

# Supporting Students with Disabilities in Postsecondary Education Key to Their Entry into the Workforce



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# History of Funding and Need for Increase

In May 2017, the New York State Education Department's Advisory Council on Postsecondary Education for Students with Disabilities recommended, and the Board of Regents adopted, a proposal to work with representatives from the higher education sectors to develop a funding proposal that would provide much-needed enhanced supports and services for the 86,040 identified students with disabilities pursuing postsecondary study. The Board of Regents determined a \$15 million outlay was needed to fully fund the program.

Through the work of elected officials and advocates, the FY 2021-22 and FY 2022-23 state budgets included \$2 million in funding for enhancing support and services for postsecondary success of students with disabilities, which provided about \$27.00 per student. The Department distributed this funding in a proportional manner by each identified student with a disability to SUNY, CUNY, and NYS degree-granting independent and proprietary colleges, following a plan outlining how the funding would be spent, for one or more of these purposes:

- to supplement funding for support and accommodation of students with disabilities;
- to support summer college preparation programs to assist students with disabilities' transition to college, and prepare them to navigate campus facilities and systems;
- to provide full- and part-time faculty and staff with training in working with students with disabilities; and
- to improve the identification process of students with disabilities and enhance data collection capabilities.

An increase of \$13 million is needed to bring the current \$2 million program level to \$15million and reach the vast number of students with disabilities who are not receiving these services. According to the proposal, funds would be distributed based on enrollment, in equal amounts per identified student with a disability, to eligible institutions with approved plans to help serve more students with disabilities pursuing postsecondary study.

## Testimonials

"One campus purchased the UbiDuo (Wireless) assistive technology, which is a face-to-face communication device for students that are deaf or hard of hearing. There are many times when students have questions for departments on campus and do not have an ASL interpreter with them. This device has been used in tutoring sessions, financial aid meetings, and in the classroom with 2 students that are deaf. Many of our deaf and hard of hearing students never knew about devices that can assist them. Their ability to understand the information during a meeting or social event is most important for success, interaction, and belonging."

"One of our students loved the smart pens and how it helped them take better notes. She was more independent and did not need to rely on a peer note-taker."

# The Postsecondary Education to Workforce Pipeline

According to an analysis by State Comptroller Thomas DiNapoli, two thirds of people with disabilities are unemployed compared to the 74% employment rate for working-age adults statewide. As the economic shocks of the Covid-19 pandemic dissipate, today's tighter labor market may present better opportunities for people with disabilities. But to help this historically un- and underemployed population be competitive, we must ensure their success in higher education through enhanced supports and play a proactive role as government in creating employment opportunities for graduates.

The creation of a supportive environment for students with disabilities through accommodations, staff training, transitional support, and better data collection, lays the groundwork for success post-graduation. In tandem, we must work to create more job opportunities for New Yorkers with disabilities.

That work must begin during postsecondary education. In addition to scholarship, postsecondary education is a time for students to build mentoring relationships and connect with potential employers. Internships are a critical part of that relationship building and the Legislature and State agencies must play a role in creating opportunities for students with disabilities. Government can further support students and future job seekers by ensuring that all procurement contracts have hiring goals for people with disabilities.

## Policy Recommendations

1. Increase funding from 2 million to 15 million to support students with disabilities in schools across New York
2. Pass legislation to establish a goal of seven percent employment of individuals with disabilities within state agencies, the state legislature, unified court system and state contractors and subcontractors; people with disabilities (A2458 Epstein/ S1125 Skoufis)
3. Support efforts to increase internship opportunities for students with disabilities by requiring the Senate and Assembly internship program to set aside slots for students with disabilities
4. Pass legislation allowing for students in postsecondary education experience or transition program to receive awards from the tuition assistance program (A 2341 Gunther / S 1880 Skoufis)