



**TESTIMONY
OF THE
NEW YORK PUBLIC INTEREST RESEARCH GROUP
BEFORE THE
JOINT LEGISLATIVE BUDGET HEARING ON HIGHER EDUCATION
FOR THE 2020-2021 BUDGET
FEBRUARY 4, 2020
Albany, New York**

Good afternoon. My name is Santana Alvarado and I am the Chairperson of the New York Public Interest Research Group's (NYPIRG) student Board of Directors and a City University of New York Hunter College student. 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 college and university students elected from State University of New York, City University of New York, and independent college campuses with NYPIRG chapters.

Before I get into our testimony, on behalf of NYPIRG, thank you for last year's approval of the Senator Jose Peralta "DREAM" Act. We worked closely with Senator Peralta for years and thank you for broadening financial aid eligibility to undocumented immigrant public college students.

We appreciate this opportunity to share our perspectives on the Governor's 2020-21 Executive Budget for Higher Education in New York State. The Governor's FY2021 Executive Budget largely maintains the financial status quo, however his proposals continue to place an outsized financial burden on students and their families through tuition hikes. NYPIRG strongly urges that you take steps to further strengthen his plan.

**PUBLIC INVESTMENT IN HIGHER EDUCATIONAL INSTITUTIONS IS KEY TO A
THRIVING ECONOMY AND DEMOCRACY**

Investing New York's tax dollars into public higher education is a clear win for individual New Yorkers and a win for the state's economy, even amid a climate of budget-tightening. A study on SUNY found that for every \$1 spent on education, the economy reaps over \$8 in benefits.¹

¹ State University of New York, 2019-20 Executive Budget Testimony, Chancellor Kristina Johnson, January 28, 2019, <https://www.suny.edu/govrelations/state/testimony/2019-20-budget/>.

College-educated workers earn more than their high-school educated peers – by an average of \$30,000 per year, as found by the Federal Reserve Bank of New York.² As wages increase, so do tax revenues which support any number of public services. 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 their lifetime; and an associate degree holder contributes \$81,000 more than a high school graduate.³

What's more, there is an increasing need for a college degree in today's economy. The availability of blue-collar jobs that do not require a bachelor's degree has decreased by 30 percent since 1991. Nationally, New York ranks in the top four states with the highest decrease in blue collar jobs.⁴ It has become more of an economic necessity to hold a bachelor's degree, particularly in New York. Higher education access and degree completion must remain a priority in this year's budget.

FREEZE PUBLIC COLLEGE TUITION

If there is one area in which you can make a substantial difference, it is public college tuition. As you know, the Governor proposes to expand the state's so-called "rational tuition" policy – which automatically increases tuition at the State University and City University systems – for another five years after the current law's expiration next academic year.

NYPIRG urges you to reject the Governor's proposed extension of automatic tuition hikes. In fact, given New York's policy of shifting the burden of paying for college education from the state to the students and their families, it is critical for you to freeze tuition this year.

Despite the clear benefits of public higher education for the health and prosperity of the state, students have been shortchanged: the state routinely underfunds CUNY and SUNY and costs get pushed onto students and their families. Beginning in 2011, nearly constant tuition hikes have raised tuition rates by more than 42%.⁵

Recently, NYPIRG released an analysis of the overall financial impact of the SUNY2020 legislation. We reviewed tuition hikes since 2011, compared to enrollment data for 2- and 4-year public colleges for full-time students in the fall and spring semesters. Our analysis found that New York State has charged public college students nearly \$4 billion more as a result of

² Abel, Jaison R. and Richard Deitz, *Liberty Street Economics*, "Despite Rising Costs, College Is Still a Good Investment," June 5, 2019, <https://libertystreeteconomics.newyorkfed.org/2019/06/despite-rising-costs-college-is-still-a-good-investment.html>.

³ 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/.

⁴ Buffie, Nick, and Tillie McInnis. "Highest to Lowest Share of Blue Collar Jobs By State," April 10, 2017, <https://bluecollarjobs.us/2017/04/10/highest-to-lowest-share-of-blue-collar-jobs-by-state/>.

⁵ SUNY tuition for Academic Year (AY) 2010-2011 was \$4,970, and CUNY was \$4,830. 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 Final State Budget for AY 2017-2018, 2018-2019, and 2019-2020 allowed for three \$200 dollar increases, bringing tuition to \$7,070 at SUNY and \$6,930 at CUNY, hence tuition has increased 42%. <http://www.suny.edu/smarttrack/tuition-and-fees/> and <http://www2.cuny.edu/financial-aid/tuition-and-college-costs/tuition-fees>. Calculations performed by NYPIRG.

scheduled tuition hikes at SUNY and CUNY. Even when considering additional assistance provided by the Tuition Assistance Program (TAP) and the new Excelsior Scholarship program, students have paid \$2.5 billion in additional tuition.

