



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Shelley B. Mayer

## State Representatives Highlight \$350,000 in Funding for Latino U College Access

SHELLEY B. MAYER July 20, 2022



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(White Plains, NY) – New York State Majority Leader Andrea Stewart-Cousins, Senator Shelley B. Mayer, Assemblymember Amy Paulin, and Assemblymember Chris Burdick today

highlighted \$350,000 secured in the New York State budget for Latino U College Access (LUCA).

LUCA empowers first-generation Latino youth on their path to college and graduation through individualized mentorship and culturally relevant, bilingual programming for students and their families. The funding will be used to increase services in White Plains, Ossining, Sleepy Hollow, Tarrytown and Elmsford, and expand services to Port Chester, New Rochelle, Peekskill, Bedford and Mount Kisco.

**Senate Majority Leader Andrea Stewart-Cousins said:** “For the past decade, LUCA has been making the dream of attending college a reality for first-generation Latino students in Westchester County. That’s why I led the State Senate in securing funding for the organization in this year’s State Budget. It will allow LUCA to expand its services to more of our communities, opening the doors to higher education for so many deserving students.”

**Senator Shelley B. Mayer said:** “Oftentimes, navigating the college application process and beyond can be difficult and intimidating, especially for first-generation students and their families. I was proud to advocate for Latino U College Access to make college education more accessible to the residents of our district and Westchester County. Thank you to LUCA for opening educational opportunities by supporting our students and their families.”

**Assemblymember Amy Paulin said:** “I’m thrilled to have been able to help Latino U achieve significant program funding from the NYS Assembly to support their mission of making college a reality for first generation Latino Americans in Westchester County. Having recently met with several graduates aided by LUCA who will be attending college this fall, I was incredibly impressed and inspired by their stories and achievements. Thank you LUCA for providing the support and assistance needed to so many Westchester Latino high school students and their families, helping them to achieve their college dreams.”

**Assemblymember Chris Burdick said:** “Shortly after taking office, I was introduced to LUCA by LUCA alum, Princeton graduate, and now Bedford Town Board member Andrés Castillo. I immediately set about trying to secure funds for this incredible organization and was able to obtain a small grant in 2021. I am so pleased that we were able to secure this much larger, much-needed funding in 2022. LUCA changes lives. The leaps and bounds that they are able to help their students make would take generations without LUCA’s assistance. I’m eager to see the positive impacts of their expanding services.”

Since LUCA was founded in 2012, 6,376 students and parents have received support through community programming. The programming focuses on important steps on the path to higher education including preparing for college while in high school, picking a college that is the right fit for the student, applying for college, and financing higher education.

**LUCA Board Chairman Steve Moroney said:** “On behalf of the Board of Directors, I want to extend our heartfelt appreciation to the New York State Senators and Assemblymembers who made this incredible funding possible. Your support will allow our organization to enter its next phase of expansion and serve even more dedicated students as they become the first in their families to attend college. Thank you all for your belief in our Scholars, your confidence in our mission, and everything you do to elevate our community.”

**LUCA Executive Director Cosette Gutierrez said:** “We are extremely grateful for the support of the New York State Senate and Assembly. This generous funding will allow Latino U College Access to deepen existing school partnerships and expand programming into additional high Latino serving school districts throughout Westchester County, opening doors of opportunity for the students and families in Port Chester, Peekskill, New Rochelle, and Bedford. We are honored to be included in the state budget and look forward to supporting even more first-generation students as they enroll and succeed in college.”

**LUCA Founder & Strategic Growth Officer Shirley Acevedo Buontempo said:** “At LUCA, we believe in the incredible potential and talent of Latino youth. As the youngest and fastest growing demographic in Westchester County, the future of education will be dependent on the progress and success of Latino students. This includes supporting first-generation students in their dreams to achieve a college education. When we invest in Latino students, we are investing in a brighter future for them, for our communities, and for our nation.”

Students in LUCA's Scholars program receive mentorship from high school through college. From 2013 to 2022, 332 scholars have been enrolled in the program, of which 93 percent attend four-year colleges and universities, and 99 percent remain on track to graduate in four to six years.

**Senator Pete Harckham said:** “The state budget funding for Latino U College Access will help thousands of residents, many from Westchester, pursue higher education and achieve their goals. It also advances local efforts to create more equity in learning, especially for young people in underserved communities. I am proud to join my colleagues in the State Legislature as we invest in the success of the next generation. Special thanks are due to Senator Mayer and Assemblymember Burdick for pushing for this partnership with Latino U College Access.”

**Assemblyman Gary Pretlow said:** “Education is the means towards great development; it is one of the most important power tools students will use to be successful, the more we invest the better the outcome.”

**Assemblywoman Sandy Galef said:** “It is such a delight to celebrate the good work that Latino U College Access does for our communities. When a student represents the first generation in their family to pursue higher education, they are likely to have questions about the process but not know who to turn to for answers. LUCA bridges that gap by helping talented

young people access the support they need to realize their dreams of a college education.”

**Assemblyman Steve Otis said:** “I am thrilled that we were able to include funding in the state budget to expand the Latino U College Access program. Westchester students will have another opportunity to follow their academic dreams through these additional funds.”

**Assemblyman Nader Sayegh said:** “With additional New York State financial support, Latino U College Access will allow more first-generation latinos the opportunities that a college education offers. I applaud the work Latino U College Access is doing to get us to a time when every child in every neighborhood in Yonkers and Westchester County can enjoy the benefits of a quality education.”

**White Plains City School District Superintendent Joseph Ricca said:** “This is the story of New York. This is the story of ensuring that every one of our children, regardless of where they come from, or regardless of what their familial experience has been, has an opportunity to achieve the American dream.”

**Latino U Scholar Jocelyn Nieto said:** “While reflecting on my academic and professional journey, I am positive that achieving my goals was thanks in great part to the unconditional support of the LUCA Familia. As a first-generation student, there is an overwhelming amount of anxiety surrounding the college process and the world after graduation. Thankfully, I always had LUCA’s support. Being a Latino U Scholar means being part of a devoted community who will fight fearlessly to see through the success of promising Latino youth.”

**Latino U Scholar Kate Hidalgo said:** “When I was selected as a Latino U Scholar, I was excited and relieved. What I didn't realize at the time was how much more being a Scholar would mean. LUCA understands that, when you are a first-gen, it is not only the student applying

to college, but the whole family. LUCA completely changed my life. They encouraged me when all I felt was doubt and pushed me because they recognized the potential in me, even when I didn't. I have not only been able to accomplish my dreams, but I have also gained a second family."