

SUNY REPORT ON

Long-Term Enrollment and Financial Sustainability

FEBRUARY 2025 UPDATE



STUDENT SUCCESS

RESEARCH *and*
SCHOLARSHIP

DIVERSITY, EQUITY
and INCLUSION

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT
and UPWARD MOBILITY

SUNY ON THE MOVE:

February 2025 Update to SUNY’s Report on Long-Term Enrollment and Financial Sustainability

Higher education in New York, and across the nation, is at an inflection point. Colleges and universities are grappling with enrollment challenges, financial pressures, and shifting workforce demands, all while confronting a growing public skepticism about whether a college degree still leads to real economic opportunity.

SUNY has set a different trajectory through bold decision-making, smart investment, and unprecedented systemwide collaboration. Under the leadership of the SUNY Board of Trustees and Chancellor John B. King Jr., and with the strong support of Governor Kathy Hochul and the New York State Legislature, SUNY is accelerating student success and serving as an engine of upward mobility. We have stabilized campus finances, expanded student access, and prevented the kinds of disruptions that have upended communities elsewhere.

The January 2024 SUNY Report on Long-Term Enrollment and Financial Sustainability outlined a strategy to strengthen SUNY’s financial health, ensure institutional resilience, and position the system for success. In the past year, that strategy has delivered results. From back-to-back systemwide enrollment gains for the first time in 15 years to transformative financial stability efforts at key campuses, SUNY has demonstrated what is possible with a clear vision for the future.

This update provides a progress report on our work and the next steps to ensure SUNY’s place as the nation’s leading system of public higher education – one that does not just weather challenges, but turns them into opportunities for growth and transformation.

Update on SUNY’s Progress: 2024 Highlights

Since issuing the initial SUNY Report on Long-Term Enrollment and Financial Sustainability, SUNY has made progress across all four of our priority pillars: student success; research and scholarship; diversity, equity, and inclusion; and economic development and upward mobility. Major steps forward include:

- **Achieving two years of back-to-back enrollment gain.** SUNY has experienced overall enrollment gains two years in a row across its colleges and universities, including increases in first-year undergraduate enrollment. The results mark the first time in 15 years that all SUNY sectors have seen back-to-back increases in overall enrollment. SUNY’s colleges of technology have made especially strong gains – with a 7.6% total enrollment increase over the last two years.
- **Maintaining SUNY’s affordability for New York families.** Thanks to an affordable tuition and strong state, federal and institutional financial aid, more than half of New York State resident undergraduate students attend SUNY tuition-free. Last year, New York increased the TAP income thresholds and minimum awards for SUNY students and their families, and SUNY has been committed to ensuring that every student receives all the financial aid to which they are entitled.

- **Implementing the nation’s leading retention and completion initiative.** ASAP and ACE— programs proven through randomized controlled trials in multiple states to be the nation’s best, most cost-effective strategies to increase retention and completion – are now supporting nearly 4,300 students at 12 State-operated campuses and 13 community colleges. Participating students receive personalized advising services, financial support, flexible course schedules, career development support, and a connected community of fellow learners. With additional investment in Governor Hochul’s Executive Budget, SUNY is on a path to serve 10,000 students in ASAP and ACE within the next two years.
- **Ensuring safe and inclusive campuses across the System.** At SUNY, student safety on our campuses is paramount and there is no tolerance for antisemitism, Islamophobia, and other forms of hate and bias. SUNY implemented a systemwide requirement in 2024 that all faculty and staff receive training in federal Title VI civil rights protections. In addition, five SUNY campuses and System Administration have joined Hillel International’s flagship Campus Climate Initiative. SUNY also awarded grants to 23 campuses to create or enhance interfaith prayer, reflection, and mediation spaces.
- **Expanding paid internships for undergraduate students.** SUNY has established the ambitious goal that every undergraduate student will participate in an internship or other experiential learning opportunity before they graduate. Thanks to support from Governor Hochul and the New York State Legislature, SUNY now provides State-operated campuses with \$14.5 million per year for paid internships and other internship support like housing and transportation. SUNY also expanded the Chancellor’s Summer Research Excellence Fund with a focus on AI research that advances the public good, established the Veterans Enrollment and Support Internship Program, launched the SUNY Climate Corps, announced the Institute for Local News internship program, partnered with the Brooklyn Public Library to create a new internship experience for SUNY students, and established an initiative for Educational Opportunity Program participants to intern with State agencies.
- **Launching the Empire State Service Corps.** Last fall, SUNY launched the Empire State Service Corps at more than 40 campuses with 500 college students serving in paid service internships in areas such as tutoring in high-need K-12 schools, addressing climate action, providing trained peer mental health support, and helping connect students to basic needs assistance like food benefits. SUNY received over 2,000 applications for the 500 slots, and this summer will offer 150 additional placements thanks to AmeriCorps funding.
- **Expanding health care workforce development programs with a focus on community colleges.** The 2024-25 enacted budget included \$8 million in recurring annual funding for SUNY’s 30 community colleges – the first increase in nearly a decade – of which \$5 million was leveraged to increase enrollment and completion in health care workforce programs. The funding enables campuses to hire faculty and expand or establish new health care programs; enhance nursing simulation spaces; establish new pathways with other SUNY campus health programs; and create partnerships between the campuses and the communities they serve, including with hospitals and other local employers.
- **Expanding mental health services.** As a result of \$13 million in recurring State funding, SUNY is increasing mental health services and support for students at State-operated campuses (\$10 million) and community colleges (\$3 million). These investments are making it possible to hire

