

**Remarks by James B. Milliken
Chancellor, The City University of New York
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Thank you and thanks to City & State for organizing this day to address critical issues in education in New York.

We are, of course, at the start of a new school year, when there is a sense of new beginnings and optimism in the air. As we see demonstrated on our campuses every day, higher education means possibility, hurdles overcome, personal battles won, sights set high, achievement.

Think especially of what those things mean in a CUNY context. The average age of our undergraduates is 24. Just getting to a CUNY campus has been, for some, a hard fought success, a badge of courage. Forty percent are the first in their families to attend college. Roughly 40 percent are foreign born and more than 50 percent come from households that report annual incomes of \$30,000 or less.

Our mission at CUNY, our cause, has always been opening the doors to opportunity and we have always done a pretty good job at it, but achieving that goal today is more challenging than ever. Educational institutions must adapt to the new challenges of the 21st century, to changing requirements for our students, to new funding stresses. What we did in the past simply is not good enough as we confront the demands and challenges of an increasingly competitive, globalized, knowledge economy. I'm happy to say that through the work of our Board of Trustees, our college leadership, and our talented faculty and staff, CUNY is being transformed to best prepare our students for that future.

There has never been a time when higher education has been more important. For individuals, it often means the difference between being well employed and under or unemployed. According to one estimate, within three years two-thirds of all jobs will require a college degree – not to vault ahead, just to get started. Currently, college graduates earn, on average, about \$1M more in lifetime earnings than a high school graduate, and that gap is likely to grow. More and

more, the most promising careers require analytical, communications and technological skills that come with a good college degree. We know that the benefits of those careers include stronger families, better health, longer lifespans and, on a civic level, more prosperous communities, more competitive economies.

We're not the only ones to figure this out. Across the globe, countries want to share in the success the U.S. has enjoyed in recent decades, in large part because of higher levels of educational attainment. And while we may not be declining in attainment levels, we are losing ground. When my generation graduated from college, the U.S. had the highest educational attainment in the world. Now we're not in the top 15. Other countries are out competing us, so if you're a family interested in individual economic opportunity or a policy maker focused on regional and national competitiveness, we have work to do.

CUNY has served its city and students quite well as measured by economic and social mobility. If you haven't yet read about it, I recommend you get acquainted with a remarkable study first released early this year on college and

intergenerational mobility by a group of respected economists led by Raj Chetty of Stanford. They analyzed income data for more than 30 million college students and their families and ranked every college in the country based on accessibility to lower income students and how well the graduates were able to advance up the income ladder. As summarized in a column in The New York Times, CUNY propelled nearly six times the number of students from lower income levels to the middle class and beyond as all the Ivy League-plus schools combined. CUNY colleges held 6 of the top 10 mobility rankings among all colleges. I should add that some SUNY colleges ranked very high – Stony Brook, for instance, ranked third in the country.

I think we would all agree that talent is distributed evenly across demographic groups and income levels. Unfortunately, opportunity is not. Whether its preparation for college, access to the best schools, getting a college degree, or launching a great career, success is all too often still stubbornly correlated with wealth.

According to Chetty's study, Ivy-plus colleges drew almost 15 percent of their students from the top 1 percent of income earners in the country, and fewer students from the entire lower 50 percent of income earners. Another study found that among students who earned bachelor's degrees by age 24 in 2014, over half came from the top 25 percent of family income and just 10 percent from the bottom quartile of income. These vast opportunity gaps are not just startling; they are wholly unacceptable in a country that claims to cherish equality of opportunity.