ESTIMATED ADDITIONAL TUITION REVENUES GENERATED BY SUNY2020 AND LOCAL GOVERNMENTAL DECISIONS⁶

Academic year	4-Year Public Colleges	2-Year CUNY Colleges	2-Year SUNY Colleges
2011-12	\$76,682,400	\$17,324,100	\$26,127,544
2012-13	\$153,476,400	\$34,057,200	\$41,644,228
2013-14	\$230,885,100	\$52,143,300	\$55,191,048
2014-15	\$312,176,400	\$71,318,400	\$68,053,338
2015-16	\$391,251,000	\$89,476,500	\$84,536,641
2016-17	\$393,852,000	\$92,753,900	\$98,898,711
2017-18	\$456,965,100	\$93,262,660	\$110,549,958
2018-19	\$515,642,900	\$91,330,320	\$130,340,857
TOTAL	\$2,530,931,300	\$541,666,380	\$615,342,325

During the years reviewed by this analysis, the state’s all funds budget increased by over 26%⁷ – more than enough to have allowed for increased state support for public colleges and universities, and to halt the growing tuition burden placed on public college students and their families. Anecdotal evidence buttresses the claim that tuition dollars are being used to fill budget shortfalls resulting from stagnant state support.

The added tuition dollars have added up over an approximate 9-year period resulting from passage of the “SUNY 2020” law first enacted in 2011 and actions by local governments impacting community college costs. This year’s tuition increases will drive that number higher.

While New York’s substantial financial aid and opportunity programs have shielded some students from these hikes, there are many who fall through the eligibility cracks or who cannot apply for reasons outside of their control. With every tuition hike, New York continues to rely on students and families, many who struggle to keep up with rising costs, rather than addressing years of state underfunding.

NYPIRG urges you to reject the Governor’s proposal to extend automatic public college tuition hikes for the next five years and instead freeze tuition at current levels.

⁶ NYPIRG. We relied on various data sources to come up with our estimated costs. These sources are from both the state and federal governments. In addition, in the instances in which the data was incomplete for an academic year, we relied on the previous year’s numbers (e.g. enrollments) in order to complete our calculations. We did not include tuition revenues generated during summer, winter, or other non-traditional sessions. We did not include tuition revenues generated by students attending part-time during any part of the academic year. We did not include revenues from tuition increases for the current academic year, that data was not readily available. It is safe to assume that our estimate will increase once the current academic year’s information become available, and if tuition revenues generated by part-time students and students attending public college during summer, winter, and non-traditional sessions were easily accessible and included.

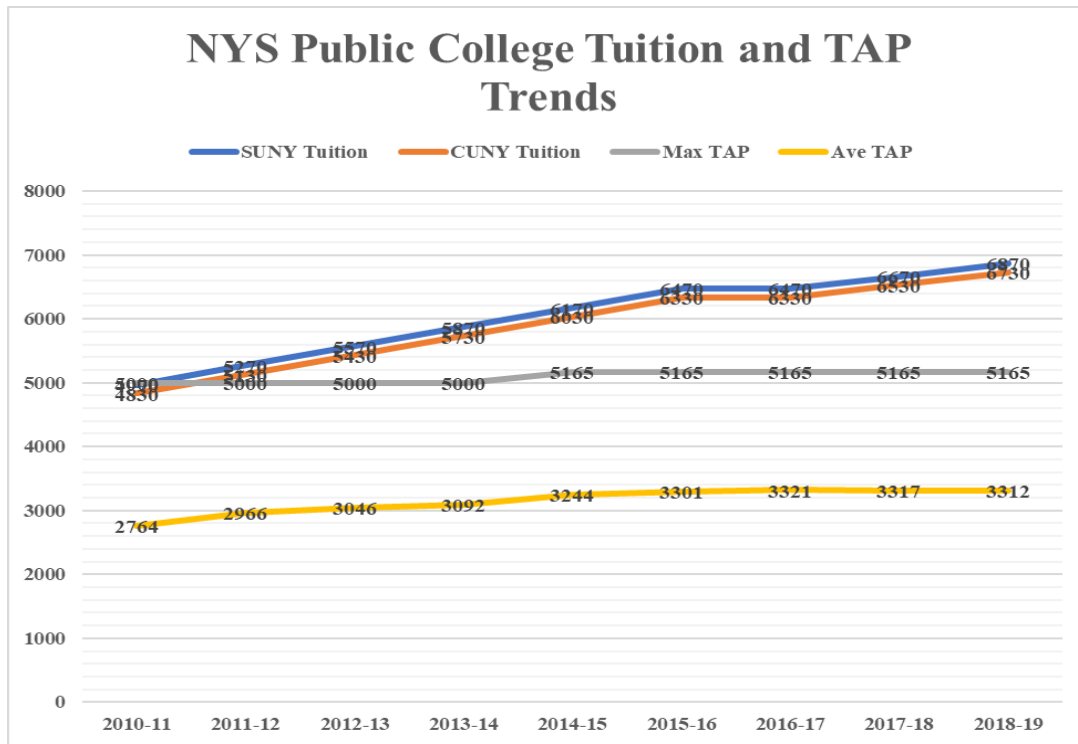
⁷ Citizens Budget Commission, “NYS Trends During the Cuomo Administration,” Fiscal years 2011-2019, October 18, 2018, <https://cbcnny.org/research/nys-trends-during-cuomo-administration>.

**ELIMINATE FUNDING GAPS:
THE “TAP GAP” AND INCOMPLETE MAINTAINANCE OF EFFORT**

The state’s system of automatic public college tuition hikes not only impacts the finances of students and their families, the SUNY2020 law contained another change in long-time New York higher education policy. Firstly, prior to the SUNY2020 law, New York would increase the maximum Tuition Assistance Program (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.

SUNY2020 changed that relationship. Instead of tying the maximum TAP award to public college tuition, the state decided that while tuition would be automatically raised, TAP would be handled separately (essentially frozen for the past decade) and the colleges themselves would have to supplement financial assistance to the lowest income students.

