



THE PUBLIC HIGHER EDUCATION EMPOWERMENT AND INNOVATION ACT

GOOD FOR STUDENTS AND THEIR FAMILIES

New York State has a history of tuition increases occurring whenever the state suffers a fiscal crisis. The amount of tax dollar support provided to SUNY is reduced and in its place goes student tuition revenue. In 2008, the SUNY Board of Trustees adopted a “Rational Tuition Policy” – as endorsed by the SUNY Student Assembly – that implements a method of modest, annual and predictable tuition increases based on the Higher Education Price Index (HEPI). This concept is expanded upon further in the SUNY/CUNY Empowerment Act with the provision that annual tuition increases never exceed 2.5 times the five year rolling average of HEPI.

Perhaps even more significant however is that the Act removes tuition from the political process and places it in the hands of the University where it belongs. Tuition revenue will no longer go through the state’s general fund, meaning students won’t have to contend with the kind of irregularities they faced last year, when the state took 90% of their tuition increase and used it for purposes other than their education. Now, SUNY will collect tuition dollars, and SUNY’s Board of Trustees will be responsible for ensuring a tuition policy that is fair, equitable and responsible.

Family budgeting represents a challenge in these tough economic times, and college costs are a significant expense for any student and their family. With modest, predictable tuition increases families can engage in a reasonable planning process without the worry that college costs will spike in huge, random increments. Beyond that, SUNY will provide for enhanced financial aid and scholarship assistance to protect traditional TAP eligible students who would be impacted by a differential or rational tuition increase, preserving access and fundamental affordability.

College costs differ greatly from region to region, campus to campus, and degree program to degree program. Having the ability to charge varying tuition rates will provide additional resources to the campuses to build upon existing academic programs with new faculty, develop new programs meeting student demand, and enhance the overall quality of life on the campus. Just as with general tuition increases, SUNY will provide for enhanced financial aid and scholarship assistance to protect traditional TAP eligible students who would be impacted by such an increase, and the SUNY Board of Trustees would be responsible for ensuring fair, equitable and responsible results.

The SUNY/CUNY Empowerment act provides campuses with the ability to give students the high quality education they deserve as citizens of the State of New York. We are one of only a handful of states across the nation that do not already have comparable measures in place, and it is clear that our students will be left behind if change does not come.