



**TESTIMONY OF DR. JAMES DAVIS  
PRESIDENT PROFESSIONAL STAFF CONGRESS/CUNY  
New York City Council Preliminary Budget Hearing - Higher Education  
March 18, 2024**

Good afternoon Chairs Dinowitz and Brannan. On behalf of 30,000 PSC members, thank you for your continued advocacy on behalf of the City University of New York. Without the council's intervention last year, the fiscal strain on the University would be far more severe.

**Post Pandemic: Students returning to shrinking campus budgets**

Enrollment is up across the board at CUNY. Some campuses have come back more quickly than others, but students are returning. Spring enrollment from 2023 to 2024, 10.6% and transfers are up 9.2%.<sup>1</sup> For Fall 2024, applications are up 386%. Recent legislative initiatives are helping to bring students back. Special thanks to Council Speaker Adrienne Adams for her leadership on CUNY Reconnect, a program that has brought 25,000 CUNY students are back to complete their degrees. Other initiatives include a waiver of application fees and recruitment letters targeting NYC public school seniors. Governor Hochul aims next year to guarantee CUNY admission for the top 10% of New York State high school graduates, and FAFSA applications from all graduating seniors will be required. (Chart 1)

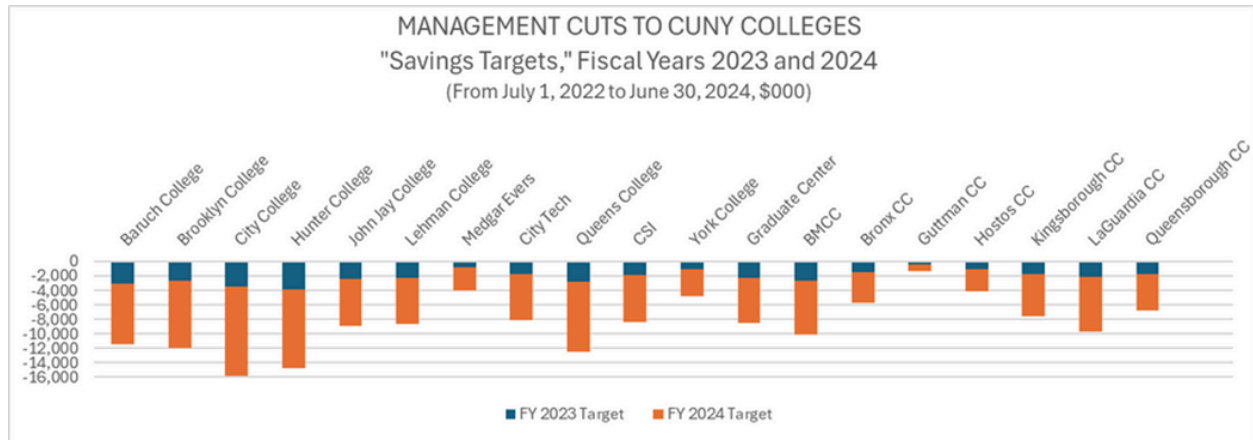
These are positive developments but the road back from COVID has been long and bruising. Many years of disinvestment have rendered CUNY unable to cope with enrollment fluctuations due to an overdependence on tuition. The Mayor continues to cut CUNY even as the City's financial picture improves. In a panic, our administration implemented damaging new midyear savings targets, pushing nine of our colleges deeper into austerity. CUNY does not have an enrollment crisis, we have a crisis of understaffing and student retention. Cutting programs leads students to drop out. To keep CUNY moving toward recovery, we need your help.

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<sup>1</sup> [CUNY's Subcommittee on Enrollment](#), March 11, 2024

My members know how to educate the students we serve and support their academic and personal development. But they cannot be effective in a chaotic environment in which hundreds of classes are canceled in the lead-up to the semester,<sup>2</sup> instructors come and go like a revolving door, and vacant staff positions go unfilled by design, leaving those who remain doing the jobs of two or three people.



### CUNY's Nine "Colleges of Concern"

**CUNY MANAGEMENT: TURNING FISCAL CHALLENGE INTO FULL-BLOWN CRISIS**

### MID-YEAR CUTS AT 9 "COLLEGES OF CONCERN"

Nine colleges were projected not to meet their savings targets for this fiscal year. These colleges of concern were directed to make additional mid-year cuts in December 2023 and implement "Enhanced Deficit Reduction Plans."

