



# DISTRICT 1 YOUTH ADVISORY BOARD

Advocating for the youth of Brentwood, Central Islip, and North Bay Shore.

## The District 1 Youth Advisory Board

Jan 18th 2024

Good Morning honorable members of the NYS Legislature,

My name is Joshua Chan, and I am honored to represent the District 1 Youth Advisory Board as its Chairman. Our organization advocates for the youth in the underserved communities of Brentwood, Central Islip, and North Bay Shore on Long Island.

Today, I stand before you to emphasize the critical importance of the Tuition Assistance Program (TAP) and the Excelsior Scholarship in shaping the educational landscape for our students. TAP has been a lifeline, ensuring that each student has equitable access to higher education. In our communities, where financial barriers can be particularly daunting, TAP has been instrumental in making college an achievable dream.

The Excelsior Scholarship, has provided tuition-free access to SUNY/CUNY institutions for families earning less than \$125,000 annually, and has been transformative. It's not merely a scholarship; it's a gateway to empowerment. It levels the playing field, enabling students from all economic backgrounds to pursue higher education without the burden of crippling debt.

Expanding TAP and the Excelsior Scholarship is not just a financial decision; it's an investment in the future of our communities. It's a recognition that talent is universal, but opportunities often are not. By ensuring that our students have access to affordable education, we are not only opening doors for individual success but also fostering the growth and prosperity of our communities. In the Brentwood School district we have around 17,000 students who are economically disadvantaged. In Central Islip we have around 5,000 students. But don't let the word disadvantaged throw you off because we are far from it. Our communities share a similar lived experience that people outside will never understand, and that's what makes us strong. These lived experiences are exactly why this organization was formed. Our Motto at the District 1 Youth Advisory Board is "Build the Future". By investing in youth towards a higher education New York State is doing exactly that. We must continue to expand the Excelsior Scholarship to its goal income limit of \$150,000. This number was laid out during the announcement of the scholarship and was poised to be reached by year 2022. This shows that we had a realistic goal but unfortunately the will power was just not there.

Being a youth leader who is soon going to graduate from SUNY Albany, I have seen first hand the difficulties me and my community face while seeking a higher education. I am so proud to say I am a child of immigrants, one of which graduated college after 20 years as she faced financial and societal barriers. There are thousands more just like me and my family who live right in the same neighborhood. Without these same grants I wouldn't be in front of you today.

As we discuss the budget for the upcoming year, I implore you to consider the long-term impact of robust support for TAP and the Excelsior Scholarship. It's an investment in the potential of our youth, the very heartbeat of our shared future. Thank you for your time and consideration.

Joshua Chan

Chairman, District 1 Youth Advisory Board