Tuition program makes good sense

By Nancy L. Zimpher, Commentary
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New York, like most states, is facing a crisis in education — not enough students are being trained in the areas of science, technology, engineering and math to support and foster our own economic growth.

Across the state, in fact, STEM careers are growing 2.5 times faster than those in any other field. Nationally, we’ll need an estimated 2.4 million more STEM graduates by 2018, just as this year’s college freshman are receiving their diplomas.

The value of this opportunity for all involved cannot be overstated. For students, it means a guaranteed admission — on state scholarship — into a world-class higher education degree program and immediate job placement upon graduation. For our colleges, it means top-of-their-class students who graduate in the top 10 percent of their class an unprecedented opportunity. Come to SUNY or CUNY and earn a degree in some of today’s most in-demand career fields — tuition free. Do well, and agree to work in New York for at least five years after graduation, and we’ll find you a job where you can be successful.

With the passage of this year’s budget, however, Gov. Andrew Cuomo and the Legislature are making it possible to do something about it.

The STEM tuition program offers New York’s high school students who graduate in the top 10 percent of their class an unprecedented opportunity. Come to SUNY or CUNY and earn a degree in some of today’s most in-demand career fields — tuition free. Do well, and agree to work in New York for at least five years after graduation, and we’ll find you a job where you can be successful.

This win-win-win proposal is an innovative as it is critical. At SUNY, we are looking forward to partnering with the state’s school districts and employers to put the governor’s STEM tuition plan into action.

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