



**New York State Senate Higher Education Committee  
Hearing on the Cost of Public Education**

**Submitted by Melanie Kruevelis, Senior Manager of Policy and Advocacy, Young Invincibles  
October 24, 2019**

Good morning. My name is Melanie Kruevelis, and I am the Senior Manager of Policy and Advocacy at Young Invincibles. Young Invincibles is a policy and advocacy non-profit dedicated to elevating young adults in the political process and expanding economic opportunities for our generation. We work with young adults across the country and in our five state offices (New York, Texas, California, Illinois, and Colorado) to ensure that our voices are at the table when it comes to higher education, health care, workforce development, and civic engagement. I want to thank Senator Toby Ann Stavisky for bringing folks together for this important hearing on the cost of public education in New York State, and her leadership on the Senate Higher Education Committee. I also want to thank Senators Andrew Gounardes, Kevin Parker, Julia Salazar, and Velmanette Montgomery for their commitment to college access and success in New York City.

Today's hearing comes at a critical moment for New York's college students. Today, nine out of every ten jobs created in the United States go to those with a college degree.<sup>1</sup> In New York City, workers with a bachelor's degree earn, on average, \$550 more per week than those with a high school diploma.<sup>2</sup> While there are multiple pathways to a living-wage career, a college degree remains one of the best bets a person can make to attaining long-term economic stability. However, access to a quality postsecondary experience is not created equal. Nationally, white and Asian American Pacific Islander (AAPI) students graduate from college at rates nearly twice that of Black students and about 1.5 that of Latinx students.<sup>3</sup> And while data shows that completion rates for students at both two-year and four-year public colleges are higher than for

---

<sup>1</sup> Goldstein, Steve. (2019). Nine out of 10 new jobs are going to those with a college degree. Retrieved from: <https://www.marketwatch.com/story/nine-out-of-10-new-jobs-are-going-to-those-with-a-college-degree-2018-06-04>

<sup>2</sup> New York State Department of Labor. Labor Statistics for the New York City Region. Retrieved from: [https://www.labor.ny.gov/stats/why\\_go\\_to\\_school.shtm](https://www.labor.ny.gov/stats/why_go_to_school.shtm)

<sup>3</sup> Six-year college graduation rates for AAPI students: 70.3 percent; Black students: 41.0 percent; Latinx students: 49.6 percent; White students: 67.1 percent. Source: National Student Clearinghouse. (2018) Completing College – National – 2018. Figure 6. Retrieved from: <https://nscresearchcenter.org/signaturereport16/>.

students enrolled in for-profit colleges, the fact remains that students at public colleges — particularly those enrolled at our community colleges — are graduating at much lower rates than anyone at today’s hearing would like.<sup>4</sup>

Evidence of this racial gap in college attainment can be seen in our public institutions right here in New York. Graduation rates across State University of New York (SUNY) colleges are higher than those at City University of New York (CUNY) campuses. At SUNY, the six-year graduation rate at the system’s senior colleges is 68 percent,<sup>5</sup> compared with a 55 percent<sup>6</sup> completion rate at CUNY’s four-year universities.<sup>7</sup> The gap is present, and perhaps even more alarming, at the systems’ community colleges: SUNY’s community colleges have a 26 percent three-year graduation rate, as compared with 22 percent at CUNY’s community colleges.<sup>8</sup>

What does this story of differing graduation rates tell us about the state of higher education equity in New York? One must look at the students currently served by these public college systems to see. Today, more than half of the student population at SUNY is white,<sup>9</sup> while at CUNY, over half of the total student population are Black and Latinx students.<sup>10</sup> 45 percent of CUNY students are the first in their families to go to college, navigating a complex, costly, and time-consuming system without lived experiences from families to lean on for guidance.<sup>11</sup>

How then can New York change course and ensure that its young people have equitable access to educational success and meaningful work? How can we ensure taxpayer dollars are supporting systems that propel more students from low-income families and more students of color into greater economic stability?

---

<sup>4</sup> National Student Clearinghouse. (2018). Completing College – National – 2018. Figure 4. Retrieved from: <https://nscresearchcenter.org/wp-content/uploads/SignatureReport16.pdf>

<sup>5</sup> SUNY Fast Facts. (2019). Retrieved from: <https://www.suny.edu/about/fast-facts/>

<sup>6</sup> CUNY Matters, Keep on Moving Up. (2018). Retrieved from: <http://www1.cuny.edu/sites/matters/2018/02/16/keep-on-moving-on/>

<sup>7</sup> CUNY Matters, Keep on Moving Up. (2018). Retrieved from: <http://www1.cuny.edu/sites/matters/2018/02/16/keep-on-moving-on/>

<sup>8</sup> Center for an Urban Future. (2017). Struggling to the Finish Line: Community College Completion in New York State Retrieved from: <https://nycfuture.org/research/community-college-completion-in-new-york>

