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**The Council of the City of New York**

Committee Report of the Human Services Division

Andrea Vazquez*, Legislative Director*

**Committee on Higher Education**

Hon. Eric Dinowitz, Chair

February 25, 2022

**Oversight: CUNY Start and Development Education**

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| **Res. No. 20** | By Council Members Brannan, Dinowitz, Mealy, Restler, Farías, Marte, Avilés, Joseph, Louis, Williams, Brewer, Narcisse, Feliz, Menin, Nurse, Ossé, Powers, Riley, Ung, Cabán, Hanif, Hudson, Sanchez, Abreu, Rivera, Gutiérrez, Krishnan, Barron, De La Rosa, Velázquez, and Won |
| **Title:** | Resolution calling upon the New York State Legislature to pass, and the Governor to sign, The New Deal for CUNY (S.4461-A/A.5843-A), which is intended to reestablish the City University of New York as an engine for social and economic mobility by waiving all tuition and creating certain staff-to-student ratios in order to increase student success. |

1. **Introduction**

On February 25, 2022, the Committee on Higher Education, chaired by Council Member Eric Dinowitz, will hold an oversight hearing on *CUNY Start and Developmental Education*. Additionally, the Committee will hear Res. No. 20, a Resolution calling upon the New York State Legislature to pass, and the Governor to sign, The New Deal for CUNY (S.4461-A/A.5843-A), which is intended to reestablish the City University of New York as an engine for social and economic mobility by waiving all tuition and creating certain staff-to-student ratios in order to increase student success. Witnesses invited to testify include representatives from the City University of New York (“CUNY” or “University”) Administration, the University Faculty Senate, the University Student Senate, the Professional Staff Congress at CUNY (PSC/CUNY), higher education and student advocacy groups and organizations, and other interested stakeholders.

1. **Background**

***Overview of the CUNY System***

CUNY was established in 1961 pursuant to New York State legislation that united seven existing municipal colleges and a graduate school into a formally integrated citywide system of public higher education.[[1]](#footnote-1) Today, CUNY is the largest urban public university in the United States (U.S.), with approximately 7,000 full-time faculty and 11,300 part-time faculty providing higher education to more than 261,000 degree and non-degree seeking students and offering adult and continuing education with over 185,000 course registrations at 25 colleges across the City’s five boroughs.[[2]](#footnote-2) With more than 1,900 academic programs,[[3]](#footnote-3) 200 majors leading to associate and baccalaureate degrees,[[4]](#footnote-4) and nearly 700 graduate degree programs,[[5]](#footnote-5) CUNY offers learning opportunities at every level, from certificate courses to Ph.D. programs, in a system that now comprises seven community colleges, 11 senior colleges, the Macaulay Honors College, five graduate and professional schools, and an assortment of research centers, institutes and consortia.[[6]](#footnote-6)

CUNY operates pursuant to a legislative mission that underscores its importance as a “vehicle for the upward mobility of the disadvantaged in the city of New York.”[[7]](#footnote-7) The legislature tasked the University to “maintain and expand its commitment to academic excellence and the provision of equal access and opportunity” for faculty, staff, and students of all backgrounds. Community colleges are integral to this mission as their open admissions policies and relative affordability provide an important pathway into higher education for historically underrepresented populations.[[8]](#footnote-8) At CUNY community colleges, 39 percent of students have household incomes below $20,000 and more than 65 percent are first-generation college students.[[9]](#footnote-9)

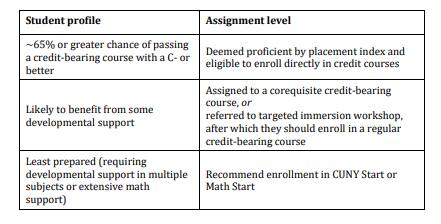
1. **Developmental Education at CUNY**

Unfortunately, many students who enter community college are deemed unprepared for college-level coursework.[[10]](#footnote-10) CUNY is no exception to this rule—approximately 65 percent of associate-degree seeking students arrive at CUNY underprepared for college-level work in at least one subject.[[11]](#footnote-11) Developmental education, also known as remediation, allows for students to reinforce the basic skills in reading, writing, and mathematics that are essential for college success.[[12]](#footnote-12)

Traditionally, remedial courses have been offered as standalone zero-credit courses that students were required to complete before enrolling in courses for credit.[[13]](#footnote-13) However, these traditional courses have unusually low pass rates.[[14]](#footnote-14) As a result, students may take multiple semesters to meet proficiency requirements traditional courses, which then leads to increased tuition costs and student attrition.[[15]](#footnote-15) Nationally, only 17 percent of students who enter college with assessed remedial needs go on to complete their degrees.[[16]](#footnote-16)