As tuition has been raised, public colleges have had to dig deeper into their own resources – which have also been more or less frozen during this time – to provide necessary financial assistance. This deepening hole – the “TAP Gap” – has shortchanged CUNY and SUNY for years, starving campus budgets and putting student support services and educational quality at risk. Last year, CUNY reported a \$74 million TAP Gap.⁸ As seen in the following chart, the gap between the maximum TAP award and the public college tuition is growing with each annual tuition hike and that gap must be closed with state revenues, instead of campus resources.⁹



⁸ City University of New York, 2019-2020 Operating Budget Request and Four-Year Financial Plan; January 14, 2019, http://www2.cuny.edu/wp-content/uploads/sites/4/page-assets/about/administration/offices/budget-and-finance/FY2020-Budget-Request_for-OBFSite-1.pdf.

⁹ Information obtained for New York State Higher Education Services Corporation Annual Reports.

The best solution is to renew the state's pledge to match the maximum TAP award to public college tuition rates. In the meantime, additional state support to public colleges is needed to ensure that financial aid made to the poorest college students comes from the state, not the individual college.

Secondly, while the state promised in 2011 to maintain its funding levels from year to year as it raised the tuition burden on students, the state has not included funding for inflationary or other mandatory cost increases like electricity and staff contracts. That has created a gap in state funding for mandatory costs.

According to SUNY New Paltz Vice President for Administration and Finance, revenues are simply not keeping pace with necessary increases in expenditures. One factor among others cited was no increases in direct state support since 2012.¹⁰ CUNY Baruch College's President released a statement that they expect a \$5 million budget shortfall and are implementing across the board department budget cuts and vacancy-control measures.¹¹ Stony Brook University cited an \$18.5 million budget shortfall when eliminating their undergraduate pharmacology program in 2018.¹²

The erosion of state support and the creation of growing funding gaps is translating into an 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 a third of CUNY students reported not being able to register for a course they needed for their major. Of those students, half couldn't register because there were not enough seats available.¹³

SUNY New Paltz student Haley Gray transferred to the campus for its art education program and struggles to get the courses she needs:

“I chose to come to SUNY New Paltz for their top-rated art education program. But recently, it's been nearly impossible for me to get all the classes that I need in order to graduate. When I first transferred here, there were so many more sections of classes offered. Making my schedule last semester was a nightmare because the classes I needed for my major and the classes I needed in order to fulfill my general education requirements conflicted in time slots. I had to repeat studio courses that I had already completed just to fulfill the requirements for my major. This semester, I had the same experience. Not being able to take the studio courses in my concentration negatively impacts my educational development and my ability to teach in the future.”

¹⁰ The New Paltz Oracle, “Budget Cuts Costs on SUNY New Paltz Campus,” November 8, 2018, <https://oracle.newpaltz.edu/budget-cuts-costs-on-suny-new-paltz-campus/>.

¹¹ Baruch College, Message from the President, FY19 Budget Reduction, July 9, 2018, <https://www.baruch.cuny.edu/facstaff/documents/07092018-FY19BudgetReduction.pdf>.

¹² The Statesman, Liebson, Rebecca, “College of Arts and Sciences Cuts Undergraduate Pharmacology Program,” February 25, 2018, <https://www.sbstatesman.com/2018/02/25/college-of-arts-and-sciences-cuts-undergraduate-pharmacology-program/>.

¹³ City University of New York, “2016 Student Experience Survey A survey of CUNY undergraduate students,” http://www2.cuny.edu/wp-content/uploads/sites/4/page-assets/about/administration/offices/oira/institutional/surveys/2016_SES_Highlights_Updated_10112016.pdf.

Evelyn Marks, a Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages (TESOL) major at SUNY Cortland, is also concerned about graduating on time. With some of the classes that she needs conflicting with other required classes, she may have to push her graduation date out a year.

NYPIRG urges the Legislature to stop state divestment in CUNY and SUNY by closing the “TAP Gap” and including predictable, mandatory cost increases in base aid funding levels.

MODERNIZE TAP

New York State’s TAP is a generous program that commits the state to aid the neediest college students – both in public and independent institutions. It is TAP (combined with support from the individual SUNY and CUNY colleges as mentioned above) that offers “free tuition” to the vast bulk of college students attending public college.

However, the changes resulting from SUNY2020 as well as an overall disinterest in improving the program has left TAP inadequate to the needs of college students in the 21st Century. As seen in the chart in the preceding section, the TAP maximum award has changed very little over the past decade and has not kept up with rising public college tuition (and continues to cover an ever-smaller percentage of independent college tuition). The cost of providing coverage, as discussed earlier, is supplemented by the individual campuses. It should be borne entirely by the state.

To enhance the accessibility and affordability of attending New York’s higher educational institutions to qualified students without imperiling the quality of SUNY and CUNY educations, the Tuition Assistance Program (TAP) should be expanded.

NYPIRG urges that the Legislature increase the TAP maximum award to cover the tuition cost of public college and that it be tied to any future public college tuition increases, as had been the practice prior to SUNY2020.

TAP recipients are eligible for the award in the fall and spring semesters as long as they take a minimum of 12 credits per semester. However, apart from some opportunity programs or for some students with disabilities, the award is only available for up to 8 semesters. For students to reach the credits required for graduation on time (often 120), they must take 15 credits per semester or add summer and winter session classes. Apart from “accelerated TAP,” when TAP recipients take winter and summer classes, they must pay out of pocket.

