Commentary/Op-Ed - January 2017

Op-Ed: New York Can Help Students Afford College—and Graduate

Governor Cuomo's proposal to make public college tuition free for all New Yorkers, while a bold idea and smart investment, could have an even more powerful impact. New York should make public college tuition-free. At the same time, the state should take steps to help students complete their studies and make the most of this crucial investment.

by Tom Hilliard

Governor Andrew Cuomo's plan to make public college tuition free for all New Yorkers is a bold idea and a smart investment. The Excelsior initiative confronts the central dilemma of New York's emerging knowledge economy: higher education has become the main highway to the middle class, yet too many New Yorkers struggle to pay the toll. However, Cuomo's proposal could have an even more powerful impact by strengthening student success at the same time.

More than half of first-time students at New York's public colleges will not graduate in six years, a status quo thatundermines the promise of equal access to higher education. New York is about to invest taxpayer dollars to make college more affordable. Let's make sure that money goes to helping students graduate, not just attend classes.

In this op-ed for *City Limits*, Center for an Urban Future Senior Research Tom Hilliard asserts that New York should make public college tuition-free, but at the same time, the state should take steps to help students complete their studies and make the most of this crucial investment.

Read the op-ed here.

This op-ed follows publication of several CUF reports on community colleges and college readiness, including CUF's *Completion Day*, which asserted that while community colleges are a critical resource for a growing number of New Yorkers, they are taken for granted by policymakers and face enormous challenges in graduating students; *Tapped Out*, which found that the Tuition Assistance Program (TAP), the state's main financial aid program, is out of reach for most community college students enrolled on a part-time basis; and *Mobility Makers*, which showed that community colleges were crucial platforms for economic mobility but that too few students enrolled actually made it to graduation.

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