

**NYSUT Testimony to the Board of Regents  
On the Statewide Plan for Higher Education  
November 29, 2012**

Good morning, I am Ellen Schuler Mauk. I speak today on behalf of the 600,000 members of New York State United Teachers. I serve as the Chair of the NYSUT Higher Education Policy Council which includes affiliates at SUNY, CUNY, including community colleges at both of the public systems, and a variety of independent colleges across the State. I am an English Professor at Suffolk Community College and serve the President of the Faculty Association of Suffolk Community College.

Chancellor Tisch, Chairmen Bendit, and members of the Board of Regents, thank you for the opportunity to speak before you today. I would like to discuss the very serious subject of New York's plan for Higher Education over the next eight years as Higher Education offers a significant opportunity for the advancement of New York. This State is home to some of the finest institutions of higher education in the country, both public and private colleges attracting students from all over the country. These 270 institutions educate more than 1.27 million students each year. Access to higher education for these students will mean access to greater opportunities and an improved future. This access must be protected and enhanced over the next eight years.

In order to create access and preserve a student's opportunity to learn, the State Education Department must adopt three priorities for Higher Education for 2012-2020:

- I. *Investing in More Full-time Faculty, Staff, and Services.*
- II. *Increasing New York State Support for Higher Education.*
- III. *Investing in Academic Quality*

## **Investing In More Full Time Faculty**

Both research and experience has shown that the investment in, and integration of, more full-time faculty and student services increases the likelihood of students succeeding in their pursuit of higher education. The 2012-2020 Statewide Plan for Higher Education should call for an investment into more full-time faculty and staff members to improve the educational experience at New York's institutions of higher education. While there have been past promises of increasing full-time faculty, the number of full-time faculty is still considerably less than the number of part-time faculty members at SUNY and CUNY institutions.

From 2004 to 2010 the number of full-time faculty at SUNY and CUNY only increased by 8% while the number of part-time faculty increased by 21%. As of 2010 only 39% of CUNY's faculty was full-time. At CUNY in 2010, adjuncts made up 63% of the faculty at community colleges and 59% at the senior colleges. At the thirty SUNY community colleges, the number of part time faculty was 10,754 compared to 4,462 full time faculty. During the same period, enrollment at SUNY community colleges increased from 209,515 in 2004 to 249,347 in 2010-- an increase in enrollment of over 19% (39,832 students). But the number of full time faculty at SUNY community colleges only increased by 0.2%.

Let me give you a very specific example of the part-time and full-time staffing issues from my own institution, Suffolk County Community College. Currently SCCC has 1,593 part-time faculty but only 478 full-time faculty. Included in both sets of those numbers are not only classroom faculty but also librarians, counselors and professional assistants. Of those 478 full-time faculty, only 310 are classroom faculty—for a project student enrollment of 24,504 students. To give you an even

more specific perspective, in 1976 when SCCC's enrollment was 17,928, it employed 348 full-time classroom faculty. So in 36 years, our student population increased by 6,576 students but the number of full-time classroom faculty decreased by 38.

As more and more students enter postsecondary education in need of remediation the faculty and staff at colleges and universities play an integral role in ensuring students are prepared and capable of completing their academic degree. In 2010 at SUNY community colleges more than 40% of incoming students were in need of remediation. At CUNY the situation is even starker with nearly 75% of first year students at community colleges in need of remediation. In order to better invest in higher education, New York must reinvest in the academic services students need to remain in college and graduate – and graduate in a timely manner. And this leads me to Priority #2:

### **Increasing New York State Support for Higher Education**

The loss of academic programs at public colleges and universities in New York in recent years is a direct effect of over \$1.5 billion in State reductions to the CUNY and SUNY systems. We believe the State should provide a robust funding stream to higher education if it hopes to meet the goal of a strong and vibrant higher education system across the State. In our view New York must reverse course and end the practice of cutting higher education funding.

Through our Community college sector New Yorkers have an opportunity to gain an education and necessary skills that are required for students to move forward in both their academic and career pursuits. New York State Education Law requires community college funding to be 1/3 from the State, 1/3 from local sponsor

communities, and 1/3 from student tuition. State statute requires the State to contribute 40% of the operating budget for a full opportunity community college, while the local sponsors are required to contribute 26.7% of a community college's operating budget. Student tuition payments are supposed to cover the remaining 33% of operating costs.

Sadly, the State has failed to live up to its promise to properly fund community colleges and many local sponsors have not held up their end of the funding stream as well. As a result, students attending community colleges have been forced to pay considerably more than their share of community college costs. Between 2004 and 2011 the State share of SUNY community college net operating costs declined from 31.5% to 26.5% while average Student tuition increased from 37% to 43% of net operating costs. In many community colleges, though, the Student share is over 50%. Again at SCCC our tuition of \$3,990 funds 52% of the college's budget—and SCCC's tuition is neither the highest amount nor the highest percentage of a community college's operating budget.

New York's population must be retrained to gain the skills required of new and innovative jobs and NY's community colleges offer these courses for these skills. However, community colleges will only be able to continue assisting in New York's transformation if they have the essential resources to operate these new programs. The Statewide Plan should advocate for future investments into community colleges as they continue to prepare students for current workforce needs.