***Comprehensive Remediation Reform***

As a result of the poor student outcomes associated with traditional remediation, CUNY has committed itself to comprehensive remediation reform with the goal of eliminating traditional remedial courses by 2022.[[17]](#footnote-17) Pursuant to this objective, CUNY has revised its proficiency assessment methods and phased out standalone remedial courses in favor of corequisite courses where students receive additional mandatory non-credit instruction while enrolled in credit-bearing courses, and other targeted developmental programs.[[18]](#footnote-18) Compared to traditional remedial courses, corequisite support is focused on building the skills that are essential for the specific course.[[19]](#footnote-19) Corequisite courses can be offered in one-course or two-course models.[[20]](#footnote-20) The two-course model consists of a credit bearing course and non-credit remedial instruction, each graded separately and treated separately for tuition and financial aid purposes.[[21]](#footnote-21) The remedial portion is designed to supplement the credit bearing course “just in time.” The linked courses may be taught by the same instructor or by two different instructors.[[22]](#footnote-22) Under the one-course corequisite model, credit-bearing and remedial non-credit bearing instruction are combined into one developmental course.[[23]](#footnote-23) These courses include additional contact hours for remedial instruction which offers supplemental “just in time” support tailored specifically to the credit-bearing course material.[[24]](#footnote-24)

As part of its remediation reform efforts CUNY has also revised its remedial assessment and assignment process.[[25]](#footnote-25) As of fall 2019, CUNY no longer uses the CUNY placement exam to assess student proficiency and assign developmental course placement.[[26]](#footnote-26) Instead, students are evaluated by a proficiency index that combines their high school grade point average, SAT, and Regent scores, to determine whether the student has a reasonably high chance of passing a credit-bearing course without any additional support.[[27]](#footnote-27) However, due to the pandemic, CUNY will not use SAT or ACT to determine proficiency through the Spring 2023 admissions cycle.[[28]](#footnote-28) The chart below outlines student placement according to their proficiency index profile.

**Figure Source: CUNY Memorandum on Remedial Assignment Practices[[29]](#footnote-29)**

The students deemed to be least prepared, requiring developmental support in multiple subjects or extensive math support, are recommended to enroll in CUNY Start or Math Start.[[30]](#footnote-30)

1. **CUNY Start and Math Start**

***Program Overview***

CUNY Start and its math instruction corollary—Math Start help associate-degree seeking students meet CUNY’s proficiency standards by providing intensive instruction in reading, writing, and math prior to matriculation.[[31]](#footnote-31) The programs are also notable for their low cost, which enable students to save tuition and financial aid for credit-bearing courses.[[32]](#footnote-32) Participants pay only $75 for semester-long programs and $35 for the shorter cycles offered through Math Start.[[33]](#footnote-33)

CUNY Start was launched in 2009 as a pilot program at LaGuardia and Kingsborough Community College initially targeting only High School Equivalency diploma recipients.[[34]](#footnote-34) It has since expanded to include students entering CUNY who are assessed as having significant remedial need in reading, writing, and/or math.[[35]](#footnote-35) CUNY Start now operates on eight[[36]](#footnote-36) CUNY campuses and Math Start is available on nine.[[37]](#footnote-37) The programs’ objectives are to reduce or eliminate student’s remedial needs prior to taking credit-bearing courses, prepare students for college-level work, and improve their academic outcomes upon matriculation.[[38]](#footnote-38)

CUNY Start and Math Start participants must meet the following eligibility requirements:

* Earned a high school or high school equivalency diploma;
* Completed all CUNY admissions requirements and admitted to a campus that offers the CUNY Start or Math Start program;
* Required to take an English and/or math intervention; and
* Able to commit to the academic schedule and to actively participate in classes.[[39]](#footnote-39)

While both CUNY Start and Math Start enable students to increase their academic proficiency before taking credit-bearing courses, CUNY Start is unique in that it requires students to defer matriculation for one semester.[[40]](#footnote-40) During each semester, CUNY Start offers a full-time schedule where classes meet 25 hours a week for both academic math, reading, and writing instruction, and a part-time schedule where classes meet 12 hours a week for either academic math *or* reading and writing.[[41]](#footnote-41) Math Start focuses exclusively on math proficiency and is offered in semester-long eight to ten week cycles or an intensive summer program.[[42]](#footnote-42) In addition to academic instruction, students enrolled in CUNY Start or Math Start attend weekly college success seminars led by their program advisors.[[43]](#footnote-43) CUNY Start and Math Start advisors work with students individually and in the weekly seminars to develop and implement an individualized plan to “survive and thrive” their first year of college.[[44]](#footnote-44)

Both CUNY Start and Math Starts offer students two opportunities to demonstrate proficiency.[[45]](#footnote-45) During CUNY Start, students receive 12 weeks of instruction, followed by a proficiency assessment, and an additional three to six weeks of developmental instruction based on their remaining assessed needs.[[46]](#footnote-46) Similarly, Math Start offers six to eight weeks of core instruction, followed by an assessment, and an additional two weeks of instruction based on the student’s assessed remaining needs.[[47]](#footnote-47)

