A Note to the State University of New York Community and Friends –

Each January, I have the distinct privilege of delivering the State of the University Address. I cannot underscore enough the importance of this event—it is a time to tell all our constituents about the State University’s accomplishments over the previous year, and to lay out our plans for the year to come.

This year was a milestone, as I marked five years serving as chancellor of this remarkable system. And like any milestone, it proved to be a time to reflect on our work together since I arrived in New York in 2009.

In the months leading up to this speech, and in thinking about what we, the University, felt we needed to say to New Yorkers, we formulated a clear, singular goal—SUNY will strive, in all its efforts, to become the best at getting better.

To explain how we will accomplish this, I framed this speech around a series of questions that you can see on the opposite page and learn about how SUNY answers them in the body of this booklet.

To become the best at getting better, to implement every proof-point strategy that we know expands access, drives completion, and builds student success—this is our goal. This is what guides and drives us forward. We will double down in all of our programming, all of our processes and procedures, all of our advocacy, to make sure that we are delivering the best possible education—and at an affordable price—to every New Yorker.

I am so pleased to offer this document to you, a transcription of the remarks I delivered that day. It includes all of the graphics that accompanied and illustrated the speech. I encourage you to read it, to look. And I encourage you, as a fellow New Yorker, as a leader in higher education, as a leader in any sector that serves New Yorkers, to think about how we can better work together to make the necessary investments to make The State University of New York, unequivocally, the best public higher education system in the world.

Nancy L. Zimpher
Chancellor

In the 2015 State of the University Address we posed several big, system-searching questions.

What Is Our Challenge?
Why Meet This Challenge?
How Are We Doing?
What Is Our Goal?
How Can We Do Better?
What Should We Invest In?

We answered that last question with several announcements, designed around the framework of access, completion, and success. These initiatives are ones that we know work, and for which we need support from the State to bring them to scale for all New Yorkers.

ACCESS
• Early Advisement
• College Readiness MOOC
• Electronic High School Transcripts
• Educational Opportunity Program
• Chief Diversity Officers at Every Campus

COMPLETION
• Remediation
• Finish in Four
• Open SUNY

SUCCESS
• Master Innovators
• SUNY Works

To learn about how SUNY answers all of these questions, read on.
Good morning, all.

I'm thrilled that we're all here together today, and I'm especially glad to see so many students here.

As Chairman McCall showed us, this has been a big year for SUNY: a year of great accomplishments on our campuses, by our faculty and staff, and of course, our students. We have much for which we can be proud.

And I have to say, it's also been a year of reckoning. A year in which we can take stock of our wins, yes. But also a year of uncovering where we need to do better. To ensure that we as a system are doing the absolute best we can for New York.

As a university, we are in the business of building and enhancing people's lives through education. And it's a complex business. We, like others, are learning how to do it better, and how to do it best.
WHAT IS OUR CHALLENGE?

In this process, and for the thousands of words that are published every day on the subject of education there is no one sentence that has stuck with me more than a line by David Leonhardt. And it is this:

"Education—educating more people and educating them better—appears to be the best bet any society can make."

You know, finding this quote was a real "A-ha" moment for me. And it is still an inspiration for all of us at SUNY. Following this idea, we have created a formula that guides our work in carrying out our university’s core mission:

Ensuring that every New Yorker has ACCESS to the highest quality education. Access to the widest possible range of postsecondary programs, empowering our graduates to build better lives, stronger communities, and a vibrant economy.

So, our formula. While we introduced this last year, it is not last year’s news.

We are talking about this still because we know we’ve figured something out.

We know that educating more people means expanding ACCESS like never before.

We know that educating them better requires an array of tools that ensure COMPLETION.

And we know that the "best bet" means making big investments in building and taking to scale those tools that really do expand access and make completion a reality for every student.

Educating more people  Educating them better  Best bet society can make

A + C = S

ACCESS  COMPLETION  SUCCESS

But just because this formula looks nice and neat on the page, that doesn’t mean it’s easy to pull off. Getting to that all important “equal” sign—the SUCCESS part for every student—sometimes feels like it requires a kind of alchemy.

But, luckily it doesn’t require magic.

It requires unprecedented innovation, hard work, and the discipline to realize a shared clear vision. And that’s where we, all of us—students, faculty, presidents, elected officials, all our partners—have our work cut out for us.
WHY MEET THIS CHALLENGE?