For some students, a 15-credit course-load is a reasonable ask. However, 15 credits per semester is simply unrealistic for some. The issue is particularly acute for working students. Currently, students nationwide work an average of about 30 hours per week. At least a quarter of all students – and about a fifth of all students who enroll on a full-time basis – are also employed full-time while enrolled.¹⁴ We’ve heard from students who struggle to balance their full-time course load, jobs, and personal obligations. In a report issued by the CUNY Office of Institutional Research and Assessment, of students that work, 79 percent reported that they work

¹⁴ 2016 Student Experience Survey, CUNY, http://www2.cuny.edu/wp-content/uploads/sites/4/page-assets/about/administration/offices/oira/institutional/surveys/2016_SES_Highlights_Updated_10112016.pdf.

to pay for living expenses and over a third of those who work believe that having a job negatively impacts their academic performance.¹⁵

NYPIRG urges the Legislature to extent TAP to winter and summer sessions.

The state established a New York State Part-Time Scholarship (PTS) Award Program to provide scholarships to students attending a SUNY or CUNY community college on a part-time basis. Awards cover the cost of six credit hours, up to twelve credit hours, and are awarded on a lottery-based system. In AY 2018-19, fewer than 400 students received this scholarship. In addition, the state's Aid for Part-Time Study awards provide up to \$2,000 per year for part-time undergraduate study at participating institutions in New York State. Nearly 10,000 received an award in AY 2018-19.¹⁶ Aid for part-time students is woefully limited and these award help, but a broader approach is needed. Part-time students should be eligible for TAP and the Excelsior Scholarship rather than administering these limited separate programs.

NYPIRG urges the Legislature to expand TAP to part-time students.

Despite prisons being called “correctional facilities,” they do a dismal job in turning lives around. According to the U.S. Department of Justice, nationwide about two-thirds of released state prisoners were re-arrested within three years and three-quarters within five.¹⁷ Too often, prison is a revolving door. And it's a revolving door that impacts certain communities worse than others. According to the Cuomo Administration, nearly half of New York inmate population is African American, nearly one quarter is Hispanic, and nearly one quarter is white.¹⁸

The currently high recidivism rate helps no one, so what should be done? While prisoners can sometimes get access to educational courses now, they are ineligible for the federal Pell Grant program as well as the New York State Tuition Assistance Program (TAP). Since the vast majority of inmates are low income, they usually cannot afford college courses while in prison. The connection between higher education and reduced recidivism has been well established.

A study conducted by the University of California at Los Angeles found that “[a] \$1 million investment in incarceration will prevent about 350 crimes, while that same investment in education will prevent more than 600 crimes. Correctional education is almost twice as cost effective as incarceration.”¹⁹

¹⁵ City University of New York, “2016 Student Experience Survey A survey of CUNY undergraduate students,” http://www2.cuny.edu/wp-content/uploads/sites/4/page-assets/about/administration/offices/oira/institutional/surveys/2016_SES_Highlights_Updated_10112016.pdf.

¹⁶ New York State Higher Education Services Corporation Annual Report AY 2018-19.

¹⁷ U.S. Department of Justice, Office of Justice Programs, Bureau of Justice Statistics, “3 In 4 Former Prisoners In 30 States Arrested Within 5 Years Of Release,” April 22, 2014, <http://www.bjs.gov/content/pub/press/rprts05p0510pr.cfm>.

¹⁸ New York State Department of Corrections and Community Supervision, “Under Custody Report: Profile of Inmate Population Under Custody on January 1, 2013,” http://www.doccs.ny.gov/Research/Reports/2013/UnderCustody_Report_2013.pdf.

¹⁹ Audrey Bazos and Jessica Hausman, UCLA School of Public Policy and Social Research Department of Policy Studies, “Correctional Education as a Crime Control Program,” p 2, March 2004, <http://www.ceanational.org/PDFs/ed-as-crime-control.pdf>.

NYPIRG urges the Legislature to provide TAP eligibility for incarcerated individuals.

Graduate TAP began in 1974-1975, helping 22,253 New York graduate students with an average award of \$302 with a maximum award of \$600. The program has fluctuated greatly over the years with regards to the number of students receiving the award, the maximum award available, average award distributed, and the amount of money the state invested in the program. Before TAP for graduate students was eliminated in 2009-2010, it served 7,251 students.²⁰

The Bureau of Labor Statistics estimates that jobs requiring master's degrees and professional degrees will grow by 22% and 20%, respectively, from 2010 to 2020 – faster than any other level of education.²¹ According to the Georgetown University Center on Education and the Workforce, a worker with a high school diploma can expect to earn \$1.3 million over a lifetime, while a worker with a bachelor's degree will earn \$2.3 million and a worker with a master's degree will earn \$2.7 million over a lifetime.²² While the benefits of advanced degrees are clear, financial aid programs are either non-existent or uninviting to prospective graduate students, many of whom already hold student loan debt.

NYPIRG urges the Legislature to expand TAP to eligible graduate students.

Last year, New York passed the Jose Peralta New York State DREAM Act, essential aid to undocumented New Yorkers. NYPIRG looks forward to Higher Education Services Corporation releasing data on the first year of the program. This past academic semester, concerns were raised by advocacy groups about how opportunities to enroll in this financial aid program were being communicated to students.

Sufficient outreach is essential to educate potential students of their options and inform prospective undocumented students of the TAP application process. Further, additional resources and training for advisors on this program could be the difference between a student completing their college degree or not.