The difference maker for hundreds of thousands in New York City is CUNY; but it must do more. Much more. Too many students require remediation before college and it is often delivered poorly, too many students are allowed to fail or take way too long to graduate, and too many students don't have the knowledge or skills to land great jobs. CUNY and other universities need to bridge this gap with better strategies. With faculty, students and administrative leaders across CUNY, we spent the better part of a year developing our response to the challenges we face. We call it "Connected CUNY", underscoring the

recognition that we cannot climb this mountain alone; our programs and initiatives require a great deal more collaboration, communication and partnering than in the past--among CUNY's network of colleges, between the university and other academic and research institutions around the world, with state and city government agencies, major industries and other employers, and especially with the DOE. To remain an engine of mobility on a scale that can really make a difference in this restless giant of a city we live in, we have to change.

Here is our plan.

First, access, a fundamental value at CUNY for 170 years, is being widened considerably. We already have numerous programs to help prepare thousands of New York's high school students for college—including over 25,000 students in public schools taking college credit—but under our new strategic framework we are scaling up programs in partnership with the DOE and broadening their reach so more students learn about CUNY's opportunities and nurture the skills needed to succeed in college. We are implementing major reforms in our developmental programs so that fewer enter remediation and for those who do,

progress will be quicker and more certain. We are embarking on exciting plans to extend CUNY's reach considerably through more effective use of technology. For one reason, there are 800,000 people in New York City alone who have some college credit but no degree. We have to develop pathways for them to reenter college and succeed in college. And, of course, the Governor's Excelsior free tuition program is removing some financial barriers and giving thousands more middle class students the means to attend college.

Second, we are expanding and instituting programs to significantly increase CUNY's graduation rates. CUNY's colleges are embracing a new "culture of completion" and our students will be the beneficiaries. We are building on years of evidence and thoughtful analysis and providing even greater support so our students stay on track to graduate with valuable diplomas in a timely way. I have committed to **doubling** our community college graduation rates within just a few years. Double them. Our revolutionary ASAP program had about 4000 students three years ago, and we are scaling it up to 25,000 students next fall, including full ASAP implementation at one college. I was tired of hearing that it's a nice program but it can't possibly scale. We are going to prove the

naysayers wrong and New York will lead all cities in the country in community college graduation. Other states, anxious for improvement and recognizing the benefits of CUNY's innovation, have asked for our advice in building their own programs. We also are working on plans—now in the pilot stage—to implement and scale up analogous programs at our senior colleges.

Third, we are implementing a major expansion of our programs for giving graduates more workplace experience through internships and other experiential learning initiatives, and we will work closely with leaders in key sectors in the economy to build into our curriculum courses that give CUNY students the specific qualities and skills employers are seeking. Taken together, these efforts will give our graduates the skills, experiences, professional networks, resumes and the confidence they need to excel in careers in industries such as finance, health care, information technology, and the arts. In one case, we are focusing on the long overdue effort to attract and equip more women to succeed in IT through partnerships with Cornell Tech, Verizon, IBM and Revature.

The Connected CUNY strategic framework is a roadmap not just for how CUNY can fulfill its mission better for all New Yorkers but I believe offers broader guidance for higher education leaders as they design strategies for addressing our country's needs in the future. And, that in addition to our traditional sources of support we can significantly increase the role of private support for CUNY from foundations and individuals who recognize CUNY's enormous reach and potential and share our vision and goals. I am convinced that if you want to invest in the future of New York City, there is no better investment than CUNY.

Our graduates deliver immense returns from the investment made in them, from Nobel Prizes (13) to Rhodes, Marshall and Truman Scholarships, more MacArthur Genius Awards than any public university other than Berkeley. Mainly, they are the lifeblood, energy and engine of New York City. Our faculty are engaged in ground-breaking initiatives in areas ranging from sustainable energy, prison reform and HIV prevention to immigrant rights and early childhood education. And, for a former English major, I'm especially proud that 2 of the last 3 Pulitzer prizes in poetry went to CUNY Scholars. In short, CUNY students and faculty deliver the leadership, the creativity and the drive that make

New York New York. Our job and our commitment is to offer access, opportunity and success to many more New Yorkers. I believe we have the right plan to do that and we're well on our way to executing it.

Thank you.