

NYSUT STATEMENT ON PROPOSED NEW COMMUNITY COLLEGE AT CUNY

Whereas, NYSUT believes strongly in equal access to high-quality education. As an education union, we strongly support expansion of public higher education in New York and welcome opportunities for genuine academic innovation. We are proud that New York led the effort to create high-quality, free, public education, starting with the 1847 founding of The Free Academy, which later became the City University of New York. For more than 150 years, faculty and staff in New York State's public colleges and universities have developed innovative curriculum and pedagogy in collaboration with our unique student population; and

Whereas, educational innovation designed to help students to engage with and even change the world continues to flourish at New York's public colleges. It flourishes in a particular way at the community colleges, which include many students from groups that have traditionally been excluded from college education; and

Whereas, in August 2008, the Chancellor of the City University of New York issued a "concept paper" for a proposed new community college at CUNY. The proposal is being aggressively marketed by CUNY not only as a blueprint for a CUNY institution, but as a statewide and national model for public community college education. As the federal government becomes increasingly interested in new models for community college education—having passed more higher education legislation in the last three years than at any other time in several decades—all of NYSUT has a stake in the outcome of CUNY's community college proposal; and

Whereas, NYSUT vigorously supports not just innovation, but also expansion of public higher education itself. Mass access and intellectually ambitious education are deeply compatible. NYSUT joins the PSC in supporting CUNY's historic mission of providing an intellectually ambitious liberal arts education to "the children of the people, the children of the whole people."

At a moment when enrollment at CUNY's community colleges is at its highest-ever level, however, NYSUT questions the strategy of proposing a new community college that is not designed to offer significant relief to overcrowding. Enrollment in the proposed new college will reach only 3,000 at its peak. NYSUT also questions the strategy of devoting resources to a small, boutique college at a time when the State and City budgets are in crisis and when CUNY's existing colleges are suffering from years of underfunding; therefore be it

RESOLVED, that while NYSUT is grateful for the opportunity the proposal of a new college provides for public discussion, and while we commend the CUNY faculty and staff who have worked to enrich the proposal,

NYSUT cannot support CUNY's proposal for a new community college in its current form.

- **We urge the New York State Department of Education to withhold approval until the issues below are satisfactorily resolved.**
- **We call on CUNY Chancellor Matthew Goldstein's administration to redraft the proposal in a way that addresses the issues below.**

- **We ask our members, including the CUNY faculty and staff, to be guided by the principles enunciated below as they engage in institutional and curriculum planning for the proposed new college.**
 - **We call on both higher education and K-12 members throughout the state to discuss the implications of the proposed new model of community college education for their students.**
- 1) **Liberal arts education.** The proposed new college must offer students a rich liberal arts education, not a diminished version of college. CUNY’s proposed new community college offers only 12 majors, all of them designed to speed students to graduation. Important as student success is, “on-time” graduation, as defined by standards that often fail to measure the actual progress of community college students, is an inadequate guide to developing a college curriculum. A college curriculum should be driven by academic, pedagogic and intellectual imperatives, not by either flawed measures of progress or the presumed needs of the market. To start with the instrumental goal of maximizing graduation rates and then design a curriculum to fit that goal is to work backwards. Such a college, especially one marketed as a national model, would offer a dangerous precedent for community colleges and public higher education generally, especially at a time when educational “reform” is being driven by a regime of testing rather than teaching.
 - 2) **Permanent, tenured or tenure-track faculty.** The new college must have permanent, tenured/tenure-track faculty whose appointments reside at the proposed newly chartered institution. A faculty composed mainly of adjuncts or of faculty whose primary appointments are at other colleges is unacceptable—important as such faculty’s contributions are. Without tenured faculty whose academic home is the proposed new college, students lose an essential component of a college education—sustained contact with a permanent faculty—and educational quality is compromised. Research capacity is also compromised in an institution with few or no permanent full-time faculty, and academic freedom is put at risk.
 - 3) **Full-time/part-time ratio.** The new college must meet CUNY’s own “Performance Goals” for the ratio of full-time to part-time faculty. Past CUNY Master Plans have stated a goal of 70 per cent full-time to 30 percent part-time faculty. For a college that proposes to model exemplary teaching and learning conditions, a 70/30 ratio should be the minimum standard. Ideally, all colleges should provide equitable compensation, benefits and working conditions for the part-time faculty they do employ; the empirical evidence shows that part-time faculty who enjoy such support are better able to provide a rich, full educational experience for students.
 - 4) **Faculty governance.** Governance is a responsibility and a duty of the faculty. The governance plan for the new community college must, at a minimum, meet the standards for faculty governance set forth in the CUNY Bylaws, Section 8.6,

- 5) **Academic departments and elected department chairs.** Faculty governance and professional autonomy are essential to any new college: they ensure academic integrity. As part of the governance plan, the proposed new college must be organized into academic departments and must include elected department chairs and personnel and budget committees. Faculty must hold primary responsibility for hiring, reappointment, tenure and promotion.
- 6) **Academic freedom.** The governance plan for the new community college must affirm, in the strongest terms, its commitment to academic freedom. All faculty members, whether full-time or part-time, and all instructional staff, to the extent that their work involves teaching, research, publication of results and selection of library materials, must be protected by academic freedom. Academic freedom must be guaranteed through tenure, a strong governance structure, the presence of a permanent faculty and the other protections won historically by faculty nationally and in New York State.
- 7) **Adherence to the union contract.** The collective bargaining agreement between the PSC and CUNY supports academic quality and professional integrity by mandating compensation, benefits, workload, due process rights and other rights and protections. It is assumed that the proposed new college will be brought into compliance with the collective bargaining agreement and that the features of the current proposal that are in violation of the contract will be changed or negotiated with the union.
- 8) **Open admissions and access.** The proposed new community college must adhere to CUNY's open admissions policy. The new college proposal, as it now stands, practices economic discrimination by admitting only students who are able to attend full time in their first year, and by not offering stipends to replace earnings that students would otherwise achieve from part-time or even full-time employment while in college. That economic discrimination, and the requirement that entering students be remediation-free, violates CUNY's policy of open admissions at the community colleges.
- 9) **Unequal resources.** The superficial attraction of a new college must not be allowed to divert attention from the real problem facing all of New York State's public colleges and universities—the political decision to starve public higher education of the resources it needs. The death-by-a-thousand-cuts suffered by CUNY and SUNY throughout the three decades cannot be reversed by the creation of one small new college. The proposed new community college must not be allowed to divert resources from other CUNY colleges or to establish a

tiered system of resources for the existing community colleges. At a time when public community colleges are experiencing record applications for admissions, and when both SUNY and CUNY are being buffeted by severe budget cuts, allocating adequate funds to the State's existing colleges should be New York's priority.