more mental health counselors, expand clinic hours, and provide tele-counseling options. Examples of this expansion can be found [here](#).

- **Expanding pre-professional EOP programs.** In 2021, SUNY launched its first pre-professional Educational Opportunity Programs to prepare EOP participants for careers in medicine. Students receive academic support, guidance, supplemental financial aid, assistance with graduate or medical school applications, and clinical experience. SUNY is building on this success starting with two additional pre-professional EOP programs focusing on students interested in mental health and engineering careers. Starting this year, four SUNY campuses are launching EOP pre-mental health career programs and two are launching EOP pre-engineering programs.
- **Adopting SUNY's first-ever Climate and Sustainability Action Plan.** Following a yearlong process that brought together SUNY campus leaders and sustainability experts, SUNY adopted a Climate and Sustainability Action Plan with specific targets and strategies to achieve net-zero SUNY-wide greenhouse gas emissions and zero waste in line with Governor Hochul's goals for New York State. SUNY's plan describes specific next steps in areas including institutional commitment, education, research, workforce development, facilities, operations, and inclusive engagement. The full report is available [here](#).
- **Adopting a new general education requirement for civic discourse.** In December, the SUNY Board of Trustees approved new systemwide requirements for SUNY's undergraduate general education curriculum beginning with the incoming Fall 2026 cohort. The new requirements add civic discourse to the general education core competencies, as well as update the existing information literacy core competency to reflect the rise of emerging technologies and artificial intelligence. Part of SUNY's broader [Civics and Service Agenda](#), the civic discourse requirement ensures students gain the skills necessary to engage in healthy and respectful dialogue on difficult issues.
- **Making progress towards Governor Hochul's goal to double SUNY research.** In FY2024, SUNY-wide sponsored research funding expenditures totaled \$1.2 billion at SUNY campuses and NY CREATES. This reflects a 26% increase from just six years earlier. SUNY's University Centers and other research-intensive campuses are leading the way in groundbreaking research from AI to quantum and from biomed to sustainability – aided by increased State capital investment in labs and other research space. Under Chancellor King's leadership, systemwide task forces on Artificial Intelligence, Microelectronics Packaging, and Biotech/Biomanufacturing/Bioengineering brought together hundreds of researchers across campuses to develop strategic plans for expanding SUNY's research, maximizing federal research dollars, and increasing economic development impact. Similar task forces have recently launched for Quantum Information Science & Technology and Climate & Sustainability Research. In partnership with a new dedicated team at SUNY system to support the development of multi-campus federal research grant applications, these efforts to grow SUNY research are already bearing fruit in new federal research awards.
- **Launching Governor Hochul's Empire AI research center for the public good.** Housed at the University at Buffalo, Empire AI brings together New York State's leading public and private research universities to conduct cutting-edge research that advances the public good. The Empire AI consortium "flipped the switch" on the first wave of Empire AI's computing power in Fall 2024. Initial projects by researchers at SUNY's four University Centers have explored antisemitism and social media, climate change, eliminating disease, and improving vaccination.

