
Policy Close Up

Community College Tuition Changes over the Past Decade

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Summary: Since passage of New York State’s “SUNY2020” law, the focus of policy advocacy has centered on the law’s impact on four-year public colleges and universities. Indeed, there has been much to discuss. Most notably the impacts that the law, which allowed public colleges and universities to annually raise tuition and severed the relationship between public tuition and the maximum income limits covered by the state’s Tuition Assistance Program, had on the finances of the institutions, the impacts on the independent sector, as well as the affordability and accessibility of public higher education for students. Moreover, the current state budget deficit – exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic – has resulted in Administration officials “withholding” 20% of TAP awards, further straining college finances.

Far less has been focused on the impacts of that law on the state’s vast public community college system. This review examines the costs of community colleges to students and their families. It has long been clear that New York charges one the of the highest public community college average tuitions in the nation, but in addition, this review finds: **(1) That the rate of tuition hikes at NY community colleges over the past decade far outstrip inflation; (2) That in some cases, the tuition increases exceeded those allowed for the four-year public colleges; (3) That some community colleges now charge tuition that exceeds the maximum financial aid provided by the Tuition Assistance Program (TAP); (4) That state support for community colleges has stagnated; and, (5) That many community colleges in the SUNY system are experiencing a staggering reduction in the student populations.**

Background:

What is the mission of a community college?

New York State’s public community colleges ensure open access to postsecondary education and contribute to the development of an educated citizenry and skilled workforce.¹ Community Colleges provide associate degree programs that prepare students for senior colleges or entry into professional careers.² Community colleges are established and operated under New York State law and regulations. They are jointly supported by New York State and localities – county governments and the City of New York.³

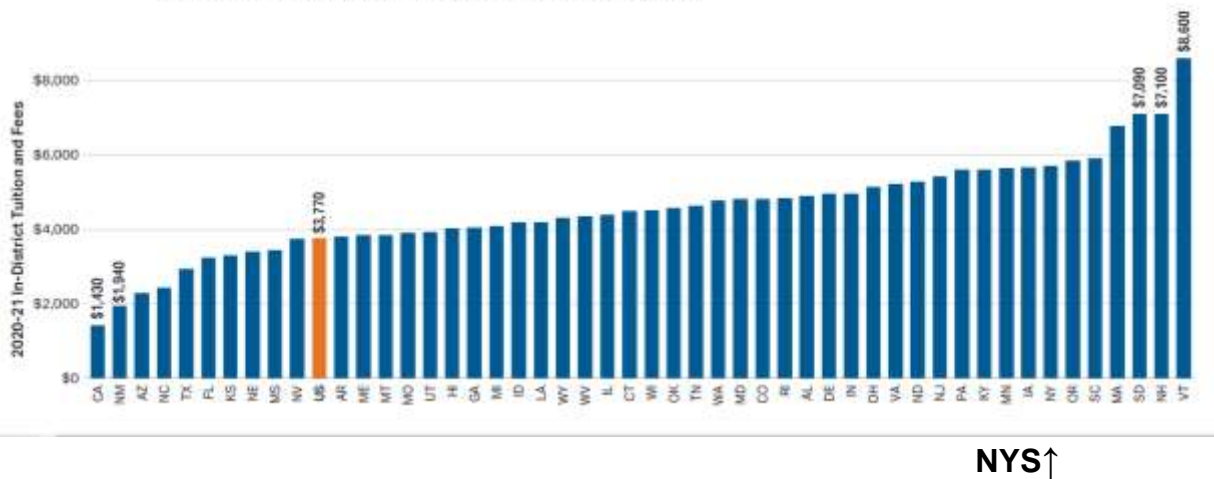
New York charges one the of the highest public community college average tuition and fees in the nation

The College Board annually publishes a national ranking of states' average tuition and fees. New York State has historically been among the most expensive. As seen below, the most recent data documents that New York's average tuition and fees are the seventh most expensive in the nation.⁴

Nationwide Comparison Of Average Community College Tuition & Fees

In 2020-21, average published tuition and fees for full-time in-district students at public two-year colleges range from \$1,430 in California and \$1,940 in New Mexico to about \$7,100 in South Dakota and New Hampshire and \$8,600 in Vermont.

FIGURE CP-5 Average 2020-21 In-District Tuition and Fees at Public Two-Year Institutions and 2015-16 to 2020-21 Five-Year Percentage Changes in Inflation-Adjusted In-District Tuition and Fees, by State



In addition, policies from the State and localities have increased community college tuition and fees (averaged over the past five years) at a rate faster than increases found nationally.⁵ This report examines in more detail the state's community college tuition experience over the past decade.

