend this opportunity to more New Yorkers.

**STEP** prepares economically disadvantaged students in grades seven through twelve for success in mathematics, science, technology, health-related fields, and many licensed professions. An additional **\$2.2 million** would ensure the delivery of these services. While STEP is currently the subject of pending litigation, and we cannot comment on specifics, the Department remains

steadfast in its support for this legislative program and looks forward to working with you to strengthen pathways for disadvantaged students.

**CSTEP** supports college students pursuing licensure and careers in high-demand STEM and health fields. An additional **\$1.6 million** would increase access and workforce readiness.

**LPP** provides comprehensive pre-collegiate and dropout prevention services statewide. An additional **\$2.5 million** would allow this vital program to reach more young people before they disengage.

### **FOSTER YOUTH COLLEGE SUCCESS INITIATIVE**

This initiative expands opportunities and services for foster youth through SUNY, CUNY, and other not-for-profit degree-granting institutions. It recognizes that foster youth often face unique barriers to college completion by providing supplemental financial aid, summer preparation programs, tutoring, and advising.

Funds can also be used to conduct a summer college preparation program for foster youth who will be enrolled and attending as first time full-time students, providing academic and social support to prepare students to navigate on-campus systems.

The Executive Budget reduces funding by **\$483,000**. We respectfully request restoration and an additional **\$1 million** to ensure foster youth receive comprehensive support.

### **SUPPORTING COLLEGES AND STUDENTS DURING FINANCIAL INSTABILITY**

Since 2016, **28 colleges** in New York's independent and proprietary sectors have closed. Each closure disrupted the education of students. Through our Office of College and University Evaluation, the Department works to minimize harm by guiding orderly closures, ensuring permanent transcript preservation, prioritizing teach-out agreements, and accelerating program approvals to allow students to complete their degrees. Recent efforts have included expedited program approvals, degree transfers to partner institutions, and support for experiential requirements.

We have also shifted from reactive to proactive engagement, issued guidance on mergers and consolidations, and worked closely with institutions exploring partnerships. In 2024, the Regents approved regulatory amendments allowing mergers with highly qualified out-of-state institutions. In 2025, the Board of Regents approved the first such transaction between Northeastern University and Marymount Manhattan College.

We remain committed to working collaboratively with HESC, SUNY, CUNY, CICU, and other stakeholders to ensure every regulatory and policy option is available to protect students and stabilize institutions.

NYSED recognizes that closures affect entire communities. We thank the Governor and Legislature for advancing a chapter amendment directing economic and community support responsibilities to appropriate agencies. The Department stands ready to assist whenever educational approvals or redevelopment involve degree-granting institutions.

### **SUSTAINING TEACH.ORG**

The Department's partnership with Teach.org has strengthened statewide teacher recruitment through the Teach NY platform. Since April 2024, the site has generated **82,000 sign-ups**, with **64 percent identifying as people of color**, facilitated **1,400 one-on-one advising sessions**, and registered **4,200 participants** for group advising.

We appreciate the Executive's inclusion of **\$500,000**. To maintain the full scope of this statewide recruitment and navigation tool, which converts interest into commitment, we request an additional **\$800,000**.

This additional funding is paramount to sustaining a teacher pipeline that reflects and serves all New York students.

### **ACCES-VR AND TRANSITION SUPPORT**

The Department engages in tremendous work on behalf of students with disabilities as they transition from high school. ACCES-VR and the Office of Special Education coordinate to ensure students with disabilities transition successfully from high school to careers and postsecondary pathways. Participation in Pre-Employment Transition Services (Pre-ETS) has grown from **2,630 to 8,805 students** in two years. In 2026, ACCES-VR will hire additional staff to provide services directly in schools and participate in IEP meetings.

This is measurable progress upon which we must build.

To further support postsecondary students with disabilities, we request the restoration of \$2 million, eliminated in the Executive Budget, and an additional **\$2 million** to strengthen college-level supports, faculty training, data systems, and transition programming.

Students with disabilities enrolled in degree-granting colleges and universities likely need supports and services like those they received in high school to be successful. This is an investment in ensuring educational success that will unlock new employment opportunities for these individuals. Additional funds would allow postsecondary schools to enhance the supports and services they provide to their enrolled students with disabilities, including:

- Supplement and expand existing supports and accommodations for students with disabilities (SWDs);

- Create college preparatory programs to assist incoming SWDs in transitioning to college and prepare them to navigate the campus facilities and systems;
- Provide full- and part-time faculty and staff at SUNY, CUNY, and other private and independent degree-granting institutions of higher education (IHEs) with training in how to better serve students with disabilities; and/or
- Improve the identification process of SWDs and enhance data collection capabilities at SUNY, CUNY, and other private and independent degree-granting institutions of higher education.