Strengthening Financial Sustainability Across the SUNY System

The January 2024 SUNY Report spotlighted five State-operated campuses that were implementing strategies to improve their financial health and ensure their long-term sustainability. Over the last year, each campus has made significant progress towards this goal through a combination of targeted growth and fiscal discipline.

SUNY Potsdam

Following a 38% loss of enrollment from Fall 2013 through Fall 2023, SUNY Potsdam – under the leadership of new President Suzanne Smith – has developed a comprehensive plan to sustain and grow the campus.

SUNY Potsdam is aligning academic programming with student demand, charting a path for investment in growth areas, and leaning on the college's strengths to establish a future-focused fiscal health framework. The campus has invested in bolstering online offerings and expanding its graduate programs, while reviewing 14 under-subscribed academic program areas for discontinuance, offering a voluntary separation program, and assessing the campus footprint.

As part of a five-year operational stability plan, SUNY Potsdam ended 2023-24 with a \$3.9 million deficit – down from a base deficit of \$10.4 million (a 62% reduction). In addition, Fall 2024 overall enrollment grew by 2%.

SUNY Fredonia

SUNY Fredonia had experienced a 40% reduction in total enrollment from Fall 2013 to Fall 2023, and in 2023, President Stephen Kolison took steps to ensure the financial stability of the institution and engaged the campus in developing a plan for Fredonia's future.

SUNY Fredonia's path forward emphasizes expanded student services and the elimination of low-enrolled programs in favor of adding new programs demanded by students and the state's economy. The campus has completed the process of deactivating 13 low-enrolled degree programs and is in the process of deactivating nine minors also characterized by low enrollment. At the same time, the campus has added two new programs: a Masters in Clinical Mental Health Counseling and an MBA in Accounting. The Masters in Clinical Mental Health Counseling is currently the fastest-growing program at Fredonia, expanding from 11 students in January 2024 to 34 students in January 2025. The campus is continuing establish additional programs that are in high demand by students.

SUNY Fredonia's 2023-24 end-of-year deficit of \$4.1 million was roughly half of the base deficit of \$8.1 million prior to the campus's actions. Fall 2024 enrollment increased by 7.2% for first-time undergraduate students.

Buffalo State University

While SUNY Buffalo State is at an earlier implementation stage than SUNY Potsdam and SUNY Fredonia, Interim President Bonita Durand has taken important steps to address the campus's 42% enrollment decline from Fall 2013 to Fall 2023.

The Buffalo State operational stability plan focuses on areas where the campus excels, including creating new teacher education pipelines, nurturing STEM programs, bolstering art and hospitality programs, strengthening the pipeline of students to Ph.D's at the University at Buffalo, and creating Buffalo State's first doctoral program (Creative Studies).

To address its structural deficit, Buffalo State's plan focuses on aligning its workforce with expected enrollment (including through voluntary separation programs), increasing student support spending, and reviewing other ongoing expenses to maintain fiscal discipline. In addition, the campus has identified 37 degree programs, certification titles, and concentrations with extremely low student demand (i.e., 34 students total across the 37 programs) to be deactivated.

SUNY Buffalo State continued to see an enrollment decline in Fall 2024 (driven in large part by student attrition) and ended the 2023-24 fiscal year with a \$12.6 million deficit, which was better than the base deficit of \$16.5 million (a 24% reduction). Implementation of the proven ACE program is part of a multi-pronged effort to improve student persistence and completion. Further previously announced budget actions over the next year are expected to reduce the deficit to a projected \$10.1 million.

SUNY Delhi

Under then-acting and now-permanent President Mary Bonderoff, SUNY Delhi has been at the forefront of bringing together the campus community to lean into Delhi's strengths like applied learning opportunities while expanding student services, managing expenses, and finding more efficient ways to operate. The campus has also established a high-tech simulation laboratory to support critical care instruction to nursing students.

Following a 10-year 14% decline in first-time undergraduate enrollment from Fall 2013 to Fall 2023, SUNY Delhi increased first-time undergraduate enrollment by 18% in Fall 2024. As a result of a series of budget actions implemented with input from faculty through shared governance, Delhi is projected to have eliminated its structural deficit, and the campus ended the 2023-24 fiscal year with a \$1.4 million operating surplus.