On the wall in my office there is a piece of art.

It is a map of New York State. And on it are blue rivets that locate every one of our 64 campuses. And in between those rivets, connecting and criss-crossing the state, are strings—vibrant in color and pulled tight so that if plucked like a chord they hum with life. The impression it makes is a powerful one—and I’m proud to say it was created by a SUNY student! An artist at FIT.

I see this image every day. In fact, I requested that this piece be installed on my wall so that I could see it every day and be reminded of our system’s presence, and its unmatched energy and potential.

It is a reminder that we, The State University of New York, function like a central nervous system for the state—an economic and quality-of-life driver unlike any other. You can see our connectivity. You can see how we reach deep into every region, every community in New York. You can see both our power and our potential as a generator of the big ideas, new knowledge, jobs and careers that are making New York the place to be as we continue our march into the 21st century.

Because there’s a SUNY campus within 30 miles of every single New Yorker. And because we employ 90,000 faculty and staff, we are a major source of jobs in so many communities.

In 2015, more than 460,000 students are enrolled in SUNY. But that big number doesn’t even begin to show the whole picture.

Because between part-time students, those who aren’t matriculated, those participating in Cornell Cooperative Extension programs and classes through Educational Opportunity Centers and other SUNY programs, we actually serve close to 3 million people every year.

30 Miles from every New Yorker
90,000 faculty & staff
460,000 students
3,000,000 people served annually

Three million people. This is a massive responsibility. And we need to get it right in everything we do.

Five years ago, when I came to SUNY, I got a sense, very quickly, that this ability to be New York’s best economic driver was our system’s opportunity. That we needed to step up, tighten up our system’sness, and deliver for New York as only we can.

Those were not the best of times, if you’ll remember. The nation was in the throes of the Great Recession, and New York was feeling it hard.
And as I traveled the state in my first hundred days, visiting every campus, every region, I learned for certain what I had already suspected.

I learned from listening to people on and around our campuses that SUNY was a powerful force in every community—an economic powerhouse that generates $21 billion annually for the state, supports 173,000 jobs, and generates $460 million in state and local taxes.

And I realized, with absolute certainty, that it is not only okay for a university system to set its goals around the economic vitality of its state—it is our responsibility to do so.

Together, we must work to better connect the academy to the economy. SUNY’s vision of ACCESS + COMPLETION = SUCCESS is really at the core of our intent to drive the economic strength of New York. This has been our momentum and our goal for the last five years and continues to be our commitment.

Because we know that education—higher education—is a necessary ingredient in strengthening the economy and the betterment of society. This is not up for debate. It’s a fact.

New York needs to educate more people and we need to educate them better.

We know that an educated citizenry is a more successful citizenry. We know the strong connections between higher education and better health, lower crime, higher voter turnout, and more volunteerism in communities. We know that the higher the degree of education, the less likely you are to rely on public assistance. We know that college graduates overwhelmingly earn higher incomes than those who do not complete, and that graduates put more back into their local economies. In New York State, the unemployment rate is two times higher for those without any higher education.

Knowing all this—these facts that are supported by mountains of evidence—drives home our point loud and clear: New York needs to educate more people and we need to educate them better.

Because the other thing we know is—and this is not going to change—jobs that earn a middle-class wage require some sort of post-secondary training. In fact, this will be true for 69 percent of all jobs in New York by 2020. It doesn’t mean that every career needs a four-year degree or a PhD. But with the way the world is moving, the way technology is advancing, more and more good jobs require skills and knowledge developed after high school.
This is something everyone in this room already knows. I know you’ve heard it before. I know you live it every day... But here’s something that maybe you don’t know:

For every 100 ninth graders in New York, on average only 73 will graduate from high school.

Of those 73, 51 will go directly to college.

But only 37 will return for their sophomore year.

And then of those 37, only 23 will complete their degree on time or close to on time.

Twenty-three out of 100.

And 23 is only the average. In our upstate urban centers, the statistics show a darker picture: only 16 of every 100 ninth graders will complete college close to on time.

Of those students who fall off, some of them will have college experience— but most of them will not finish. They will not complete their degrees. They drop out for a variety of reasons: Lack of preparedness. Lack of funding. Lack of guidance.

So New York’s education pipeline is still not whole enough for all students. It is still not strong enough so that everyone, no matter where he or she is born, no matter where they go to school, or who their parents are, has the chance to succeed.