In reference to preparing students for current workforce needs, additional, and perhaps ear-marked, funding is needed for high cost/high need programs on our

campuses to enable SUNY community colleges to meet the ever-increasing demand from students and host communities for graduates of nursing, allied health and other resource-intensive technical programs. Because of equipment and safety issues in the technical programs and the clinical placement requirements in the nursing and allied health programs, the student-faculty ratio in these programs is often 1 faculty member to 8, 9 or at a maximum 10 students, compared with 1 to 35 students on average in the liberal arts areas. The majority of the state's RN programs are offered at the community colleges with the BN programs being offered at SUNY's four-year colleges. Two years ago SUNY New Paltz decided to discontinue its nursing program, in large part due to financial considerations and not a lack of interest or need in the field. But this isn't the only institution that has begun the conversation as to whether such programs can be continued with no additional funding stream, let alone be expanded, and, if so, at the expense of what other programs that may serve a larger portion of the student body population. The Statewide Plan's advocacy for future investments in higher education needs to consider both the big picture needs of higher education in general as well as the workforce needs of specific programs that are equally essential but run at a much higher cost per student than other programs.

### **Investing in Academic Quality**

The structure of higher education across the country is very different in 2012 than it was in 2004. The rise of online education companies has significantly altered the way higher education is delivered to students. Online colleges have reduced the brick and mortar institutions to online portals that allow very limited interaction between students and professors. This can result in a loss of critical thinking created by intense interactions between students. Academia is strengthened through the cultural exchanges between students and their professors, and through

the creation of barriers in online education these experiences may be lost on students. As a result, the State must ensure that for-profit and online educational programs are regulated to ensure that academic standards continue to be held in high regard in New York. The for-profit sector has come under a great amount of scrutiny for their deceptive financial practices with students and a low quality education product. As such the New York State Department of Education must ensure that a high bar is used before any such programs are authorized to operate within the State. NYSUT recommends that the State Education Department only authorize programs which meet needs that the New York academic community does not already serve.

The for-profit industry of higher education must be further examined in New York to ensure that students are receiving a strong education at these institutions. Students continue to pay more for an education across the country, and must have protection that their degree will lead to further opportunities. Nationally for-profit colleges have come under criticism for relying heavily upon federal student aid and support from their students in order to operate. Many for-profit colleges are obtaining more than 85% of profits from federal student aid, which does not include student aid provided by the military to veterans and active military personnel. In addition, for-profit graduates have large debt loads. Nationally, the average student currently graduates with \$25,050 in student loans, while students of for-profit colleges have an average student loan debt of \$33,050. In New York the average student debt level is \$26,271 for all students graduating in 2010 according to the Project on Student Debt. The for-profit industry has offered students an education at an increased cost compared to public colleges in New York, forcing students to have increased levels of debt after graduation. The State Education Department in New York must continue to strongly regulate these

colleges to ensure that students in New York are receiving a quality education from all institutions in the State.

We already have robust and successful distance education programs at colleges around the State. I think it is clear that our community college faculty have an understanding of the needs of the students and industry around New York to create strong distance education courses that make students career ready. We do not need packaged academic programs at institutions in New York. SUNY Empire State, the four year campuses and the SUNY community colleges have faculty with the educational wisdom to best prepare and educate our students giving them the greatest likelihood of success. As faculty we continue to work with one another creating and modifying the best practices for educating students in different formats. Through distance education we are able to reach non-traditional students with courses that best fit their learning needs. As technology and academic programs continue to adapt so too do our faculty, because we have an understanding of the delivery methods that will help our students learn, achieve, and graduate with the skills necessary to succeed. By using the distance education courses at New York's public institutions the department and systems will continue to maintain control on the education that New York Students are receiving. Outside institutions cannot offer the educational opportunities that our campuses have cultivated for years. We should rely upon these strong academic programs to deliver the services we know our students need. Through distance education students can choose a program at our strong public institutions and receive the education they want and deserve.

In summary, what we are advocating is that the 2012-2020 Statewide Plan reinvests in the Academia of Higher Education in New York.

We believe that our recommendations for the 2012-2020 Statewide Plan offers New York a tremendous opportunity to reinvest in its economy, its students, and its future stability by investing in higher education. By investing in community colleges, SUNY and CUNY's four year colleges and the SUNY hospitals New York State will begin to once again utilize the vital resource of higher education to power New York's future. The State Education Department should outline a plan which focuses on reinvesting in faculty, staff and services at all institutions of higher education to ensure that our students have the highest quality opportunity to gain an education in New York.

By reinvesting in academia New York will offer opportunities for a stronger educated populous, greater opportunity for research and development in New York and an empowered system of higher education in the State drawing students and business from across the world to New York. These investments will bear fruit in form of a more highly skilled workforce, spin off economic activity from the investments made into the various research pursuits of our faculty and institutions and a more attractive place to live and do business. The global village predicted over 50 years ago – is here and upon us. Higher education is more than just creating a future workforce; it is about creating a future of informed and effective citizens. An educated citizenry will drive New York forward as graduates strive to improve their society through programs of social justice.

As Thomas Jefferson said, “an educated citizenry is a vital requisite for our survival as a free people.” If New York does not take the lead and invest our human spirit then other states and nations will. This will only serve to disadvantage New York State residents in future years. No modern society can

become prosperous, nor can it maintain prosperity without a strong educational system which invests in the future of that society by investing in its citizens.