### **VOCATIONAL REHABILITATION CONTRACTING**

NYSED requests a change in appropriation language for the Vocational Rehabilitation Program to exempt out-of-state colleges from contracting requirements. Currently, the State Finance Law requires that state agencies receive prior approval from the Office of the State Comptroller (OSC) before contracting for services that would exceed discretionary spending thresholds.

ACCES-VR has encountered various challenges when attempting to contract with colleges, as the state contract process generally takes 8-10 months. Given this, some out-of-state IHEs have declined to participate in New York's process altogether. This policy is contrary to the federally mandated provision of rehabilitation services and the informed choice of the recipient of services, which hurts consumers and creates a legal and financial risk for New York State.

Restricting a customer's education and training options to only those IHEs with a contract limits "informed choice" and creates a barrier for individuals with disabilities to receive ACCES-VR services.

While NYSED supports the Governor's proposal to increase the discretionary procurement threshold to \$300,000, this contracting barrier should be eliminated. We respectfully request a targeted exemption to ensure that students with disabilities have full access to education and training options.

### **TRA TRANSFER AND ALLIED HEALTH OVERSIGHT**

Since 2020, the Department has seen an increase in the number of for-profit proprietary schools offering allied health programs that provide training for direct patient care roles such as Home Health Aide, Personal Care Aide, Nurse Aide, EKG Technician, Diagnostic Medical Sonographer, and Phlebotomist.

The Department has also seen an increase in the number of proprietary schools out of compliance with training and salary requirements for direct care workers. BPSS has been required to significantly increase its investigations into schools offering programs in the allied health fields. A Risk-based investigation found **that 31% of the reviewed schools were** out of compliance with regulations; as a result, the Department denied **13%** of license renewals. To protect public safety, the Department must ensure that private career schools are properly

training direct care workers, so that New Yorkers receive health care services from qualified health professionals.

These schools train direct-care workers who serve vulnerable populations. Public safety demands vigilant oversight.

As a result of this, we request the authority to transfer up to **\$500,000** from the Tuition Reimbursement Account (TRA) to BPSS if and when the TRA exceeds \$2.5 million, to hire four additional staff focused on allied health oversight. Sufficient funds would remain available to reimburse students in the event of closures. Proactive oversight protects students, patients, and the integrity of the workforce.

### **OFFICE OF THE PROFESSIONS**

The Department provides diligent technical assistance to the Legislature on profession-related bills and works collaboratively with the Department of Health (DOH) on cross-agency matters. As a result of that partnership, the Department supports the following two budget proposals:

- **Medical assistants administering immunizations:** Authorizes trained medical assistants to administer immunizations in outpatient office settings under the direct supervision of a physician, nurse practitioner, or physician assistant.
- **Certified medication aides administering certain medications:** Authorizes certified medication aides to administer routine and prefilled medications in residential health care facilities under the supervision of a registered professional nurse. The proposal also requires DOH, in consultation with SED, to issue an implementation report two years after enactment and includes a 10-year sunset provision.

However, we respectfully oppose the proposal to transfer physician and physician assistant discipline and post-licensure authority to DOH (HMH, Subpart D), as it would fragment professional oversight and create unnecessary complexity.

We also oppose the proposal for independent PA practice (HMH, Subpart E) being addressed within the context of the budget. While we recognize workforce shortages and have supported expanded PA authority with safeguards, including 2024 reforms, a major decision such as this should include comprehensive stakeholder engagement and legislative debate.

We remain committed to thoughtful, balanced policymaking that protects public health and safety.

## **CONCLUSION**

The Executive Budget includes meaningful investments for which we are grateful. However, if we want to ensure every student in New York State is prepared for college, career, and civic life, we must commit to sustained, strategic, long-term planning.

We respectfully urge the Legislature to work with the Executive to restore and strengthen these investments so that higher education is accessible and affordable, professional pathways remain viable, and opportunity is not determined by zip code, disability status, or family income.

I look forward to continuing our work together to advance equity, access, and opportunity for all New York State students.