

Higher Education Budget Hearing Testimony

EdTrust-New York

February 24, 2026

Thank you for the opportunity to submit written testimony for the New York State 2026 Joint Legislative Budget Hearing for Higher Education. I am Joanna Yip, Policy Lead at EdTrust-New York, a statewide policy and advocacy organization that seeks to close opportunity gaps that keep too many students from reaching their full potential, especially students of color—particularly Black, Native American and Latinx students, and those from low-income backgrounds. Our work is data-driven and student-centered, and we work in partnership with civil rights, education, parents, nonprofit and business organizations across the State.

I appreciate the opportunity to share this testimony with members of this committee as you consider the 2026-2027 State Budget. As an organization committed to pursuing equity in higher education, our work focuses on ensuring policies, structures, and systems exist so that those who are typically excluded from higher education also have the opportunity to gain the skills, credentials, and degrees that lead to family-sustaining wages.

Maintaining affordability and increasing access to higher education is essential to workforce development and equitable access to opportunity particularly for low-income students of color. Given many other fiscal priorities, we believe that the focus in higher education needs to remain squarely focused on ensuring affordability and access to higher education to students who have the greatest need and face the greatest barriers.

Executive Budget Proposal

The Governor's 2026-27 Executive Budget includes several important investments to address affordability and access to higher education. We believe the Legislature has an important opportunity to build on the Executive Budget proposal and improve the lives of all New York college and university students by investing in the following higher education priorities in the Legislature's final enacted budget:

- **Emergency Aid:** EdTrust – New York strongly supports the Governor's proposal to invest in and develop systemwide policies for a Statewide Emergency Aid Fund at SUNY and CUNY that covers basic needs after unexpected emergencies. These funds can ensure that students facing major life emergencies do not have to decide to drop out of college due to financial need. However, the \$1M proposed is insufficient to lead to the retention outcomes the funds are intended to protect. Student need far outpace the actual rate of grants typically provided, so we know that current levels of emergency aid do not fully meet actual basic needs. **We urge the Legislature to include a total of \$5 million for emergency aid in the final budget using the legislative language included in S.9044 (Gounardes)**



- **Investments in Community Colleges** – EdTrust New York supports the investments proposed by the Governor in community colleges, creating critical opportunities for first generation college students and historically excluded minority and low-income students to pursue high-demand fields while preparing a ready workforce for the state. The proposed expansion of the New York State Opportunity Promise Scholarship program will make it possible for working New Yorkers to upskill or acquire degrees that lead to higher wages while addressing the state’s workforce needs in key areas. Targeting the program to nursing is one way the program can be intentionally designed to lead to stronger outcomes that serve working New Yorkers. We encourage the Legislature to create parameters to ensure that eligible programs are aligned to local job markets, remove barriers to participation for working students, and invest in programs that serve the public interest such as teaching and early childhood education. **We urge the Legislature to include the Governor’s \$12.5M for free community college in the final budget.**
- Maintaining affordability is tantamount given potential budget pressures and upcoming changes to federal loans. The Governor’s proposals to maintain a tuition freeze for resident undergraduate students at SUNY and CUNY four-year colleges and maintaining the funding floor specifically for community colleges is absolutely vital. **We urge the Legislature to include the Governor’s \$90M proposal to keep college affordable for working families in the final budget.**
- Continued investment in holistic student supports such as ACE and ASAP is a necessary strategy to ensure students persist through a degree pathway. These programs support academic and career advisement, tuition grants, textbooks, and transportation costs. **We urge the Legislature to include the Governor’s \$8M proposal to support ACE and ASAP at SUNY in the final budget.**
- **FAFSA completion** - In 2024, New York took a major step forward to improving FAFSA completion rates by passing a Universal FAFSA law last year. To meet the new Universal FAFSA completion requirements, districts and community partners need significant support to increase outreach and meet the law’s requirements and **we propose a \$3 million new investment that would support outreach to students and funding to NYSED to meaningfully collect data on the law’s implementation, particularly around student waivers.**
- **Increase investment in New York’s Tuition Assistance Program (TAP) by:**
 - Extending availability of TAP for undergraduate students from four to six years. Based on Ed Trust New York's [To and Through](#) college completion and persistence analysis of TAP recipients, many students of color and low-income students do not complete their degrees in 4 years. In addition to supporting dual enrollment,





extending TAP access to six years would support students who face greater financial barriers and working students to complete their degrees. ETNY supports A508 (Anderson)/S3779 (Gounardes) to increase the eligibility timeline to six years.

- Increasing income thresholds for students to receive maximum TAP awards. ETNY supports A5539 (Hyndman)/S1732 (Fahy) to increase the threshold to receive a maximum award from \$7,000 to \$18,000 for dependent and independent married students and advocates for the same increase for single independent students.

I want to thank you for the opportunity to offer strategies to further educational equity for all New Yorkers. We appreciate the Legislature's leadership on these critical issues and look forward to continuing to work together for New York's students and our collective