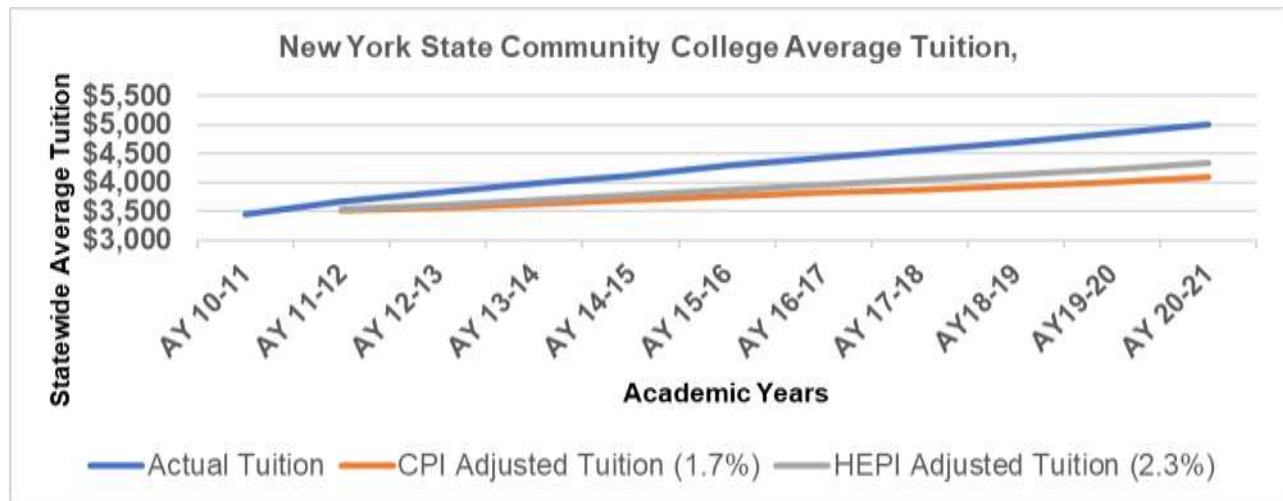
Findings:

The rate of community colleges' tuition hikes over the past decade far outstrips inflation

A deeper look into the individual community colleges' tuition policies underscores that there has been a significant shift in who bears the burden of paying for college education. As seen in Tables 1 and 2 below, for every community college in New York State, current tuition costs exceeded those charged a decade ago and *all* have had increases that *exceed* higher education inflation.⁶

As seen in the Tables 1 and 2, we have adjusted tuition costs for inflation as calculated by the Higher Education Price Index (HEPI).⁷ Typically, HEPI inflates at a higher rate than the Consumer Price Index. This analysis shows that community college tuition hikes exceeded even the HEPI inflation factor. Community college students are paying more now than before the SUNY2020 law went into effect.

As seen below, the average community college tuition costs exceed tuition adjusted for both methods of calculating inflation, using the Consumer Price Index and the Higher Education Price Index:



Tuition increases exceeded those allowed for the four-year public colleges

Since the first year of SUNY2020, more than half of the SUNY community colleges (16 of 29) had tuition rate increases that exceeded the rate approved for the SUNY four-year public colleges and universities.⁸ During that time, the average increase in tuition for four-year public colleges and universities was 42%, as seen in Table 1, the majority of SUNY community colleges and as seen in Table 2, all of the CUNY community colleges exceeded that rate (although there has been a recent freeze on tuition within the CUNY community college system). Those SUNY campuses that exceeded the tuition increase rate at four-year colleges have their tuition rate increase listed in bold-face in the table.

State support for community colleges has stagnated due to enrollment declines

The state’s base aid rate was cut dramatically in the Great Recession and has been steadily enhanced. The state budget approved in April 2020 maintained base aid for community colleges at \$2,947 per FTE, the same as SFY 2019-20. However, the 98% funding floor that was included in the SFY 2019-20 Enacted Budget was not continued, resulting in overall community college base aid reductions in both SUNY and CUNY. The resulting overall SUNY community college base aid of \$431.2 million is a reduction of \$22.7 million from last year, and the overall CUNY community college base aid of \$225.2 million amounts to a decrease of \$3.6 million from SFY 2019-20. Actual enrollment may be much lower so there will be an adjustment down in next year’s allocation.

The burden of community college tuition on students far exceeds that of the state, which runs contrary to New York policy.