**Enhanced Deficit Reduction Plans Undermine Academic Quality**

Increasing enrollment caps on classes	Less classroom attention for students
Cancelling course sections	Student schedules in chaos; required courses not offered when students can take them
Reduced services in libraries, labs, offices, meal halls	Less student support; diminished learning environment for students
Hiring freezes, allowing only one rehire for every three staff departures	Rising workloads and unmanageable caseloads for staff; longer waits for students
Abrupt layoffs of adjunct faculty and full-time faculty/staff on contingent appointments	Lost jobs and health insurance; demoralized workforce

**Colleges of Concern and Budgets:**

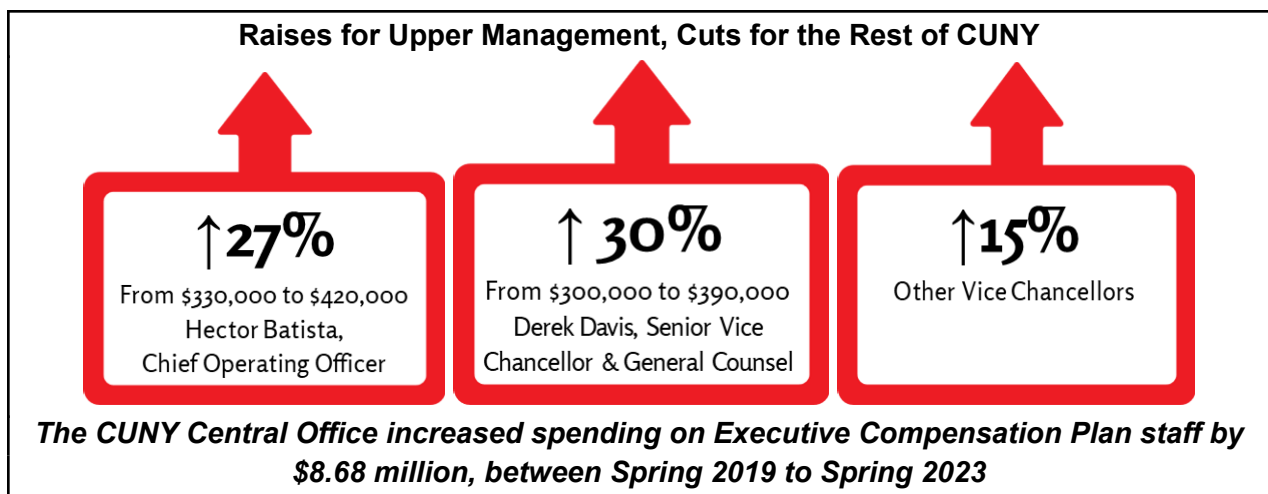
- School of Professional Studies (TBD)
- John Jay College (FY '24: \$4.5M)
- Queens College (FY '24: \$4.3M; FY '25: \$4.3M)
- Borough of Manhattan Community College (TBD)
- York College (FY '24: \$1.9M; FY '25: \$1.9M)
- New York City College of Technology (TBD)
- Brooklyn College (FY '24: \$3.5M; FY '25: \$4.5M)
- Kingsborough Community College (TBD)
- College of Staten Island (FY '24: \$2.4M)

FY 2024 is from July 1, 2023 to June 30, 2024. FY 2025 is from July 1, 2024 to June 30, 2025.

<sup>2</sup> [CUNY Layoffs and Class Cuts Come Just Weeks Before New Semester | THE CITY — NYC News, https://queensledger.com/2024/01/11/queens-college-lays-off-26-professors-two-weeks-before-spring-semester/](https://queensledger.com/2024/01/11/queens-college-lays-off-26-professors-two-weeks-before-spring-semester/)

CUNY’s austerity measures include increasing enrollment caps on classes, reducing student services such as library hours and cafeteria access, and abrupt layoffs of hundreds of faculty and staff on contingent appointments, including 26 Queens College full-time substitute Lecturers before Spring semester. Despite the fact that all but three CUNY colleges ended fiscal year 2023 with a surplus, the administration cut across-the-board in fiscal year 2024, anticipating the expiration of federal stimulus funding and slow enrollment growth. This past fall, nine of the colleges (Chart 2) were told their progress in meeting savings targets was insufficient, and the administration imposed further cuts, extracting tens of millions in additional savings. This was on top of the \$57 million in fiscal year 2024 savings that these nine campuses - two community colleges, six senior colleges, and one professional school - were already tasked with delivering.

Our exasperation at these cuts is compounded by the fact that we have yet to hear of any CUNY administrator making the sacrifices they demand from our members. Where was the Board of Trustees’ fiscal discipline when they approved 30 percent raises for the top two executive vice chancellors in 2022? Where is the Board’s call now for furloughs for the executive staff to help achieve cost savings in 2024? PSC members have heard enough about the university’s “multi-pronged strategies” to reduce costs; every prong hurts us and our students, not them.



