

## **DEVELOPING A STRONGER NEW YORK THROUGH OPEN ACCESS TO EDUCATION AND TRAINING**

### **Empire State Economic Security Campaign**

#### **The Challenge**

New York currently faces a substantial skills gap. In our state's changing economy, we have lost many traditionally high-wage jobs that were available to New Yorkers without higher levels of education and training, such as those in manufacturing. Today, the New York State Department of Labor (NYSDOL) identifies managers, teachers, nurses and electronic data processors among the top 25 occupations for job openings through 2014.<sup>1</sup> NYSDOL statistics make it clear that the number of jobs requiring at least an Associate's degree is expected to grow 31% while the number of low skilled, low wage jobs will decline. Furthermore, the federal Department of Labor estimated that as of the year 2000 the majority of new jobs required post-secondary education; in NYC, they estimate that 75% of the major employers require at least two years of college for entry level positions. To remain competitive, New York must ensure its residents have a solid education that will provide the skills and credentials.

Access to education and training allows individuals to participate in shaping the future for themselves, their family, and their community. Yet, a new study finds that New York ranks 43<sup>rd</sup> in the nation in the number of adults with high school who attained college. Less than 4% of NYS adults with high school diplomas are in college. In the ten years between 1995 and 2005 enrollment dropped by 20%.<sup>1</sup> Workforce development is critical in keeping New York competitive in the marketplace and that includes education along the continuum for children and teenagers to adults. Countless studies have demonstrated that "quality of the workforce" is a leading factor for employers when determining where to locate their businesses. Employers are looking for workers that have the education and skills training to make their businesses efficient and productive.<sup>2</sup>

Yet, higher education is becoming unattainable for many families. Soaring tuition costs and constant threats to financial aid put college out of reach for many, despite the fact that with college degrees individuals earn nearly twice as much as high school graduates over the course of their lifetime. Unfortunately tuition is rising. For example, SUNY tuition rose 27.9 percent for in-state students during the 2003-04 year alone.

People receiving welfare in New York face particularly harsh barriers to the education and training that would help them prepare for a good job. According to the NYS Education Department, over half of adults receiving welfare do not have a high school diploma or General Educational Development (GED) degree and an estimated 40 percent read at less than an eighth grade level. Yet enrollment in adult literacy, English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL), high school equivalency classes, college, and vocational training has been drastically reduced due to welfare policies that limit access to education and training. For example, since 1995, the City University of New York (CUNY) has lost over 20,000 students who were receiving public assistance.

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<sup>1</sup> NYS Department of Labor,  
<http://www.labor.state.ny.us/workforceindustrydata/apps.asp?reg=nys&app=projections>

<sup>1</sup> "Working to Learn, Learning to Work," the Schuyler Center for Analysis and Advocacy and the Center for an Urban Future 2007

<sup>2</sup> [http://www.scaany.org/initiatives/documents/working\\_to\\_learn\\_000.pdf](http://www.scaany.org/initiatives/documents/working_to_learn_000.pdf)

New York City has the largest population of people receiving welfare in NYS. NYC Mayor Michael Bloomberg said, "Over the past five years, we've moved more than 400,000 people from welfare to work. Our welfare rolls are down 18% from 2002 - and are now lower than at any time since 1964. Still... nearly one in five New Yorkers - many of whom set the alarm clock and punch the time clock every working day - live below the Federal poverty line."

Ninety percent (90%) of adults receiving welfare were and still are women with children. In 1993, research showed that eighty-eight percent (88%) of women who attain a bachelor's degree move to jobs with a living wage and permanently out of poverty. A new report from the Institute for Women's Policy Research (IWPR) confirms, more than a dozen years later, that despite the challenging circumstances for low-income students to undertake a college education, higher education "provides the best opportunity--especially for women--to acquire good jobs, with good wages and good benefits." The most striking finding is the ripple effect that higher education creates "beyond the individual sitting in the classroom..."

The report goes on to argue that children of college-educated parents show improved grades and study habits, and 80 percent of degree holders indicate increased involvement in their communities.<sup>3</sup> When employers have an educated workforce, new employees are hired, retained, trained and promoted. In fact, production and investments increase; through workers' salaries and taxes, government revenues increase across the state.

### **What the Public Thinks**

Public opinion supports access to education and training as a way to greater economic security. When asked what government benefit would most help poor families get ahead, a majority (89 percent) of moderate and high income New Yorkers and low income New Yorkers (68 percent) identified skills acquisition (training and higher education) as a first or second response. Basic education, including pursuit of a GED and English for Speakers of Other Languages also received significant support from both moderate and high income New Yorkers and low-income New Yorkers.<sup>5</sup>

Moreover, 84 percent of adult Americans say that the federal government should play a significant role in higher education. 66 percent of those surveyed are willing to pay more taxes to increase financial support for college students and to colleges and universities (61 percent) and to increase tax credits for families sending their children to college (72 percent).<sup>6</sup>

### **ES2 Policy**

All New Yorkers should have ongoing access to a wide range of education and training programs so that they are prepared to compete in the job market. An educated workforce is good for New York and its residents.

### **The 2008-2009 Session**

- New York State should allow people receiving welfare access to the full range of education and training programs they need to compete for good jobs that pay a family-sustaining wage. This includes participation in adult literacy, English for Speakers of Other Languages, and high school equivalency classes, 2 and 4-year college, and other vocational training programs.

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<sup>3</sup> <http://www.iwpr.org/pdf/D466.pdf>

<sup>5</sup> Telephone poll conducted by Lake, Snell, Perry, and Associates for Community Service Society of New York, July 20-28 and August 11-14, 2005.

<sup>6</sup> Quality, Affordability, and Access: Americans speak on Higher Education, survey conducted for Educational Testing Service, June 2003.

- Under federal TANF regulations, New York can count 30 percent of its welfare caseload as meeting work requirements when engaged in education and training activities. New York should commit to meeting this full 30 percent.
- Under the new federal TANF regulations, New York will be required to have 50 percent of the welfare caseload engaged in “allowable activities.” The “other 50 percent” should be allowed to engaged in the wide range of education activities listed above.
- New York State should make the Work-Study, Internship and Externship Law permanent. This law counts the hours students spend in work-study, internship and externship programs towards the welfare work requirements.
- New York State should increase funding for education and training programs, CUNY, SUNY and the Tuition Assistance Program (TAP) for full-time and part-time students.
- Create a state-funded higher education scholarship program for foster youth attending college at CUNY and SUNY
- New York State should provide free public college tuition to all New Yorkers.
- New York State should conduct statewide and regional job vacancy surveys to more accurately project job growth and labor market trends in New York. A job vacancy survey will help better identify where jobs are available and what skills are needed to perform those jobs.
- State policy directives on education and training options should be displayed at local social services offices so people receiving welfare can know the regulations.
- NYS should implement the current minimum allowed under state and federal regulations, where parents with children less than 6 years old receiving welfare and doing 20 hours of activities fully meet participation rates.