The goal of New York State law is quite clear: the state, the local government, and the student should pay *equally* for the cost of education at a community college. According to various sections of state law:

- “Tuition and fees charged **students** shall be fixed so as **not** to exceed in the aggregate more than **one-third** of the amount of operating costs of the community college.”⁹ [Emphasis added]

- “(1) Full opportunity colleges. The basic **State** financial assistance for community colleges, implementing approved full opportunity programs, **shall be the lowest** of the following:
 - (i) **two-fifths** (40%) of the net operating budget of the college, or campus of a multiple campus college, as approved by the State University trustees;
 - (ii) **two-fifths** (40%) of the net operating costs of the college, or campus of a multiple campus college; or
 - (iii) for the current college fiscal year the **total** of the following:
 - (a) the budgeted or actual number (whichever is less) of full-time equivalent students enrolled in programs eligible for State financial assistance multiplied by \$2300; and
 - (b) up to one-half (50%) of rental costs for physical space.”¹⁰ [Emphasis added]

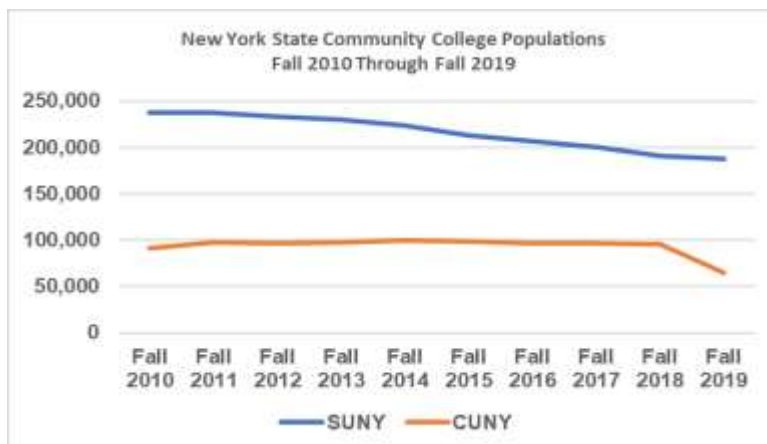
The state *should* be covering at least 40% of the costs of educating a student at a community college. However, that ratio can – and has been – changed during the enactment of the state budget. Still, the goal is clear.

What is clearest of all, however, is that there is a *huge* discrepancy between the tuition paid by students and the aid provided by the state. In the current fiscal year’s budget, the state has pledged to provide \$2,947 in aid for each full-time student attending community colleges.

As seen in Tables 1 and 2, none of the state’s community colleges have tuition levels set under \$4,300, much less \$3,000.¹¹ In fact, *average* community college tuition is above \$5,000,¹² roughly two-thirds higher than the amount of state support.

Many community colleges in the SUNY system are experiencing a staggering reduction in the student populations.

What is notable when reviewing federal data on the student populations in New York’s community colleges is that there has been a significant decline. However, the decline in community colleges is really two different stories. Until fall 2019, when a significant reduction occurred, CUNY community colleges had maintained rough equivalence in their enrollments over recent years, but SUNY community colleges have suffered from decade-long, across-the-board declines in enrollment. At last count, there were over 50,000 fewer full-time SUNY community colleges students in AY 2019-20 than there were in AY 2010-11.¹³ And without exception, every SUNY community college lost population, some with catastrophic enrollment declines.¹⁴ This is the most recent data available, but there is no evidence that the overall trend has changed.¹⁵



There are now community college tuitions that exceed the maximum TAP award. As seen in Table 1, there are 8 community colleges that now exceed the \$5,165 maximum TAP award. However, while students who receive the maximum award are held harmless, colleges are reimbursed only \$5,000 per maximum TAP awardee. As seen in Table 1, there are 16 community colleges that now exceed the \$5,000 maximum TAP reimbursement level. Those campuses are listed in **red**.

Recommendations:

Much of what ails the state's community college system is the result of a stagnating population, particularly among young adults.¹⁶ However, there are steps that the state can take to bolster support for community colleges and offsetting the cost borne by college students and their families.