Yes, our job market requires that college enrollment be higher than ever—but it’s really the COMPLETION rate that matters.

It’s COMPLETION that gauges how many graduates are going out into the world and into the workforce, ready to hold good jobs.

Toward this goal, SUNY continues to see year-to-year improvement in completion.

Systemwide, our 4-year graduation rate is 47 percent, 14 points higher than our national public counterparts. Our 6-year graduation rate of 65 percent is 7 points higher than the national publics. In fact, with respect to 6-year graduation rates, SUNY rivals private colleges.

Promising as this news is, what it really shows is that we need to get better still. This is where New York needs to become the best at getting better.

Because where we are now is simply not good enough, and we can’t be afraid to say that.
HOW ARE WE DOING?

So we’re making progress. Using our collective-impact approach, over the last five years, we’ve been learning how to pull together and break down the silos in and between education and government and the private sector.

NY SUNY 2020

Governor Cuomo got it right four years ago when he signed the NY SUNY 2020 legislation into law. He made groundbreaking progress for New York. He solidified for our students and our campuses a historic commitment to a 5-year plan of rational tuition, maintenance of effort, and economic growth. This is one of the most effective examples of government empowering a university to provide the best possible education for its students.

Faculty and staff hires

And over the last five years we have hired more than 500 new faculty and staff, attracting some of the best and brightest in the world.

I’m happy to say that we’ve been able to make critical investments like this as well because of savings found through our shared services initiative. To date, we’ve saved $70 million, and put those dollars into services and strategies that serve our students. And we’ve identified opportunities for another $40 million in savings, pushing us over our initial $100 million run rate.

Seamless Transfer

And we are making seamless transfer a reality. Each year, more than 30,000 students transfer within our system. Last year, 44 percent—nearly half—of four-year degrees awarded at SUNY were earned by transfer students.

Through ground-breaking policy, we have made transfer easier than ever. No one else has done anything like this at this scale. No one.
Smart Track

We launched SUNY Smart Track—the most aggressive effort in the nation to ensure financial aid transparency.

Smart Track is available not only to everyone who applies to any of our 64 schools—it’s available to every person on the planet—truly—who wants to plan and calculate the cost of their education.

TeachNY

We’ve created TeachNY. SUNY takes teacher training personally. We produce 25 percent of the state’s teachers, and we’re about making them the best in the world. We’re raising the bar for admissions into our teacher preparation programs to ensure that the best and the brightest are in every classroom, every day.

Community Colleges

Then our 30 community colleges are making great strides.

SUNY educates nearly 240,000 students a year at our community colleges. And looking ahead, their importance will only grow. The state Department of Labor projects that jobs requiring associate degrees are the fastest growing occupation group through 2020.

Community colleges’ commitment to the workforce was the reason Vice President Biden visited Monroe Community College last year. It is also why a consortium of SUNY’s community colleges was awarded one of the largest U.S. Department of Labor TAACCCT grants—$14.6 million—to train more students in advanced manufacturing skills.

Early College High Schools

And because we know that college success starts well before college, we’ve continued to invest in bridging the gap between K-12 and higher ed.

The pathways we created in our 20 Smart Scholars Early College High Schools, P-TECH programs, and New York State high school students get a jump on college—with 90 percent of these students graduating high school and doing so with college credit.
START-UP NY

We’re also the keystone of the Governor’s START-UP NY campaign to attract and retain new businesses in New York. Right now, 44 SUNY schools have been approved for START-UP. That’s more than 310 tax-free areas for new or expanding businesses to operate on or near SUNY campuses.

Nine of our schools have announced 53 START-UP NY projects, creating more than 1,900 new jobs and nearly $90 million in new investment.

In addition, START-UP is increasing industry-sponsored research funding, increasing co-op opportunities, and providing richer student experiences—all right there, right on or near our campuses.

Networks of Excellence

Programs like these build on New York’s STEM needs—preparing students to have careers in the Science, Technology, Engineering, and Math fields that are most important to growing our economy.

To this end, we have continued to build and strengthen our six Networks of Excellence. We’ve engaged more than 500 faculty members in diverse fields in the hard and soft sciences, as well as in the arts and education. SUNY will continue to invest in these areas, knowing that these are the places where new ground must be broken—and SUNY is going to be the research university that does it.