NYPIRG urges continued careful review of the DREAM Act roll-out as well as additional resources to ensure adequate public outreach.

The Enhanced Tuition Awards (ETA) program provides tuition awards to students who are NYS residents attending a participating private college located in NYS. Recipients will receive \$6,000 through a combination of their TAP award, ETA award and a match from their private college. In AY 2018-19, New York awarded more than \$4.3 million to 2,744 students through this program.²³

²⁰ New York State Higher Education Services Corporation, "Graduate Level TAP AY 1974-1975 thru 2009-2010," Neal Warren, September 2013.

²¹ United States Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics, "Occupational Outlook Handbook, Projections 2010-2020," <http://www.bls.gov/ooh/about/projections-overview.htm>.

²² The Georgetown University Center on Education and the Workforce, "The College Payoff: Education, Occupations, Lifetime Earnings," Page 2, August 15th, 2011, <http://www9.georgetown.edu/grad/gppi/hpi/cew/pdfs/collegepayoff-summary.pdf>.

²³ New York State Higher Education Services Corporation, AY 2018-19.

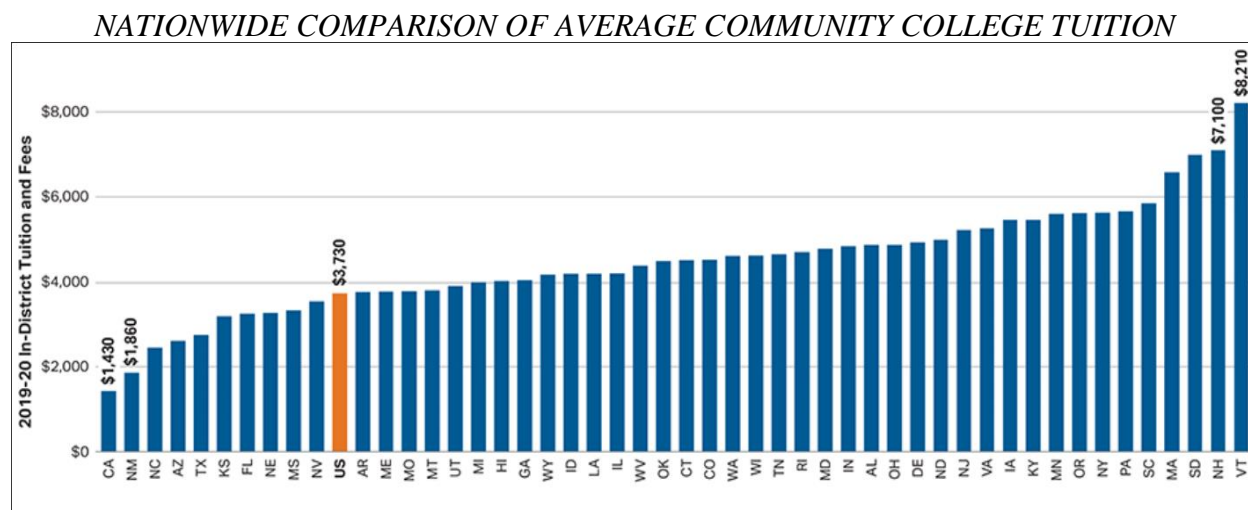
The Governor proposes \$7.6 million for the ETAP program for students attending independent colleges and universities, which is a \$389,000 increase from AY 2019-20. The income threshold for ETAP would increase in line with Excelsior to \$135,000 in AY 2020-21 and \$150,000 in AY 2021-22.

We support the enhancement but believe that an expended TAP is a better vehicle. NYPIRG urges that the TAP be enhanced to ensure that needy independent college students are provided maximum aid and that the award be increased to match public college tuition. Regarding the Executive’s proposed expansion of ETAP, we agree that the program benefits the students who maintain eligibility, although the number is small.

BOOST STATE SUPPORT FOR COMMUNITY COLLEGES

Community colleges are a local and potentially affordable path to a higher degree or a better job for many New Yorkers, including those who need to be close to their homes, families, and jobs. Moreover, community colleges provide crucial job training and re-training for under-employed and unemployed workers in a rapidly shifting economic environment.

Yet, as seen below, community college tuition costs are among the highest in the nation²⁴ – creating a barrier to individuals who need new skills for a rapidly changing marketplace.



The Executive Budget includes a decrease in funding for community colleges at SUNY and CUNY, reflecting a decrease in full time enrollment since funding for the community colleges is directly tied to enrollment numbers.

However, the decline in community colleges is really two different stories. The CUNY community colleges have maintained rough equivalence in their enrollments over the recent years. There have been across-the-board declines at the SUNY community colleges. At last count, there were 30,000 fewer full-time SUNY community colleges students in AY 2018-19

²⁴ The College Board, <https://research.collegeboard.org/trends/college-pricing/figures-tables/published-district-tuition-and-fees-public-two-year-institutions-state>.

than there were in AY 2011-12.²⁵ And without exception, every SUNY community college lost population, some with apparently catastrophic enrollment declines.²⁶

While there are many reasons why, one of them may well be that CUNY – through the support of New York City – has kept tuition frozen. SUNY community colleges, on the other hand, have increased tuition significantly to offset population losses and to maintain services. Unfortunately, those tuition increases may trigger even greater enrollment declines.

