



## **New York State Association for College Admission Counseling Position on the Proposed Excelsior Scholarship**

The New York State Association for College Admission Counseling (NYSACAC) is the state affiliate of the National Association for College Admission Counseling (NACAC), the only professional association composed of members from secondary schools, community-based organizations, colleges and universities, and independent counselors. NYSACAC welcomes all who are involved in assisting students in the transition into their post-secondary education.

As an organization, NYSACAC supports legislation that increases college access and success for students. As a counseling association, we are concerned about maintaining a healthy college choice environment for New York students. This position paper is being presented in response to Governor Andrew Cuomo's recent proposal regarding The Excelsior Scholarship.

NYSACAC is excited that higher education is a priority for the Governor's 2017 budget. The Excelsior Scholarship, proposed in January of 2017 would make SUNY and CUNY tuition-free for full-time students who earn, or whose families earn, less than \$125,000. The new aid program would leverage existing aid programs and cover the remaining cost of tuition for eligible students not covered by TAP and Pell grants. The new initiative would be phased in over three years, beginning for New Yorkers making up to \$100,000 annually in the fall of 2017, increasing to \$110,000 in 2018, and reaching \$125,000 in 2019. It is important to remember that this is a proposal to the legislature. It requires the support and approval of the state Assembly and Senate. It is estimated that this program could support around 940,000 families with college-age children.

While we support increased access to postsecondary education, NYSACAC has several concerns involving the Governor's new proposal. First, low-income students and families who receive substantial financial aid awards stand to benefit very little under the Excelsior Scholarship. It is estimated that these students would still be asked to take loans in the amount of \$10,000-\$14,000/per year to cover additional costs of attendance and housing at a SUNY or CUNY school. These costs limit possibilities of post secondary education for many students. This is why NYSACAC continues to urge our representatives to support programs that are aimed at supporting low-income students, such as EOP, HEOP, STEP, CSTEP, and SEEK.

Second, many students from across the economic spectrum choose to attend private colleges and universities, which may be a better fit for their academic/social needs or extracurricular talents. Although cost is always a factor when deciding on college attendance, we hope that families continue to be able to make college decisions that are right for them. Any effort to eliminate tuition costs should not interfere with financial support for students who

choose to attend private not-for-profit colleges in New York. With the estimated cost of the Governor's proposal at \$163 million dollars per year, NYSACAC would not want these additional funds to come at the expense of TAP funding. Along with free-tuition at public universities, TAP funding should be increased and eligibility expanded to ensure students who choose to attend private universities are also accounted for. NYSACAC also urges the Governor to review the possibility of expanding the Excelsior Scholarship to be applicable for students to use at private not-for-profit colleges.

Third, while the full details of this scholarship have not been released, it is likely that only those students who are eligible to receive TAP funding will be eligible for free tuition at SUNY and CUNY. Without enactment of the NYS DREAM Act, undocumented students would remain ineligible. Of the more than 4,500 undocumented students who graduate from New York State high schools every year, only 5-10% will pursue a college degree. Any effort to eliminate tuition costs and expand college access should be targeted to those who are most often deprived of it entirely. Governor Cuomo has proposed the NYS DREAM Act in his 2017 State of the State address. NYSACAC is calling on members of the NYS Assembly and Senate to approve the DREAM Act this year.

As we await more details on the Governor's proposal and negotiations in the state legislature, NYSACAC is once again excited that higher education is a priority for the Governor's 2017 budget. We look forward to taking part in the discussion to expand college access and hope to serve as a resource, with a multitude of knowledge and expertise throughout New York state that may assist in these conversations.