Innovation Showcases

We continue to showcase SUNY’s intellectual capital and drive new economic development through our annual Innovation Showcase, a dynamic day of linking SUNY entrepreneurs and high-tech companies with potential investors.

Last year’s showcase featured 25 businesses, 75 percent of which have had investment since the event. We are anticipating even more success at our showcase coming up next month.

Research Foundation

Clearly, we have made important gains.

And maybe we have been a little too successful. People have taken notice.

We are proud of the fact that the University of Illinois has managed to lure our vice chancellor for research and president of the Research Foundation, Dr. Tim Killeen, to be that system’s next president. In its choice, Illinois has recognized the quality of the academic enterprise that is SUNY.

The good news is we have outstanding people within the system ready to lead.

To that end, I am so pleased to announce that Dr. Alexander Cartwright, SUNY provost and executive vice chancellor, will continue SUNY’s research momentum and serve as interim president of the Research Foundation.

We are more than proud to call Alex one of our own. A distinguished scholar, he has just been named a fellow in the National Academy of Inventors, the best of the best.

So for all of this—and these are just some highlights—for all of this great progress made toward our aim to become the best at getting better—it’s still not enough to get us to the completion and success rates we need.
WHAT IS THE GOAL?

There are a lot of smart people who have ideas about where we need to go.

All told, groups in the know—groups like the Gates Foundation, Complete College America, the National Governor’s Association, The College Board, The Lumina Foundation—they all agree that completion is too low. These groups more or less have all set goals in the next five or ten years that would bring college completion in America to around 60 percent.

Just this week, The Chronicle of Higher Education did a status report on President Obama’s goal to lead the world in college completion by 2020. In six years the U.S. only moved up one place, from 12 to 11. At this rate, we’re not going to cross the finish line in time.

So where does that put SUNY? What role do we play?

Right now, New York State is at 45 percent. Forty-five percent of adult New Yorkers—that’s 25- to 64-year-olds—hold a post-secondary degree of some kind. The national average is 39 percent—so that’s good, we’re doing something right—but we’re still short of the mark. It’s not good enough.

So let’s say we are shooting for 60 percent. Let’s say that’s the goal over five years. On our current path, we won’t get there.

That red swath there, that’s the attainment gap. That’s what we need to close. That’s the difference between where we are and the very bottom of where we need to be.

5-YEAR GOAL

Percent of Adults, 25- to 64-year-olds holding a post-secondary degree

- New York average
- National average

Because, truly, the gap is even wider than this. Closing this gap, eliminating this red zone, only gets us to the 60 percent. And knowing what we know about trends in the workforce and the economy and the world, it’s too low.

Sixty percent is too low.
Sixty percent of New Yorkers holding degrees means 40 percent are still left out in the cold. Forty percent either won’t have access or won’t have the support they need to complete. Forty percent won’t have much of a chance to develop the skills and the knowledge they need to hold the jobs that pay.

This is not good enough. We need to do better. And as daunting as that 60 percent push is over the next five or ten years, it’s still not bold enough.

These are goals. And they’re necessary goals. But they are not solutions. And the real challenge isn’t in setting goals—it’s meeting them.

So what would it take? What would it take to bump New York’s line up from 45 percent to 60, or even above that, which is where we really need to be?

What will it take to achieve a higher degree of ACCESS…a higher degree of COMPLETION…a higher degree of SUCCESS in New York?

Because, as I said, on our current trajectory, without putting some serious muscle under that 45 percent line, we’re never going to get there.

And never getting there means not enough New Yorkers ready to work in promising sectors right here at home.

Never getting there means not enough New Yorkers to help grow and sustain a vibrant economy.

Never getting there means more New Yorkers who struggle to pay their bills. More New Yorkers who risk slipping into poverty. More New Yorkers who are frustrated, who feel hopeless, who feel trapped.

Never getting there means we’ll just roll into the future and the gap will widen because the need for adults with degrees will continue to outstrip the rate at which degrees are earned. This is not a formula for a successful society.

We need to do better.
HOW CAN WE DO BETTER?

When we look at our mission, our purpose, it endures.

But the times, they change, they are different. The world is different. So we need to keep asking ourselves, yearly, daily, as we carry out our work, “How can we do better. How can we do this better? How can we educate more people, and educate them better?”

Over the last few months I’ve been out on our campuses with the express purpose of sitting down with students and alumni, talking to them about their SUNY experience. We were thrilled to be joined by New York’s own Senator Ken LaValle at our event at Stony Brook earlier this month.