The Executive Budget maintains base aid for community colleges at \$2,947 per FTE, the same as SFY 2019-20. However, the 98 percent funding floor that was included in the SFY 2019-20 Enacted Budget is not continued. This results in overall SUNY community college base aid of \$431.2 million for SUNY, a reduction of \$22.7 million from last year and overall CUNY community college base aid of \$225.2 million for CUNY, a decrease of \$3.6 million from SFY 2019-20.

NYPIRG urges that the Legislature support an increase in state aid to offset the costs of attending community colleges and tie such support to tuition freezes at community colleges. We urge you to reject the Governor’s elimination of the 98 percent funding floor. In the case of CUNY, the City support of holding the line on student tuition costs should be rewarded, not penalized. In SUNY, it’s hard to imagine how the campuses can survive additional cuts without more tuition hikes – which will exacerbate enrollment declines.

REFORM THE EXCELSIOR SCHOLARSHIP PROGRAM

In the Excelsior Scholarship, the state acknowledges the burden that tuition places on low and middle-income students. But the scholarship does not cover everyone and is designed to minimize costs for the state. The Governor proposes to further expand the Excelsior Scholarship program to students with higher incomes. NYPIRG supports making college free, so expansion is worthy of support. However, the program itself needs changes in order to help the largest number of students.

The Excelsior Scholarship mandates 30 credits per year to maintain eligibility (or else the scholarship turns into a loan) and the award is not available for summer and winter sessions. While scholarship recipients can maintain eligibility by taking 12-credits per semester in the fall and spring, they must pay out of pocket for the additional 6 credits in the winter or summer sessions. Meaning, the state’s “free tuition” scholarship is not always tuition-free, even for those who qualify, maintain eligibility, and receive the award.

The scholarship is also a “last dollar” program, meaning it will only apply once all other forms of government aid have been applied. New York’s financial aid programs already offer tuition coverage for the poorest public college students. Tuition is not the only financial responsibility associated with obtaining a college degree and Excelsior does not address those costs. Excelsior

²⁵ New York State Data Portal, “NY Open Data,” <https://data.ny.gov/Education/Headcount-Enrollment-by-Student-Level-and-Student-/4fyc-bf8i/data>.

²⁶ While Nassau Community College had the biggest enrollment decline, nearly 5,000 full time students, Clinton County Community College had the largest *percentage* decline in enrollment, losing 55 percent of its full-time students. For the purposes of this analysis we did not include the Fashion Institute of Technology, which is unique among 2-year schools and which did have a slight increase during this period.

Scholarship dollars are not available for students to use for costs associated with earning a college degree such as student housing, textbooks, transit, or food.

Yerania Aguilar transitioned from Queensborough Community College where she was part of the ASAP program, to Queens College at which point she received the Excelsior Scholarship but could not meet the credit requirements and is now in debt:

“I started off in the ASAP program at QCC and was able to smoothly manage my course load and graduate on time because of the support I received from the opportunity program. However, when I enrolled at Queens College and heard about the Governor touting free college for all through Excelsior, I was quick to sign up only to find out when it was too late that I needed to fulfill a 30-credit requirement for the entire academic year. Because I found out too late, I had to pay back \$800 for Excelsior since I didn’t take the required number of classes which would have been five classes instead of the four that I took.

Five classes, for many students including myself, is too much to set as a universal standard for all students. At most, I can handle four classes if I want to get good grades in all of them. For the state to expect students to meet unrealistic academic goals... it’s setting students up to fail.”

Lily Mou, a student at Baruch College, similarly struggles with on-time graduation. She shared her story with us:

“While I receive TAP and Pell, it still wasn’t enough so this spring I had to pay \$600 out of my pocket to make sure my classes wouldn’t drop! I have to work to pay the difference that financial aid does not cover, hindering me from focusing on school which is why I am unable to graduate on time. Before I came to Baruch, I was enrolled at QCC. This semester I’m taking 4 classes which translates to 13 credits, but I wanted to take more. My advisor however recommended for me to stick to 13 since I’m taking calculus which is hard enough. It was my advisor’s professional opinion that taking more than 4 classes while transitioning to a 4 year would be too much of a workload for me, an average CUNY student who already works more than 20 hours a week. I have to pay hundreds of dollars out of pocket to cover my tuition and to cover the costs of expensive textbooks, not to mention the basic expenses I have to come up with in order to eat. I’ve been in college for more than 5 years now because I have never been able to completely devote my attention to my classes. Instead, I’m constantly struggling to balance my work schedule with classes, meeting deadlines both financially and academically.”

Ramona Shoy-Parker, a Brooklyn College Excelsior Scholar, shared:

“Currently, balancing work and school is a lot. I am taking 15 credits while working 40 hours a week to pay for additional costs such as textbooks, food and transportation. My mom helps me out with the costs but balancing it is a lot, especially straight out of high school. If I had the option to take fewer classes I would. I believe the scholarship would be better if students were able to take a mandatory 12 credits because 15 is a lot of pressure, especially since the scholarship doesn’t cover Winter or Summer semesters.”

As you know, roughly half of all Excelsior Scholarship applicants do not receive an award.²⁷ Despite public statements, a very small number of SUNY and CUNY students receive these awards. Undoubtedly, Excelsior helps those students who qualify for the award. As seen below however, its impact is very limited and much more needs to be done to broaden its benefits.

