

## Private colleges take issue with state budget agreement

By KESHIA CLUKEY

ALBANY — The state budget's inclusion of \$19 million in enhanced college tuition assistance has not eased concerns among independent and nonprofit colleges that they will lose students to state schools thanks to Gov. Andrew Cuomo's "Excelsior Scholarship" initiative.

"We continue to be gravely concerned, as we were right from the start," said Mary Beth Labate, president of the Commission on Independent Colleges and Universities, which represents more than 100 private and nonprofit schools. "Students are not being treated equally."

The Excelsior Scholarship program, which Cuomo proposed with great fanfare earlier this year, means that qualified students will be able to attend two- and four-year SUNY and CUNY schools tuition-free. When the program is fully rolled out in 2019, students from families earning \$125,000 a year or less will qualify for the program. The last dollar program, coming after state tuition assistance and federal aid, does not include board, fees and books.

High school seniors have to decide what school they'll attend next year "literally any day now," so the timing of budget decision could present complications, Labate told POLITICO New York. She added that it's critical that students and families have as much information as possible about finances as they make their decisions.

The "Enhanced TAP" program would provide up to \$3,000 in tuition assistance for students attending private, nonprofit institutions who come from

households earning \$100,000 annually starting in fall 2017, then \$110,000 in 2018-19 and \$125,000 in 2019-20.

With the public discussion focused on the idea of "free tuition," the worry is that students will choose public schools over the privates, resulting in enrollment declines and potential economic impacts on local communities, she said. "We were hoping that families will read the fine print in the state's Excelsior program because I think you'll see it's not as free as one would suggest."

The state's for-profit colleges are not eligible for the Enhanced TAP program, which the Association of Proprietary Colleges president Donna Gurnett says is "short sighted," and, along with the scholarship, could have adverse affects.

"We're extremely disappointed," she said. "This is the first time in over 30 years that our students have been singled out and not able to participate in a state program like this based on where they attend." The association has 14 member colleges.

The scholarship plan and Enhanced TAP are similar in requirements. Both phase in household eligibility, require students to take at least 12 credits per semester and earn 30 credits each year, and require students to maintain a GPA necessary to graduate on-time. The students must also agree to work in the state for the same number of years as they receive the aid. The awards would be converted into student

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loans for those who do not meet the requirements, although there are some exceptions that allow for deferment.

The Enhanced TAP also requires nonprofit schools to freeze their tuition level for those students, and match the award amount provided by the state. The matching sum must come after institutional aid is awarded.

The institutions may choose not to participate in the program. If they opt out, their students would still be eligible for traditional state tuition assistance (TAP), but not the additional Enhanced TAP aid.

"Unfortunately this was a great opportunity for them to look at that and make some changes that could benefit all students in New York State," APC's Gurnett said. "But again, they chose to go this other route."

She continued, saying, "We'll really have to wait and see how that all plays out."

**Please Note:** The information contained in this news clipping is excerpted from the Politico NY (April 10, 2017). You can access the complete article at: <https://www.politicopro.com/states/new-york/albany/story/2017/04/private-schools-take-issue-with-state-budget-agreement-111144>