These students—let me tell you—they know what they want. They are sharp. And I have been blown away by them every time.

Just listen to this...

In these conversations I’ve heard that so many of our students come to SUNY because of our affordability. But I also hear loud and clear that they come because of our unmatched range of options on top of that affordability. They come because they want a customizable education. And they’ve discovered that they can do this better at SUNY than any place else.

So here’s what we need to do. Here’s what New York needs to do to empower every student to complete and succeed.

At SUNY, we are only interested in implementing strategies that we know work.

And once we know what works—based on data and proof points—we need to take those strategies to scale, across our system, across the state.

A Higher Degree of ACCESS

So how do we achieve a higher degree of college ACCESS for everyone in New York?

We know success doesn’t begin in college. Students need support to get them through the education pipeline. This means starting even before kindergarten. The work we are doing in our cradle-to-career infrastructures is making real progress in this area.

And as students enter high school and get closer to college age we know that there are strategies that can help them get a strong foothold toward college access.

EARLY ADVISEMENT

In my conversations with students, so many of them say that enhanced advisement early on, early in high school, would make a difference to their success in college.

We know that guidance counselors are stretched thin, in some cases just one counselor for five, six, or seven hundred students. We know that many school districts don’t have the resources to target college advisement to every student.

But what if SUNY partnered with these districts to reach the students who need it most, and reach them early? There needs to be a SUNY college advisor in every school district in the state, starting with low-income districts. Expert advisors who can partner with guidance counselors to bridge the gaps so everyone has the information they need to set goals, explore options, and make plans.

This will require investment, yes. It can’t happen for free. So be ready, all our partners out there. I’m going to be knocking on your door in 2015.
EARLY ENGAGEMENT

In order to provide our students with better access, we also need to have an open dialogue with them—a two-way discussion to help them prepare for college and for us to better understand what they need when they arrive on our campuses.

So how can we reach every 10th, 11th, and 12th grader across New York who are our potential applicants, to ensure they’re ready?

One way is through a Massive Open Online Course. This introductory SUNY MOOC will be specifically designed to help students complete college admissions requirements, build career skills, seek grants and scholarships, and understand financing.

The beauty of the MOOC model is that it will provide equal and open access to all prospective students and their parents. SUNY’s MOOC will be the first of its kind anywhere because it speaks to every aspect of college readiness. It will be fully comprehensive and easy to use.

Another thing that New York absolutely needs to do is create a fully electronic high school transcript to be used in every one of the state’s 698 school districts. SUNY enrolls about 75,000 new high school graduates every year. Applicants’ transcripts come to us in all shapes and sizes and in hard copy.

We are advocating for the development of a standardized electronic transcript so our campuses can identify applicants’ academic strengths and determine what supports our new admits might need. New York needs to do this. It cannot wait. And SUNY’s going to push hard on this.

A third strategy is to expand our Educational Opportunity Program.

SUNY’s EOP, in place at 43 of our campuses, provides access, academic support, and financial aid to at-risk students.

Without question, this is a program that works. We have the numbers. But every year, at current scale, 30,000 people apply for just 2,500 seats. We need to expand this fantastic program that we know works! But like everything else, it costs money. So show me the love, New York, and help us build out this program.

The need for these strategic interventions brings us to another of our ACCESS goals:

DIVERSITY

How can we achieve a higher degree of diversity in our system?

There are established links between richer diversity and better innovation and performance in any institution, whether it’s a college or a corporate board. We know that the more diverse our system is, the better we will deliver.

In 2014 we assembled a Diversity Task Force made up of faculty and staff from across the system to guide SUNY’s efforts to increase diversity.

The Task Force’s job is to explore and recommend policies that can drive this work systemwide.

And we know we have a lot of work to do on this front, and that the gap is even wider among our employees and leadership than it is among our student body.

We are committed to addressing these discrepancies. But we need to do more than better here; we need to double down. At the recommendation of the Task Force, I am announcing today that every SUNY campus will appoint a Chief Diversity Officer. And let me be clear; this is an appointment above and beyond staff who do mandatory reporting. This is a member of the campus leadership team who will work hand in glove with Task Force members to ensure we achieve our goals in recruitment, retention, completion, and success for every member of the SUNY family.

That. Is. ACCESS.
A Higher Degree of COMPLETION

Now what do we need to achieve a higher degree of COMPLETION?