SUNY Maritime

SUNY Maritime is the first of seven maritime academies in the country and provides extraordinary career opportunities in the maritime industry for its graduates. Admiral John Okon became SUNY Maritime's president in July 2024, and quickly began working with his campus community on a plan for Maritime's future. Following a 23% decrease in total enrollment from Fall 2013 to Fall 2023, SUNY Maritime's enrollment was up 5% in Fall 2024.

SUNY Maritime's plan focuses primarily on expanding enrollment through robust recruitment strategies, strong fiscal discipline, and revenue generation through professional mariner continuing education and training. Through a partnership with SUNY System and creation of a "Pay It Forward" initiative, SUNY Maritime is working to address a major cost barrier through scholarships for the hallmark "Summer at Sea" program – a requirement for U.S. Coast Guard licenses that can cost about \$30,000 per student over three summers even after financial aid. In addition, the campus is continuing to partner with the Federal Maritime Administration (MARAD) to receive appropriate support for the high costs of managing the federally-owned training ship Empire State VII.

In addition to these five campuses, SUNY has more broadly emphasized the importance of innovation in service delivery. The partnership between Clinton Community College and SUNY Plattsburgh is an important example of this work:

Clinton Community College + SUNY Plattsburgh

Clinton Community College has faced significant financial and operational challenges in recent years, including a multi-year enrollment decline, growing budget deficits, and a critical accreditation warning from Middle States. Left unaddressed, these issues would have placed Clinton's long-term viability at serious risk and jeopardized the economic stability of the region. Recognizing the urgency of the situation, SUNY System Administration has worked closely with the campus leadership and regional partners to stabilize Clinton's finances, drive enrollment growth, and ensure a sustainable path forward.

As part of this effort, SUNY has led the strategic planning process, coordinated critical partnerships, and guided the campus through a major relocation plan that will secure Clinton's future while preserving its mission. Over the past year, these efforts have helped Clinton move from the brink of crisis toward a sustainable long-term future, including:

- **Re-Accreditation Through 2030:** In June 2022, Middle States placed Clinton on warning, followed by probation, due to concerns about planning, governance, and leadership. Since then, Clinton has implemented significant improvements, and in Fall 2024, Middle States reaffirmed the college's accreditation through 2029-2030, removing all previous warnings.
- **Enrollment Gains:** Following years of enrollment losses, Clinton grew enrollment by 5.1% in Fall 2024, reaching 1,067 students. Applications for Spring 2025 have also tracked ahead of last year, signaling continued progress. These gains were supported by direct strategic engagement from SUNY System, including targeted marketing and outreach efforts to attract and retain students.
- **Financial Stabilization:** Clinton has reduced its year-over-year deficit by 31% and now maintains a fund balance of \$1.8 million, an important step toward long-term financial health. Additionally, Clinton's foundation endowment has grown by 42%, reaching over \$4 million, as confidence in the college's future has strengthened.
- **ASAP Implementation:** Clinton successfully launched its ASAP student success program, meeting its initial enrollment target of 131 students. This initiative has helped strengthen student retention and bridge the gap between Clinton and the broader community, reinforcing the college's role in supporting student success.

Clinton's relocation to SUNY Plattsburgh remains on track for Fall 2025, a move that will reduce operational costs, expand student access to key academic and student services, and enhance the college's long-term sustainability. With Middle States approving the relocation, Clinton is working closely with SUNY System and SUNY Plattsburgh to ensure a smooth transition while maintaining academic continuity for students. At the same time, Clinton County is conducting a feasibility study to determine the best use for the current campus.

As the transition progresses, Clinton is focused on sustaining enrollment growth, expanding student success initiatives, and ensuring that the financial efficiencies from the move translate into long-term institutional stability. Clinton's transformation over the past year demonstrates how targeted

interventions, strategic partnerships, and decisive action by SUNY System can help institutions in financial distress regain stability and build a foundation for future success.

Improving SUNY’s Long-Term Financial Outlook

The 2024 SUNY Report – submitted prior to the critical investments in SUNY included in the 2024-25 enacted budget – indicated that SUNY faced as much as a \$1 billion gap between revenue and expenses within a decade without additional State investment and efficiency measures.