EXCELSIOR SCHOLARSHIP PROGRAM RESULTS, AY 2017-18 AND 2018-19²⁸

Institution	AY 2017-18	AY 2018-19
Total SUNY Recipients (%)	17,108 (84%)	21,027 (84%)
Total SUNY Money Awarded (%)	\$58,671,943.15 (85%)	\$84,024,747.47 (85%)
SUNY 4 Year Number of Recipients	12,781	17,150
SUNY 4 Year Amount of Money Awarded	\$47,887,648.86	\$72,672,680.81
SUNY 2 Year Number of Recipients	4,327	3,877
SUNY 2 Year Amount of Money Awarded	\$10,784,294.29	\$11,352,066.66
Total CUNY Recipients (%)	3,350 (16%)	4,073 (16%)
Total CUNY Money Awarded (%)	\$10,422,772.84 (15%)	\$14,911,391.48 (15%)
CUNY 4 Year Number of Recipients	2,994	3,738
CUNY 4 Year Amount of Money Awarded	\$9,616,379.95	\$13,657,608.33
CUNY 2 Year Number of Recipients	356	335
CUNY 2 Year Amount of Money Awarded	\$806,392.89	\$1,253,783.15

NYPIRG urges the legislature to reform the Excelsior Scholarship’s restrictive credit requirements, allow for the scholarship to be awarded during winter and summer sessions, end the practice of turning the award into a loan for students who lose eligibility, and remove the “last dollar” status of the award.

ENHANCE OPPORTUNITY PROGRAMS

Opportunity programs, which are designed for educationally and economically disadvantaged students, have a steady track record of success in increasing graduation rates among the most at-risk students. In general, students in opportunity programs are individuals who have come from low-income communities and often rank low on traditional measures of collegiate admissions standards, such SAT scores, high school GPA, and class standing.

New York State has several opportunity programs in place to help students overcome the financial and academic obstacles of completing a college education: 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 childcare.

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

²⁷ Breidenbach, M., “Excelsior college scholarship denied to half of SUNY, CUNY applicants in first year,” *Syracuse.com*, <https://www.syracuse.com/news/2019/08/excelsior-college-scholarship-denied-to-half-of-suny-cuny-applicants-in-first-year.html>.

²⁸ New York State Data Portal, “NY Open Data,” <https://data.ny.gov/en/browse?q=excelsior+scholarship>.

(EOP) students compare favorably to that of the general student population at comparable schools. First year retention, where a student re-enrolls for a second year, for SUNY senior college EOP students is 91% percent,²⁹ whereas first year retention rates for the general student body at SUNY senior colleges is approximately 84%.³⁰ The six-year graduation rate for EOP students is 73%,³¹ whereas the SUNY-wide senior college rate is 68% – similar results exist for opportunity programs found in the independent sector.³²

NYPIRG applauds the Governor’s decision to advance a budget that maintains funding of these important programs. We urge the Legislature to expand these successful programs.

NYPIRG applauds the Executive Budget’s maintained support for the Bundy Aid program to help independent colleges and universities meet the needs of their students. We urge the Legislature to add to this program and support the Commission on Independent Colleges and Universities proposal to increase support by 3 percent.

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.³³ ASAP was cut by \$2.5 million in the Executive Budget.

NYPIRG urges restoration of CUNY ASAP, a program with proven success in increasing graduation rates and providing a holistically supported education to participants.

CHILD CARE EXPANSION AT CUNY AND SUNY

The cost of childcare 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.³⁴ 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.³⁵

²⁹ State University of New York’s Office of Opportunity Programs, <http://system.suny.edu/oop/>.

³⁰ 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>

³¹ *Supra* 27.

³² SUNY Fast Facts, https://www.suny.edu/media/suny/content-assets/documents/FastFacts_2018-Flyer.pdf

³³ 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.

³⁴ 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/>.

³⁵ 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/>.

While the average cost of private childcare or daycare in NYC can be prohibitively expensive (roughly \$25,000 a year³⁶), enrolling a child in daycare at CUNY can cost as little as \$5 a day. It's unsurprising that access to affordable childcare increases degree completion rates. A study by Monroe Community College in Rochester, NY, found that student parents that used the childcare center there were 30 percent more likely to stay in school.

CUNY and SUNY childcare centers are a unique and powerful tool for socio-economic mobility in New York City. While, as of 2015, fewer than half of two year and four-year colleges nationwide had childcare centers, nearly every CUNY campus has one.

Alexis Ramos, a student parent that benefits from the childcare center at Borough of Manhattan Community College shared her story with us:

“I am majoring in political science and theater, and aim to be a senator or mayor. I believe tuition and other costs to attend CUNY and SUNY schools should be state funded. I started college right after getting my GED. When I started to look into schools, I was worried I couldn't afford it. A huge obstacle was figuring out where my 2-year-old son would go while I was in school. My mother was too old and sick to take care of him and I didn't have any other family members around me so I felt stuck. My only option was to look for daycare but the prices were way too expensive. I felt like I would be drowning in debt and costs of tuition and childcare. I enrolled at BMCC since it had a childcare center.”

Melissa Estrella took ten years to get her associate degree, simply because she was unaware of childcare at Bronx Community College and as a result took a break from her education. She shared her story with us:

“I've been at BCC off and on since 2009. I took time off when I had my kids because I honestly didn't know about childcare at CUNY. It's \$5 a day here, that's super cheap. I was going here and I had no idea it existed, I would've finished school a lot quicker if I had known. I had to drop a couple of semesters because I didn't have childcare.”

The Executive Budget cuts childcare at SUNY by over \$1 million dollars and by \$902,000 at CUNY.

