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## Wisdom on TAP

Senate Republicans are right to seek more funds for the state Tuition Assistance Program

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So here it is, the season for debating the governor's state budget proposal, and no one is talking about messing with an invaluable program to help poor and middle-class kids pay for college. For a very welcome change, there's a push to increase funding for the Tuition Assistance Plan.

The Republicans in the state Senate want to make more people eligible for TAP and to increase the amount of money available to them. That's very encouraging news.

Only a few years ago, this time of year meant fighting just to keep TAP eligibility and funding where they were. More than once, then-Gov. George Pataki had a provision in his budget proposal that would have required TAP recipients to wait until after they had graduated to get the final third of their grants. Delaying such payments, or even proposing to do so, amounted to betting on less affluent, and often rather poor, college students to fail.

The Senate Republicans' plan, by welcome contrast, bets on them to succeed -- and, ideally, for the state and its work force to be among the beneficiaries of that success.

Their proposal calls for an overdue increase in the maximum taxable household income for TAP recipients, from \$80,000 to \$100,000, and from \$10,000 to \$12,500 for nondependent students. The minimum TAP award for families with dependent students, under the Senate Republicans' plan, would be increased from \$500 to \$1,000.

TAP helps students attending both public and private colleges in New York. Improving it would help encourage graduates to stay in the state. The Senate Republicans want to give \$1,000-a-year grants to students majoring in math, science or engineering technology if they promise to remain in New York after graduation. They've also proposed more tuition aid for math and science students who agree to not only stay in New York but to teach here for five years.

Much, perhaps too much, has been said about how the state has changed under its new government. But seeing the kids who need TAP to get through college as a genuine asset, rather than an easy constituency to exploit politically or a cheap way to keep the state budget down, is so refreshing. It's hard to imagine Governor Spitzer or the rest of the Legislature in any sort of disagreement.

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