

A New Approach to Public Higher Education Funding

Whereas, the current economic and public health crisis demands a new approach to public higher education in New York State; and

Whereas, as New Yorkers seek to emerge from the pandemic, thousands of people across the state will turn to public colleges to earn degrees and help them to rebuild their lives; families will rely on the vital care provided by the SUNY hospitals; communities, individuals and industries will turn increasingly to CUNY and SUNY as resources not just for workforce development, but for research, scholarship, cultural work and imaginative policy solutions; and New Yorkers who seek to remedy the gaping injustices of race and class exposed by the pandemic will demand that public higher education step up to close those gaps; and

Whereas, New York's public university systems have been hollowed out by decades of systematic underfunding, leaving both SUNY and CUNY colleges at all levels understaffed, under-resourced and increasingly reliant on annual tuition hikes, stripped of the resources the current crisis demands; and

Whereas, a return to pre-COVID "normal" will leave the state's public university systems unable to contribute as they should to an inclusive and just recovery; and continuing economic austerity for CUNY and SUNY will mean a future without the research capacity New York urgently needs and with deepening racial, ethnic and class inequities; and

Whereas, the state's reliance on tuition and fees to fund SUNY has led to abrogating its role in addressing the multiple crises facing our state, including the urgent need for quality healthcare for all, leadership on the climate crisis, and confronting the deep racial and economic divisions in the state; and

Whereas, State funding for CUNY has dropped steeply in the past, as a result of deliberate, racialized underinvestment, making this a moment that demands not just reversal of cuts but a transformative plan to revitalize and reinvest, the New Deal for CUNY; and

Whereas, SUNY and CUNY community colleges often serve those who can least afford a higher education, yet the state annually exempts itself from State Education Law Article 125, Section 6304, which requires state government to provide 40 percent of community college funding; and

Whereas, the current economic crisis demands not just that New York fulfill the statutory requirement on community college funding, but that the state make bold and future-thinking investments in public community colleges, often the first rung on the educational ladder for the least advantaged students; and

Whereas, NYSUT has advocated seriously for the funding needs of higher education and made progress in recent years in gaining support among legislators for the need for investment; and

Whereas, despite the urgent need for increased investment in higher education, the Executive Budget for Fiscal Year 2022 calls for multi-million-dollar cuts to both CUNY and SUNY; and

Whereas, increased investment in public higher education would benefit all NYSUT members, because SUNY and CUNY play a vital role in education at all levels, educating the majority of New York's public school teachers and graduates; therefore be it

RESOLVED that NYSUT will prioritize investment in public higher education in its legislative agenda; will call on legislators to refuse to pass a budget that does not include substantial new revenue and major new investment in public higher education; and will make legislators' voting record on increased revenue and public higher education funding as significant a criterion as votes on vouchers and charter schools.