There are many strategies we can bring to scale that we know increase completion.

REMEDIFICATION

One is to introduce, systemwide, remediation that is proven effective.

Too many students realize after they get to college that they can’t do college-level math. They have to take remedial classes that don’t earn credit.

And students drop out because of this. They feel like they’re spinning their wheels and getting nowhere. It’s not only discouraging, it’s expensive.

Right now about 60 to 80 percent of community college students in the U.S. have to take 3 to 5 remedial math courses. Only about 30 percent of them will complete that sequence.

But there are two tools that we know speed and improve remediation: Quantway and Statway.

These are teaching strategies that support student success in math and earn credit. Statway is showing triple the success rate in half the time. Quantway is yielding double the success rate in half the time.

Right now, ten of our community colleges already use or are beginning to implement these strategies and can vouch for its promise in getting students’ math competency up.

Why not make these pathways available to every SUNY student who needs it?

Our plan is to implement Statway and Quantway across all 30 of our community colleges in three years. From there, we will introduce these pathways at our four-year schools. This is a surefire way to empower thousands of SUNY students to complete.

Finish in Four

Finish is Four agreements are another completion driver.

Four of our schools—the University at Buffalo, Oswego, Fredonia, and Potsdam—have guarantees like these. The deal is, students, if the course you need isn’t ready when you are, that’s on us. SUNY picks up the tab. But students have to do their part—prioritize their schoolwork, enroll full-time, and participate in regular advising.

This is the kind of program we need to take to scale. So starting today, we will work to ensure that Finish in Four programs are available to all students, systemwide.

And for those students who go beyond the four? Who work toward graduate degrees? If they’re putting in the time and laying down the cash, they need to finish.

Through a program of student support, mentoring, and professional development, doctoral students at Stony Brook complete their degrees, on average, in about four and a half years—nearly a full year faster than the SUNY median and three years faster than the national median. This is a best practice. We need to work collectively to ensure that all SUNY campuses are supporting their graduate students the way Stony Brook does.

Average Time to Degree for Graduate Students
Another place where we need to expand ourselves is in online learning.

Last year we launched Open SUNY with 6 programs from 6 partner campuses. Today we offer 64 programs through 19 of our schools.

Open SUNY is accessible to every single one of our 460,000 students and is a powerful tool that helps students complete faster, cutting down on costs and debt.

But we need to do more. We need to go bigger. We need to be sure that our online courses and supports are the absolute highest quality. We need investment in quality assurance. We need investment to continue our 24-7 online help desk. We need investment to expand course offerings and partner institutions and best practices. We need New York's investment.

That is. COMPLETION.

A Higher Degree of Success

Now from here, with the most effective ACCESS and COMPLETION strategies in place, how will we create a higher degree of SUCCESS?

MASTER INNOVATORS

Our students have told us that research experiences have opened their eyes to new areas of interest, new skills, and new possibilities. We need to expand opportunities for our students and invest in the ability of our campuses to make research gains.

Currently, out of the entire SUNY faculty base, there are about 100 research-intensive professors who together drive more than $500 million in sponsored research for SUNY each year. SUNY's research success relies on this relatively small number of rainmakers.

We need to support the work of our highest performing researchers and innovators. We need to empower them to do more of their best work. SUNY's Master Innovator Program will recruit and retain high-impact faculty to enrich our academic programs and catalyze our economic development efforts across the state.

Governor Cuomo picked up on our idea for this program with his Master Researchers proposal included in his State of the Opportunity Agenda. There is no funding tied to it just yet, but we can't overstate the potential impact of investing in our faculty.

We estimate that recruiting more faculty superstars sees a return of up to forty times the investment. For example, a $50 million investment in innovation upstate would yield $2 billion annually over the next decade, and bring tens of thousands of jobs to the state.
SUNY WORKS

Last year, I committed to providing an applied learning experience to 100 percent of our graduates, and Governor Cuomo heard the call. Because applied learning has proven so effective and important in student success, this year, we unequivocally support legislation that will mandate applied learning as a graduation requirement for every SUNY student.

While we may be accustomed to big, hairy, audacious goals here at SUNY—or at least during my five years you’re used to hearing about them—now we have business partners knocking down our door to help us meet this commitment. Groups like the Business Higher Education Forum, the Rochester Business Alliance, the Partnership for NYC, and the New York State Business Council.