1. *The state should fully restore the 20% "withhold" currently in place.*
2. *State support for community colleges must at least match the tuition costs borne by college students, on a full-time equivalent basis.*
3. *State aid should set a financial floor for covering the costs of community colleges.*
4. *TAP awards should be raised to ensure that the tuition needs of low-income students are covered by the state.*
5. *The state should increase its support for opportunity programs.*
6. *The state should increase its support for child care programs.*

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Table 1: SUNY Community Colleges' Tuition Over Time, AY 2010-11 Through AY 2020-21¹⁷

Campus	Tuition AY 20-21	Tuition If HEPI	Actual Inc. %¹⁸	Tuition AY 10-11
Adirondack Community College	\$4,944	\$4,251	46%	\$3,386
Cayuga County Community College	\$4,992	\$4,469	40%	\$3,560
Clinton Community College	\$5,518	\$4,519	53%	\$3,600
Columbia-Greene Community College	\$4,968	\$4,338	44%	\$3,456
Dutchess Community College	\$4,350	\$3,640	50%	\$2,900
Erie Community College	\$5,047	\$4,143	53%	\$3,300
Finger Lakes Community College	\$4,864	\$4,178	46%	\$3,328
Fulton-Montgomery Community College	\$5,040	\$4,010	58%	\$3,194
Genesee Community College	\$4,550	\$4,268	34%	\$3,400
Herkimer County Community College	\$5,016	\$4,193	50%	\$3,340
Hudson Valley Community College	\$4,800	\$4,268	41%	\$3,400
Jamestown Community College	\$5,200	\$4,670	40%	\$3,720
Jefferson Community College	\$5,016	\$4,369	44%	\$3,480
Mohawk Valley Community College	\$4,594	\$4,268	35%	\$3,400
Monroe Community College	\$4,706	\$3,766	57%	\$3,000
Nassau Community College	\$5,800	\$4,685	55%	\$3,732
Niagara County Community College	\$4,752	\$4,369	37%	\$3,480
North Country Community College	\$5,280	\$4,682	42%	\$3,730
Onondaga Community College	\$5,090	\$4,750	35%	\$3,784 ¹⁹
Orange County Community College	\$5,376	\$4,645	45%	\$3,700
Rockland Community College	\$5,110	\$4,412	45%	\$3,515
Schenectady County Community College	\$4,608	\$4,117	40%	\$3,280
Suffolk County Community College	\$5,470	\$4,740	45%	\$3,776
Sullivan County Community College	\$5,208	\$4,883	41%	\$3,890
SUNY Broome Community College	\$5,088	\$4,348	47%	\$3,464
SUNY Corning Community College	\$5,068	\$4,607	38%	\$3,670
SUNY Westchester Community College	\$4,655	\$4,833	19%	\$3,850
Tompkins Cortland Community College	\$5,355	\$4,720	46%	\$3,760
Ulster County Community College	\$4,880	\$4,795	28%	\$3,820

Table 2: CUNY Community Colleges' Tuition Over Time, AY 2010-11 Through AY 2020-21

Community College²⁰	Tuition AY 20-21	Tuition If HEPI	Actual Inc. %	Tuition AY 10-11
Borough of Manhattan Community College	\$4,800	\$3,954	52%	\$3,150
Bronx Community College	\$4,800	\$3,954	52%	\$3,150
Hostos Community College	\$4,800	\$3,954	52%	\$3,150
Kingsborough Community College	\$4,800	\$3,954	52%	\$3,150
LaGuardia Community College	\$4,800	\$3,954	52%	\$3,150
Queensborough Community College	\$4,800	\$3,954	52%	\$3,150

Table 3: SUNY Community Colleges' Fall FTE Over Time, Fall 2010 Through Fall 2019²¹

Community College	Fall 2019	Fall 2010
Adirondack Community College	3,420	4,136
Broome Community College	6,109	6,177
Cayuga County Community College	3,669	4,719
Clinton Community College	1,299	2,352
Columbia-Greene Community College	1,447	2,031
Corning Community College	4,238	5,391
Dutchess Community College	8,691	10,329
Erie Community College	10,031	15,084
Finger Lakes Community College	5,649	6,935
Fulton-Montgomery Community College	2,286	2,833
Genesee Community College	5,285	7,486
Herkimer County Community College	2,396	3,774
Hudson Valley Community College	10,416	13,798
Jamestown Community College	4,450	5,685
Jefferson Community College	2,984	3,738
Mohawk Valley Community College	6,007	7,155
Monroe Community College	11,572	18,995
Nassau Community College	16,650	23,767
Niagara County Community College	4,924	7,428
North Country Community College	1,893	2,242
Onondaga County Community College	9,449	11,785
Orange County Community College	6,372	7,065
Rockland County Community College	6,532	8,077
Schenectady County Community College	4,732	6,415
Suffolk County Community College	25,230	26,719
Sullivan County Community College	1,628	1,749
Tompkins Cortland Community College	5,037	5,513
Ulster County Community College	3,550	3,686
Westchester County Community College	11,121	13,893

Table 4: CUNY Community Colleges' Fall FTE Over Time, Fall 2010 Through Fall 2019²²