Following a second year of systemwide enrollment gains and historic levels of sustained State funding support, the projected 10-year gap would be reduced to under \$50 million by 2033-34 if trends established since January 2023 continue. This strengthened financial position relies on:

- maintaining the general pace of enrollment increases (in Fall 2023 and Fall 2024) as well as implementing Governor Hochul’s plan for free community college for adults ages 25-55 in high-demand fields;
- continued investment to cover State-approved collective bargaining agreements (as reflected in the 2023-24 enacted budget, 2024-25 enacted budget, and Governor Hochul’s 2025-26 Executive Budget proposal) and other essential costs; and
- maintaining SUNY’s commitment to fiscal discipline.

Achieving Efficiencies and Improving Service Delivery

The SUNY Board of Trustees and Chancellor King are committed to providing campuses with the academic, financial, and operational support needed to thrive. Consistent with that vision, Chancellor King has reorganized and strengthened SUNY System Administration. Unfilled positions in crucial areas like IT have been filled and interim appointments with uncertain authority have been replaced with permanent promotions of strong internal leaders and/or talented new senior leaders.

These shifts are reflected in SUNY’s staffing, which has now returned to just below the overall full-time equivalent (FTE) level that existed when Chancellor Johnson announced her departure (551 FTE staff in June 2020; 493 FTE staff in December 2022; 549 FTE staff in December 2024). Under Chancellor King’s leadership, System Administration staffing has emphasized recruitment of more individuals with extensive content-level expertise and deep system, state, and national leadership experience. The greatest gains in staffing since Chancellor King’s appointment have been in the newly established Office for Student Success (including support for enrollment, retention, and completion) and in the expansion of SUNY’s Office of General Counsel, which has been restructured to provide enhanced centralized legal services at the highest quality and in a manner that is more cost-effective for SUNY campuses.

SUNY’s Office of General Counsel

In 2024, SUNY’s Office of General Counsel (OGC) built out in-house legal expertise in areas that SUNY System and campus leadership identified as vital to SUNY’s educational mission, including student affairs, civil rights, contracts, real estate, intellectual property, litigation, and employment and labor law. Over

the last nine months of 2024, the improved office model allowed SUNY to achieve costs savings of several hundred thousand dollars related to employment arbitration, litigation and civil rights matters; over \$400,000 by eliminating the need to retain outside investigators; and more than \$700,000 in training costs. OGC also brought a substantial portion of intellectual property matters in-house, including trademark enforcement and licensing, for additional savings on outside counsel costs. These cost savings are projected to increase in 2025.

As a direct result of the increased legal expertise, SUNY's legal approach transformed from purely reactive to one that included a significant proactive component. For example, SUNY conducted 159 trainings and presentations – almost tripling the number of trainings from the prior year – and managed complex campus issues, including creating and leading Title VI/First Amendment tabletops at every State-operated campus, drafting model template policies to ensure best practices are implemented systemwide, preparing individual campuses for the changes in Title IX regulations, and reducing the overall costs of litigation and investigations.

On contracts, for example, OGC has developed several strategies to save our campuses time and money, including improved contracts management, standardization of contracts, development of model agreements, and legal training in the areas of procurement and contract law. All of these measures have helped SUNY streamline processes, increase speed to signature, and improve negotiations with vendors.

Systemwide Financial Sustainability Initiatives

In addition to rapid progress at the five State-operated campuses with significant financial challenges described above, SUNY has worked over the last two years to implement strategies systemwide to enhance financial sustainability across all campuses:

- **Academic Program Review:** The financial challenges at Potsdam, Fredonia, and Buffalo State were the result of steep decade-long drops in enrollment without meaningful changes to programming and staffing. In contrast, over the last two years, SUNY has taken steps to ensure every campus is engaged in regular academic program review to ensure that campus programming aligns with student demand, community needs, and responsible financial management.
- **Digital Transformation Project:** Effective deployment of technology is essential to efficiently delivering successful student recruitment and enrollment management, robust academic and non-academic student supports, smooth transfer pathways, responsive human resources systems, strong financial management, and more. Thanks to the Digital Transformation Funds provided by Governor Hochul and the Legislature in 2023, SUNY is implementing an ambitious multi-year plan for technology modernization (including enhanced cybersecurity).
- **Shared Services Initiatives:** Historically, SUNY has under-leveraged the economies of scale made possible by operating the largest comprehensive system of public higher education in the nation. Building on the success of the OGC shared services model in delivering both improved services and substantial cost savings, SUNY is in the preliminary stages of launching two new shared services initiatives in financial aid services and institutional research.