**CUNY reverses its budget request**

CUNY’s preliminary budget request included \$61.5 million in restorations of city funds, then inexcusably that item disappeared from the final budget request the Board approved last December. So their fiscal year 2025 budget request does not ask for the operating funds that have been drained out by the mayor’s Program to Eliminate the Gap. The PSC has been among the most persistent voices opposing Mayor Adams’ unrelenting austerity towards the university, and we have, for decades, called for needed investments at both the state and city levels. The Chancellor, Board of Trustees, and Presidents have rarely if ever objected to proposed cuts, and have rarely put forward budget requests that would meet our needs. Nor did they do so this

year with the request the Board approved in December 2023. They must do better than accommodate austerity.

### **How to avert a retention crisis - PSC's City FY25 budget request**

Full-time freshmen fail to return for their second year at alarmingly high rates at our community colleges - 40% stop out.<sup>3</sup> Hiding this nationwide and well-known problem will not solve it. As CUNY itself knows, increasing student-facing staff and full-time faculty and providing wraparound support such as free MetroCards and textbooks boosts retention. Our budget requests focuses on logical and proven ways to get there.

**1. The Mayor must restore \$94 million in city cuts.** By FY24, cumulative PEGs had resulted in the loss of 363 civilian and pedagogical positions. Without operational support, these vacancies cannot be filled.

According to the Council's Report on the Fiscal 24 Preliminary Plan the, "citywide vacancy reduction plan required agencies to eliminate half of their current vacant positions. CUNY's vacancy reduction plan includes the elimination of 156 positions in each year... [through] 2027."

Colleges are exhibiting real stress. For example, at City Tech 67% of staff interviewed reported that their department had vacancies and 74% of staff reported that this increased their workload. At BMCC, staff report vacant positions and workload pressure in the Advocacy and Resource Center (ARC) where students wait in long lines for the food pantry and other supports.

*At BMCC, we are really feeling the cut backs. In my department (mathematics) one of the largest departments at BMCC, we are not being allowed to replace our full time office assistant. The department has approximately 150 faculty but is currently operating with only part time staff. To top it off, we just added a new Data Science major that will earn money for BMCC but we don't have the staff to support it.*

*Dr. Kathleen Offenholly, Professor of Mathematics  
Borough of Manhattan Community College*

*Restrictions have been put on hirings by CUNY. For every three vacated positions one will be replaced. How are advisors, counselors, and financial aid officers supposed to continue serving the students if positions that are vacated will not be replaced? How are we, as a college, supposed to continue advising students, processing financial aid applications or seeing students seeking mental health counseling if professional staff is not hired? First generation students need help with processing their financial aid applications. They rely on advisors for advice and graduation services, mental health services especially in the post pandemic world.*

*Justyna Jagielnicka, Licensed Mental Health Counselor  
Borough of Manhattan Community College*

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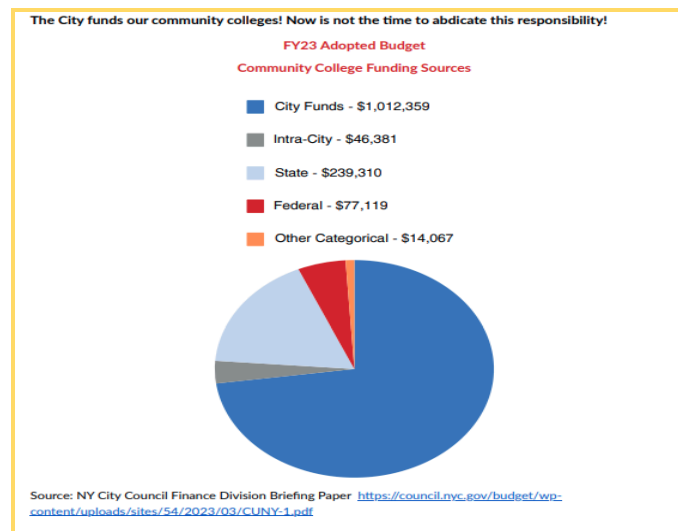
<sup>3</sup> "Stabilizing the University's Finances," CUNY report to the New York State legislature, January 2024

**2. Fund CUNY Reconnect and ASAP with \$35.5 million** to move toward ASAP for all. *CUNY can reconnect and retain students.* An ASAP-for-all model would provide students with academic support in CUNY's most successful and nationally recognized program. This should just “be college” but CUNY needs funding to match ASAP’s graduation rate which is two times that of non ASAP students<sup>4</sup>. Funding could also support the expansion of CUNY Reconnect, which successfully brought back over 26,000 CUNY students since its pilot in 2022-2023.