Community College	Fall 2019	Fall 2010
Borough of Manhattan Community Coll.	19,679	19,955
Bronx Community College	7,024	7,794
Hostos Community College	4,709	4,653
Kingsborough Community College	10,225	14,366
LaGuardia Community College	13,152	13,829
Queensborough Community College	9,814	11,007

Endnotes

- ¹ State University of New York, “Community Colleges,” <https://system.suny.edu/communitycolleges/#:-:text=The%20SUNY%20Community%20Colleges%20ensure,educated%20citizenry%20and%20skilled%20workforce>.
- ² City University of New York, “Colleges and Schools,” <https://www.cuny.edu/about/colleges-schools/>.
- ³ New York State Education Law, Section 6301, (1).
- ⁴ The College Board, <https://research.collegeboard.org/pdf/trends-college-pricing-student-aid-2020.pdf>.
- ⁵ Ibid.
- ⁶ For tuition costs for the academic years 2010-11 through AY 2019-20, we relied on the National Center for Education Statistics (a federal agency) to obtain the data necessary to calculate our estimates. We used its Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System.” Using the option to “compare institutions,” we obtained student population and tuition data used to do the calculations. The data was obtained at <https://nces.ed.gov/ipeds/use-the-data>. Accessed September 2020. For tuition costs for AY2020-21, we reviewed each of the community colleges’ websites to obtain current charges.
- ⁷ Source: Commonfund Institute, “Commonfund Higher Education Price Index,” 2020 Update. The average college cost inflation (higher education price index) for the period 2011 through 2020 was 2.3%.
- ⁸ SUNY tuition for Academic Year (AY) 2010-2011 was \$4,970. The so-called “rational tuition” policy allowed for \$300 annual increases for 5 years, or a total of \$1,500 by July 2016. NY then set annual tuition increases of \$200 for AY 2017-2018, 2018-2019, 2019-2020, and 2020-21, bringing tuition to \$7,070 at SUNY, hence tuition has increased 42%. SUNY community college tuition increased, on average, 43%. Similar increases were approved for the City University systems as well. Its community colleges also exceeded increases beyond those approved for the four-year college and universities within its system. Calculations performed by NYPIRG.
- ⁹ New York State Education Law, Section 6304, 1(d).
- ¹⁰ New York State Community College Regulations, Part 602.8 (c), Limitations on State financial assistance. ((Statutory authority: Education Law, § Education Law, §§ 355, 6221, 6302, 6304, 6305; L. 1984, ch. 762; L. 1993, ch. 53 as amended by L. 1993, ch. 259).
- ¹¹ Dutchess County Community College charges the lowest tuition in New York.
- ¹² Nassau Community College charges the highest tuition in New York.
- ¹³ See endnote #6 for sources. In addition, student FTE for the Fall AY2020 was obtained from the individual campuses’ websites.
- ¹⁴ While Monroe Community College had the biggest enrollment decline, over 6,700 full time students, Tompkins County Community College had the largest *percentage* decline in enrollment, losing 57% of its full-time students.
- ¹⁵ Stanforth, Lauren, “Community colleges grapple with crash in enrollment numbers,” The Adirondack Daily Enterprise, <https://www.adirondackdailyenterprise.com/news/local-news/2020/01/community-colleges-grapple-with-crash-in-enrollment-numbers/>.
- ¹⁶ Platsky, Jeff, “New York is growing older: Here’s where the population is graying the most,” pressconnects.com, July 25, 2019, <https://www.pressconnects.com/story/news/local/2019/07/25/new-york-growing-older-heres-where-population-graying-most/1802814001/>.
- ¹⁷ See endnote #6 for sources. In addition, student FTE for the Fall AY2020 was obtained from the individual campuses’ websites.
- ¹⁸ For comparison, SUNY and CUNY 4-year colleges and universities saw a 42% increase in tuition over the same period of time.
- ¹⁹ The federal database had a tuition listed that was double this number. We relied on the Onondaga Community College Catalogue, 2011-12, to obtain the actual tuition. See page 17.
- ²⁰ Guttman Community College was established in AY 2012-13. We did not include it in this analysis.
- ²¹ Spector, Joe, “SUNY enrollment dips amid COVID, continuing downward trend. Check data by campus,” *Utica Observer-Dispatch*, September 17, 2020, <https://www.uticaod.com/story/news/politics/albany/2020/09/17/suny-enrollment-dips-amid-covid/5813155002/>.
- ²² City University of New York, “Full-Time Equivalent (FTE) Student Enrollment by Undergraduate and Graduate Level, and College,” http://www.cuny.edu/irdatabook/rpts2_AY_current/ENRL_0024_FTE_UGGR_HIST.rpt.pdf.