<sup>9</sup> SUNY Fast Facts. (2019). Retrieved from: <https://www.suny.edu/about/fast-facts/>

<sup>10</sup> CUNY Office of Institutional Research and Assessment. (2018). Retrieved from: [https://www.cuny.edu/irdatabook/rpts2\\_AY\\_current/ENRL\\_0015\\_RACE\\_TOT\\_PCT\\_rpt.pdf](https://www.cuny.edu/irdatabook/rpts2_AY_current/ENRL_0015_RACE_TOT_PCT_rpt.pdf)

<sup>11</sup> The State of CUNY 2017: Where We Have Been, Where We Are At, and Where We Are Going. (2017). Retrieved from: <http://www1.cuny.edu/sites/cunyufs/wp-content/uploads/sites/48/2017/07/The-State-of-CUNY-2017-for-COPS-1-003.pdf>

To start, the state can work to ensure that our systems are adequately funded to serve students, who are increasingly entering college from a variety of backgrounds — from the rising number of young parents enrolling in college, to the growing share of students juggling work and school, to the number of students experiencing homelessness in college.<sup>12</sup> Yet, our current paradigm for public higher education funding does not support that vision of postsecondary equity. Consider the curious case of the TAP Gap. Since 2011, state law has required that students with the greatest financial need — those eligible for the maximum Tuition Assistance Program (TAP) award — must be able to attend SUNY or CUNY tuition-free, even if state disinvestment from TAP meant the award no longer matched tuition. While ensuring that the state’s most financially at-need students is laudable, the law required the universities — not the state — to fill in the gap when TAP doesn’t cover tuition. This threatens the institutional ability to provide critical student supports such as counseling and advising services, full-time faculty and staff, and support with non-tuition costs that can make or break a student’s ability to persist. This unfunded tuition mandate does not serve the state’s public institutions, nor the students they serve. **It’s time for the state to eliminate the TAP Gap by indexing the TAP award with tuition, so tuition no longer exceeds TAP grants and grows with the costs of college.**

The continued underinvestment in the TAP award particularly harms those students on the independent TAP schedule, including homeless youth. A 2019 survey of more than 22,000 CUNY undergraduates found that nearly 15 percent of the surveyed undergraduates experienced homelessness in a given year — five percentage points higher than the share of New York City Department of Education (NYC DOE) students in temporary housing.<sup>13</sup> And while research suggests student homelessness is on the rise across the P-16 system, our state financial aid system does not adequately serve students who lack a reliable, safe place to stay at night. Under current TAP rules, unaccompanied homeless youth (UHY) are classified as financially independent students, which essentially cuts how much TAP aid these students are eligible to receive. Today, the maximum award for an independent student is \$3,025, compared with a maximum dependent student award of \$5,165. In terms of average awards, unaccompanied