**3. Screen students for Fair Fares.** ASAP’s provision of free MetroCards is part of its success, But students are not screened for eligibility for existing city programs like Fair Fares. We support the Speaker’s efforts outlined in her State of the City to expand Fair Fares eligibility to 200% of the federal poverty level and to ensure better transit access to all students.<sup>5</sup>

### Conclusion

While there are certainly financial challenges at CUNY, support from this council and leadership from City Hall will signal to our members and students that their dedication to education and community service are valued.



Putting resources into CUNY is an investment that cannot be shied away from; it is exactly what this city needs. CUNY’s return on its investment repays New Yorkers many times over, as research consistently shows.<sup>6</sup> The City cannot retreat from its commitment to public higher education. We urge you and the Mayor to secure significant new investments in CUNY’s community colleges.

Thank you for fighting for PSC members, CUNY students, and for the opportunity to testify before you today.

<sup>4</sup> [About – CUNY ASAP](http://www1.cuny.edu/sites/asap/about/) www1.cuny.edu/sites/asap/about/

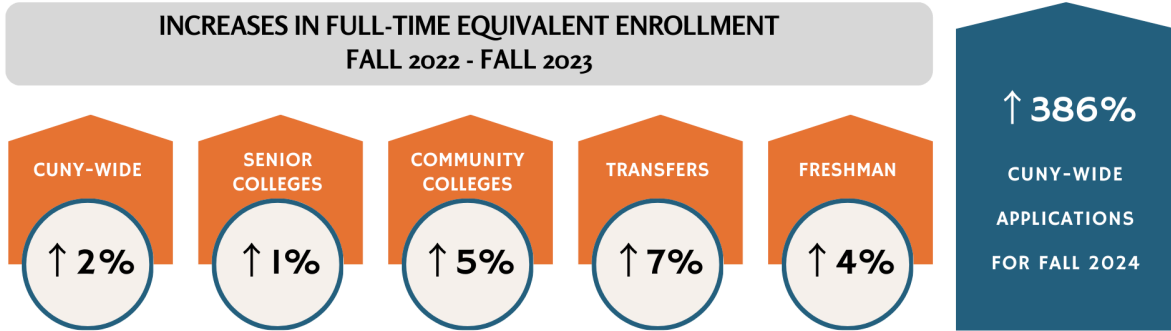
<sup>5</sup> [Moving Forward Together](#), Speaker Adams, State of the City. March 13, 2024

<sup>6</sup> [CUNY’s Contribution to the Economy: Office of the New York City Comptroller](#), March 2021

CHART 1

<sup>MIS</sup>  
CUNY MANAGEMENT: TURNING FISCAL CHALLENGE INTO FULL-BLOWN CRISIS

**ENROLLMENT IS REBOUNDED**



**Initiatives that helped this Year**

- CUNY Reconnect, a program sponsored by NYC Council Speaker Adrienne Adams, has brought back 25,000 CUNY students to complete their degrees.
- Waived application fees
- Targeted recruitment letters to NYC public school seniors

**Proposals from Governor Hochul that Will Help Next Year**

- Guaranteeing CUNY admission for top 10% of NY state high school graduates
- Requiring FAFSA applications from all graduating seniors

**While full-time equivalent (FTE) enrollment remains lower than the pre-pandemic level, it is on a strong upswing.**

**CHART 2 - CUNY's Campuses of Concern**

Campus	Expected cuts	Impact	Council District
Borough of Manhattan Community College	TBD	Staff hiring reductions - one person rehired for every three people who departed	Council District 1, Christopher Marte
Brooklyn College	\$3.5 million	TBD	Council District 45, Council Member Farah Louis
College of Staten Island	\$2.4 million	TBD	Council District 50, David Carr
John Jay College	\$4.5 million	200 classes cut; staff hiring reductions:one person rehired for every three people who departed	Council District 6, Gale Brewer
Kingsborough Community College	TBD	TBD	Council District 48, Inna Vernikov
New York City College of Technology	TBD	TBD	Council District 33, Lincoln Restler
Queens College	TBD	26 full-time faculty members were laid off just days before this semester began	Council District 24, James Gennaro
School of Professional Studies	TBD	Undergraduate capstone courses (except for clinical nursing) will be raised to a cap of 17 from 5-10	Council District 3, Erik Bottcher
York College	\$1.9 million	150 Spring classes cut in late January	Council District 27, Nantasha Williams