This program, called SUNY Works, has been generously supported by nearly $1.5 million in investment from the Lumina Foundation, as well as the Carnegie Corporation of New York. But we need to do more.

By expanding SUNY Works, we will be able to help students get the most out of their education and bridge the gap from college to career. Truly, this is a win-win. It’s not just great for students, it’s great for business, too. Co-op gives our business partners the opportunity to train and recruit top talent...sort of like a semester-long job interview.

The opportunity is clear: scaling up efforts by businesses and SUNY to build a reliable pipeline of educated workers meets the demands of our economy and keeps our graduates right here, to live and work in New York.

That. Is. SUCCESS.

WHAT SHOULD WE INVEST IN?

INVESTMENT FUND

So we’ve been at this a while, and this is where we need everyone to really listen. Here is our ask—based on our shared understanding that the success of our students translates to the success of our state.

Higher degrees of ACCESS, COMPLETION, and SUCCESS require a higher degree of INVESTMENT. We cannot make futuristic changes on yesterday’s dollar. Each of these strategies requires shared investment for shared success.

So that’s what we’re going to do. New York. Together, we will establish an Investment Fund that will deliver these strategies and bring solutions to scale.

The $18 million commitment announced by the Governor is only the beginning. But I assure you, we’ll be asking the Legislature for more. We will be asking all of our partners, public and private, for more. Be ready, because this is what New York needs. We need to continue to build upon our success and make bigger investments in what works.

Governor Cuomo said the State’s investment in SUNY needs to be based on metrics. That’s the condition—that any strategies New York invests in must be provable and measurable. We could not agree more. We’re already there. Governor, we’re ready!
SUNY EXCELS

This year we created SUNY Excels. This is our performance system. And like our strategic plan, it was created with the deepest and widest possible input. We have identified the most important indicators of our success and the metrics with which we’ll measure them.

SUNY Excels will steer our commitment to excellence. We will excel in our service to students, in the development of our faculty and staff, and in our support of New York State.

We will prove at every turn that the State can have confidence in its investments in SUNY. We will track our progress and have an ever-clearer picture of where investment is needed and best spent.

So, with a comprehensive and inclusive investment plan, SUNY can take completion to scale for New York. We’ve run the numbers and calculated the yield.

Scaling interventions that work, SUNY will grow its annual cohort of graduates from the current annual rate of 93,000 to an ambitious target of 150,000 graduates every year by 2020.

Only then can we get that 45 percent attainment rate up, get to that 60 percent, pass it, close that gap. This is what we need to do.

So the English major in me wants to make one slight edit to David Leonhardt’s brilliant words.

Because education is not a bet. A SUNY education, surely, is not a bet. It is an investment.

It is the best investment that we can make. That New York can make. An investment in the promise of every person to ensure that no one is missing out on a better life because of chance.

This is New York’s story, is it not? Inclusion and expansiveness. Innovation and exceptionalism. This is who we are and what we do best.
Our state’s late, great leader, the incomparable Governor Mario Cuomo, once said:

"We must get the public to look past the glitter, beyond the showmanship, to the reality, the hard substance of things."

This is the hard substance of things. The reality that we cannot meet the demands of the world’s economy, the modern workforce, or the needs of our citizenry, on a dime.

Mario M. Cuomo
The reality is that access to higher education for every New Yorker is a necessity. The reality is that for better student outcomes, we need better and smarter investment. And that’s on all of us. It takes muscle to lift that line, and the muscle is the investment we must put into bringing these solutions to scale.

This is not easy stuff. We’ve got to want it bad.

Our entire aim is to get this right—to make the promise and keep the promise that when you earn a degree at The State University of New York, the return on your investment is second to none.

This is our business. This is our responsibility.

This is what it takes to reach that higher degree of ACCESS—a higher degree of COMPLETION—a higher degree of SUCCESS.

This is what it takes to become the best at getting better, at delivering for every student, and every community in the great state of New York.

We are New York. We need to be a leader among states. And this—the education of our citizenry—is a task that we take seriously above all else. Being the nation’s leader in the creation of a seamless education pipeline—for every one of us—this is the task we have set ourselves to master. Together we can be the first state in the nation to make this kind of investment.

Education—educating more New Yorkers and educating them better—is simply the best investment we can make. And at SUNY we are bound and determined—we will not stop—until we deliver on all of our promises to New York. We will not stop until we are simply the best.