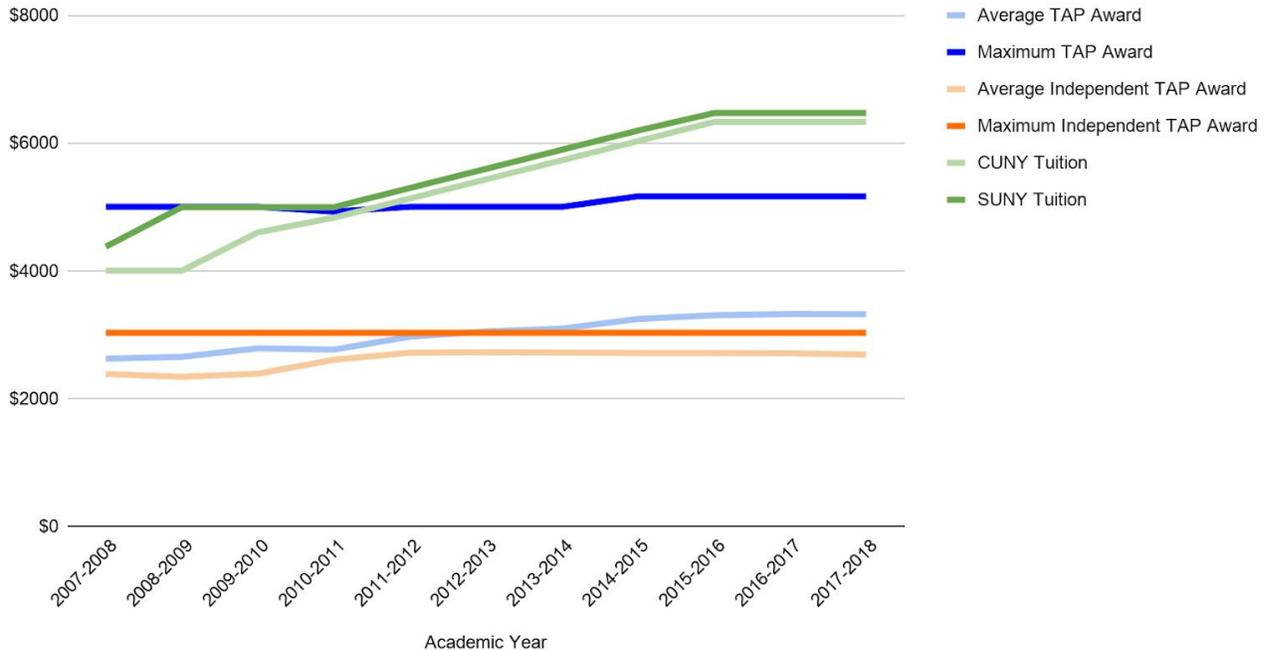
---

<sup>12</sup> CLASP. (2015). Yesterday’s Non-Traditional Student is Today’s Traditional Student. Retrieved from: <https://www.clasp.org/sites/default/files/public/resources-and-publications/publication-1/CPES-Nontraditional-students-pdf.pdf>; Hope Center. (2019). City University of New York #RealCollege Survey. Retrieved from: [https://hope4college.com/wp-content/uploads/2019/03/HOPE\\_realcollege\\_CUNY\\_report\\_final\\_webversion.pdf](https://hope4college.com/wp-content/uploads/2019/03/HOPE_realcollege_CUNY_report_final_webversion.pdf)

<sup>13</sup> Hope Center. (2019). City University of New York #RealCollege Survey. Retrieved from: [https://hope4college.com/wp-content/uploads/2019/03/HOPE\\_realcollege\\_CUNY\\_report\\_final\\_webversion.pdf](https://hope4college.com/wp-content/uploads/2019/03/HOPE_realcollege_CUNY_report_final_webversion.pdf)

homeless youth receive \$631 less in TAP awards annually than their dependent peers. This limits the financial aid available to students who could most benefit from an investment in their education. In 2014, New York State amended rules surrounding dependent status for foster youth, orphans, and wards of the court, allowing those students to access the state’s dependent status and thus receive a higher amount of aid. Unaccompanied homeless students, however, were not included in that revision. **Given the prevalence of homelessness on college campuses, the state should expand this dependency status change to students who are experiencing homelessness.**

The purchasing power of the Tuition Assistance Program (TAP) has declined over the last decade — and unaccompanied homeless youth receive less than their dependent peers.



What else can be done to ensure that New York State honors taxpayers’ investment in public colleges and supports its increasingly diverse student body to graduation? Invest in wraparound services that both research and students say improve their on-campus experience and increase the likelihood of completion. Take, for instance, the CUNY Accelerated Study in Associate Programs (ASAP). ASAP is an initiative that helps students earn associate degrees within three years by providing a range of financial, academic, and personal supports including waivers for

tuition and mandatory fees for students, and providing students with transportation and textbook supports. A study by MDRC found that students enrolled in CUNY ASAP had doubled the graduation rates of their non-ASAP peers.<sup>14</sup> In fact, the ASAP three-year graduation rate of 53 percent is more than three times higher than the national urban community college three-year graduation rate of 16 percent, and more than double that of similar CUNY associate degree-seeking students at 25 percent.<sup>15</sup> CUNY's ASAP program has been so successful that it has been replicated in Ohio, which has seen similar improvements in retention and completion to that of CUNY. In addition, this model is being expanded regionally, with Westchester Community College most recently launching a similar program. Given the success of ASAP, CUNY has recently started replicating this model in the system's four-year institutions with the Accelerate, Complete, and Engage (ACE) program, which is currently piloting at John Jay College of Criminal Justice and Lehman College. Students corroborate what the outcomes data show. In focus groups Young Invincibles held across New York City over the last year, students told us about the value they saw in the CUNY ASAP program. *"I feel like in college, ASAP is one of the best programs anybody can join,"* one student told us. *"If they bring it to the four-year colleges, I'd go back to school to purposefully get in that program."* As the state struggles to increase its graduation rates at public colleges, we should look at the model that's improving those rates by meeting students' needs where there at. It's time to invest in programs that move the needle on student completion and success. **New York State should fully cover the cost of ASAP and ACE at \$100 million, allowing institutions to double programming across across CUNY campuses citywide.**

Thank you for the opportunity to testify and we look forward to working with the Senators present today and your colleagues to tackle the college affordability crisis, and ensure that all New Yorkers have access to a high-quality postsecondary credential.

---

<sup>14</sup> MDRC. (2019). Evaluating Replications of CUNY's Accelerated Study in Associate Programs (ASAP). Retrieved from: <https://www.mdrc.org/project/Evaluating-Replications-of-CUNY-ASAP#overview>.

<sup>15</sup> The City University of New York. (2018). CUNY Expands Its Promising 'ACE' Program to Lehman College in Partnership With Robin Hood Foundation. Retrieved from: <https://www1.cuny.edu/mu/forum/2018/12/10/lehman-college-ace-program/https://www1.cuny.edu/mu/forum/2018/12/10/lehman-college-ace-program/>.