NYPIRG urges the Legislature to restore the over \$1 million cut to SUNY childcare and \$902,000 cut to CUNY childcare centers.

ADDITIONAL SUPPORT SERVICES FOR LOW INCOME STUDENTS

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 in compliance with the mandate from Governor Cuomo that every CUNY and SUNY campus create food pantries. That mandate came in part as a response to a recent report by

³⁶ Bernard, Tara Siegel. “Choosing Child Care When You Go Back to Work.” *The New York Times*, The New York Times, 22 Nov. 2013, www.nytimes.com/2013/11/23/your-money/choosing-child-care-when-you-go-back-to-work.html.

groups including NYPIRG entitled Hunger on Campus. The report looked at food insecurity on campus, and how that may undermine the educational success of untold thousands of students.³⁷ Consistent with prior studies, 48 percent of survey respondents reported food insecurity in the previous 30 days.

NYPIRG urges the Legislature to include monies in the budget to support operating expenses food pantries across campuses at SUNY and CUNY.

Textbook costs are outrageous. Average costs are routinely \$1,000 a year. For the third year in a row, the State provided \$8 million to SUNY and CUNY (\$4 million to each system) for programs to make affordable textbook options available to students, such as open source textbooks. These are high-quality college texts with an "open" copyright license allowing the material to be freely accessed, shared and adapted. Open textbooks are typically distributed online at no cost and can be purchased in a variety of other print and digital formats at a low cost, including hard bound copies. On average, using open textbooks in place of traditional textbooks saves students 80%.

Open source textbooks have many similarities with traditional textbooks. The educational content is written and reviewed by experts, and it aims to cover a similar scope and sequence of topics. Many even come with support materials like online homework, test banks, and supplemental videos.

NYPIRG supports the Executive Budget's continued funding of OER at \$4 million at SUNY and \$4 million at CUNY,

Mental health services are important, and the \$500,000 in funding should be restored. Mental health service costs should not be borne by students via increased fees.

SUPPORT CAPITAL FUNDING TO COMBAT CLIMATE CHANGE AND SUPPORT STUDENT SUCCESS

Not only is it critical for institutions of higher education to have good environmental practices in order to mold young people into becoming good environmental stewards, but also because these institutions make up a large portion of New York State's economy. According to a report from Rockefeller Institute, SUNY alone has an economic impact of \$28.6 billion.³⁸ When institutions of higher education adopt good environmental practices, they have the potential to shape the economy and drive good environmental practices forward elsewhere in the economy.

In the face of the global climate crisis, there is a moral imperative for institutions of higher education to lead the path for a more sustainable future. New York's colleges and universities should be models for the rest of the state, and country, to follow. Additionally, students should be involved in college and university processes in shaping these policies.

³⁷ NYPIRG, Hunger on Campus, The Challenge of Food Insecurity for College Students, October 2016, http://www.nypirgstudents.org/reports/Hunger_on_Campus_NYPIRG.pdf, accessed November 30, 2016.

³⁸ Schultz, Laura, "The Economic Impact of the State University of New York," Rockefeller Institute, November 1, 2018, <https://rockinst.org/issue-area/the-economic-impact-of-the-state-university-of-new-york/>

NYPIRG urges the Legislature to support New York’s colleges and universities to become these environmental models in the following ways:

- *Reduce food waste* by adopting measures to prevent putting out more food than what will be consumed, donating food, and composting.
- *Reduce plastic waste* by eliminating single-use cutlery, straws, and cups, and by not selling single-use water bottles.
- *Lead on climate change* by retrofitting buildings to be more energy efficient, electrifying buildings, investing in renewables, and switching to electric vehicles.
 - NYPIRG has long advocated for kicking off implementation of climate policies immediately on state-owned facilities and properties. SUNY alone makes up 40% of New York’s state-owned facilities.³⁹ New York can jump-start efforts to meet the goals laid out in the state’s Community Leadership and Climate Protection law by enabling SUNY and CUNY to retrofit their buildings to be more energy efficient, to electrify their buildings, and to invest in more renewables and electric vehicles and EV infrastructure.
 - SUNY already has some positive policies leading towards this direction through the “SUNY Clean Energy Roadmap.”⁴⁰ These initiatives should be fast-tracked and considered by private universities as well. At SUNY and CUNY, it is critical that additional capital funding from the State is provided for such efforts.

In addition, NYPIRG questions the policy included in the Executive Budget to require a 2 to 1 match by individual campuses to receive capital funds. The move seems to favor schools which happen to have robust endowments or happen to have wealthier alumni and seems to disadvantage smaller school which have less funding pools to pull from – precisely the campuses that may need additional capital support from the state.

In conclusion, New Yorkers need new investments in higher education, one that includes robust investment in quality and affordability. When the state limits public investment, rising tuition and other costs can lead to increased student debt, delayed graduation, and increasingly limited opportunities to thrive academically. In order to provide a quality and affordable higher education for all New Yorkers, the State must commit itself to substantially increasing public funding this year and modernizing existing financial aid programs to meet students’ needs.

Thank you.

³⁹ “Master Capital Plan Report,” SUNY, <https://sucf.suny.edu/sites/default/files/docs/Final%20consolidated%202018%202019%20Master%20Capital%20Plan.pdf>

⁴⁰ “State University of New York Clean Energy Roadmap,” SUNY, 2019, <https://www.nypa.gov/-/media/nypa/documents/document-library/cleanenergy/suny-clean-energy-roadmap.pdf>