



**Testimony to**

**Senate Joint Legislative Public Hearing**

**Executive Budget Proposals: Elementary Education/Secondary Education**

**Presented by**

Crystal Griffith  
Director, Workforce Development and Education  
The Business Council of NYS

January 29, 2025

My name is Crystal Griffith, and I am The Director of Workforce Development and Education at The Business Council of New York State, Inc. We are New York's largest statewide employer association, representing approximately 3,500 private sector employers across New York. Our membership is a diverse group of businesses from all sectors of the economy ranging from large scale employers, higher education institutions, minority and women-owned businesses, entrepreneurs, and small business owners. We appreciate this opportunity to submit testimony to the Committee on Elementary Education/Secondary Education.

The Business Council of New York State is pleased to see a proposal in the Executive Budget for the 2025-26 school year that provides \$64.58M for **the College in High School Opportunity Fund**. Including \$12.20M to provide new ongoing, per-credit funding for College in High School programs representing an increase of \$6.34M from the prior school year. However, the executive budget **fails to include Advanced Placement (AP) coursework as an early college pathway** in the Opportunity Fund. We strongly urge the Legislature to provide **\$10M in funding for AP coursework** to ensure that it is recognized as a vital part of the early college landscape.

In 2023, Governor Kathy Hochul signed into law Chapter 355 of the Laws of 2023, requiring each New York State school district and charter school to notify students and families about the benefits and opportunities of participating in advanced coursework. This legislation was widely celebrated, as access to information about advanced coursework is essential for expanding early college opportunities. Yet, despite being one of the longest-standing early college programs, AP coursework has been left out of the current budget proposal.

### **Advanced Placement (AP) Coursework**

As an effective tool for advancing student success is Advanced Placement (AP) coursework, AP courses provide rigorous academic preparation, enable students to earn college credit while in high school, and significantly reduce the financial burden of higher education. However, despite increasing participation and success rates, state funding for AP coursework has remained stagnant at \$5.8M for the past 5 budget years.

While we are grateful for the state's continued investment in AP coursework, flat funding has led to rising costs for students. We urge the Legislature to increase AP exam funding to \$9.3M in the FY 2025-26 budget, ensuring that **no hard-working low-income student in New York pays out of pocket for an AP exam**. This increase would allow exams to be taken at no cost.

### **The Growing Cost Burden on Students**

- New York has been a national leader in expanding AP access, with over 168,000 students taking AP exams in 2023, 41% of whom were low-income.
- Despite this growth, funding has remained at \$5.8M since 2019, causing the student co-pay to rise from \$5 in 2019 to \$20 in 2024 and potentially \$23 per exam in May 2025.
- An increase to \$9.3M would eliminate this cost entirely, ensuring that all eligible low-income students can take AP exams for free.

Increased state investment for AP coursework matters. It will expand college and career readiness, reduce financial burdens for low-income families, and enhance workforce development. AP students are more likely to enroll in and complete a four-year degree than

their equally matched peers, and students who score a 3 or higher on an AP exam save thousands in tuition costs. AP coursework not only prepares students for college and career pathways but also improves critical thinking, problem-solving, and analytical skills.

In 2023, low-income students in New York saved an estimated \$46M in college tuition through AP coursework. Increased funding will ensure that low-income students pay \$0 per exam would allow more students to take advantage of these savings and complete their degrees more affordably. AP coursework supports New York's goal of two-thirds of residents earning a college degree by 2030.

### **Budget Recommendation**

We urge the Legislature to increase AP funding from \$5.8M to \$9.3M in this year's budget. This investment will:

- ✓ Ensure that all low-income students take AP exams at no cost.
- ✓ Close equity gaps in college access and degree attainment.
- ✓ Support New York's workforce needs by preparing students for high-demand careers.

New York has been a leader in expanding access to AP coursework, but holding funding flat for a sixth year will undermine progress. Investing in AP today is an investment in New York's students, economy, and future workforce.

### **Support for EducationTrust–NY's Equity-Focused Recommendations**

As a part of our testimony, we would like to ensure that **our support for the recommendations from the EducationTrust-NY** is expressed. This organization of education and data experts have provided a full scope of recommendations with an opportunity for long-term system change across New York State.

### **Addressing the Gaps in Early College Investment**

The Business Council supports The Education Trust–NY's concern that the College in High School Opportunity Fund does not represent new investment, but rather a reallocation of existing resources. If New York wants to dramatically increase college enrollment and degree attainment for underrepresented students, it must commit an additional \$50M to:

- ✓ Expand proven models that have a strong record of supporting Black, Latinx, Native American, and low-income students in college pathways.
- ✓ Create new programs in parts of the state that have few or no college in high school programs.

### **Strengthening Early Literacy for Long-Term Workforce Success**

The Business Council supports the Education Trust–NY's call for a multi-year, phased-in investment in literacy to ensure students can master reading skills before they enter the workforce pipeline. New York cannot build a highly skilled workforce without addressing early literacy disparities.

We urge the Legislature to:

- ✓ Invest \$15M in professional learning to train K-8 educators in the science of reading, addressing the gaps left in last year's Back to Basics initiative.
- ✓ Allocate \$10M for high-needs districts to adopt evidence-based literacy curricula and replace outdated, ineffective approaches.
- ✓ Recognize that literacy directly impacts workforce readiness, as students who struggle with reading are less likely to persist in postsecondary education and career training.

## **Ensuring Fair and Equitable Foundation Aid**

The Business Council supports the Education Trust–NY's recommendations for improving Foundation Aid funding allocations to better support multilingual learners, students with disabilities, and students in temporary housing. These investments are critical to creating an inclusive workforce pipeline that ensures all students—regardless of background—can access the skills and credentials necessary for career success.

We call on the Legislature to:

- ✓ Increase funding for multilingual learners by differentiating weights based on proficiency level and required support services.
- ✓ Strengthen funding for students with disabilities to ensure resources continue until students graduate or turn 22 years old.
- ✓ Provide an additional per-pupil weight for students in temporary housing and foster care, ensuring these vulnerable populations receive the necessary support.
- ✓ Incorporate Pre-K and 3K funding into the Foundation Aid formula, aligning early childhood funding with K-12 funding for a sustainable and predictable investment in education.

## **Increasing FAFSA Completion**

Data indicates that students who complete the FAFSA by the end of their senior year are 84% more likely to enroll in college. However, in the FY2024-25 Budget, HESC reported that New York high school students left over \$225M in federal aid unclaimed by not filling out the FAFSA. The Business Council supports the Education Trust–NY's recommendations to better support districts and community partners including:

- ✓ Dedicating a \$3M that would allow for grants to community-based organizations to support outreach to students and funding to NYSED to meaningfully collect data on the law's implementation, particularly around student waivers.
- ✓ Assessing the gap in school counselors needed to support Universal FAFSA completion and provide additional funding for districts to hire school counselors

## **A Call for Bold, Equity-Centered Investment**

As business and education leaders, we recognize that **educational equity is directly tied to workforce development**. If New York wants to close opportunity gaps, strengthen its talent pipeline, and meet long-term economic goals, then it must commit to bold investments that remove systemic barriers for historically underserved students.

The Business Council looks forward to engaging in more conversations with members of the Senate and Assembly so we, as a state, can make these proposals permanent.