Both programs employ a student-centered instruction approach, provided by specially trained teachers and advisors, and specifically designed curriculums.[[48]](#footnote-48) Unlike traditional remedial classes, which rely more on lectures, CUNY Start’s math instructional approach promotes student discussion, real-world learning, and building of academic skills such as note-taking and studying.[[49]](#footnote-49) The program’s instructional approach to reading and writing integrates both subject into one class and aims to teach students the habits and techniques of proficient readers and writers.[[50]](#footnote-50) Students who successfully complete the program and meet CUNY’s proficiency standards may enroll in credit-bearing courses.[[51]](#footnote-51) Students who complete the program, but do not gain proficiency, are allowed to matriculate and enroll in either the highest-level remedial course or a corequisite remedial course.[[52]](#footnote-52)

***Program Highlights and Benefits***

Since its launch, CUNY Start has served over 22,000 students and enrolls more than 3,000 students annually.[[53]](#footnote-53) According to CUNY’s initial program assessments, compared to similar students who did not enroll in the program, CUNY Starts students were more likely to achieve proficiency in basic reading, writing, and math skills and more likely to pass gateway math and English courses in their first year post-program.[[54]](#footnote-54) Another CUNY study compared a sample of CUNY Start students from the Fall 2014 to Spring 2018 cohorts with non-CUNY Start students who opted to address their remedial needs while also taking credit-bearing courses, and found that CUNY Start students had a higher semester-to-semester retention rate.[[55]](#footnote-55) The study also showed that due to deferred matriculation, CUNY start participants often trail their counterparts in credit accrual in early semesters.[[56]](#footnote-56) However, this gap appears to diminish with time and becomes negligible when associate degree attainment is within reach.[[57]](#footnote-57) Finally, the study also finds that CUNY Start students earn their associate degrees at slightly higher rates than their non-CUNY Start peers.[[58]](#footnote-58)

The CUNY Start and Math Start regularly reported program data provide further evidence of both programs’ efficacy. In Spring 2021, 80 percent of the 962 students enrolled in CUNY Start completed the program and 60 percent enrolled in CUNY the following semester.[[59]](#footnote-59) During that same time, 85 percent of the 518 students enrolled in Math Start completed the program, 76 percent become college ready in math, and 66 percent enrolled in CUNY.[[60]](#footnote-60)

1. **Conclusion**

At this hearing, the Committee will seek an overview of CUNY’s developmental education programs, including CUNY Start. The Committee is interested in learning about current status of CUNY Start, including enrollment and staffing, as well as an understanding metrics used to determine its efficacy over the years. The Committee is also interested in learning about plans for the future of CUNY Start and Math Start, more specifically, how the future of developmental education programming at CUNY will better serve students and their academic as well as financial needs.

Res. No. 20

..Title

Resolution calling upon the New York State Legislature to pass, and the Governor to sign, The New Deal for CUNY (S.4461-A/A.5843-A), which is intended to reestablish the City University of New York as an engine for social and economic mobility by waiving all tuition and creating certain staff-to-student ratios in order to increase student success.

..Body

By Council Members Brannan, Dinowitz, Mealy, Restler, Farías, Marte, Avilés, Joseph, Louis, Williams, Brewer, Narcisse, Feliz, Menin, Nurse, Ossé, Powers, Riley, Ung, Cabán, Hanif, Hudson, Sanchez, Abreu, Rivera, Gutiérrez, Krishnan, Barron, De La Rosa, Velázquez, and Won

Whereas, The City University of New York (“CUNY” or “University”) was established in 1961 through legislation that united seven existing municipal colleges and a graduate school into a formally integrated citywide system of public higher education; and

Whereas, Currently, CUNY is the largest urban public university in the United States (U.S.) serving more than 275,000 degree and non-degree seeking students, including over 228,000 adult and continuing education course registrations across New York City (“NYC” or “City”); and

Whereas, While only 61 years old, the University’s history dates back to 1847, when the Free Academy, now the City College of New York, was founded as the first publicly-financed institution of higher education in NYC; and

Whereas, Founded on the principles on which the Free Academy was established, CUNY’s mission today remains the same: to uphold a commitment to academic excellence while providing equal access and opportunity for education “as a vehicle for the upward mobility of the disadvantaged in the [city]”; and

Whereas, CUNY schools also instituted a merit-based tuition-free policy that lasted until 1970, when the University eliminated all tuition charges and implemented an open admissions policy, guaranteeing all NYC public high school graduates admission to one of its colleges; and

Whereas, CUNY was only able to operate tuition-free until the financial crisis of 1976, when New York State (“NYS” or “State”) took over the administration of CUNY, to help the City avoid bankruptcy; and

Whereas, Since then, the State’s chronic underinvestment in the University has forced CUNY to cut academic offerings, reduce counseling and inhabit dilapidated buildings, all while increasing tuition; and

Whereas, The actual cost of attending CUNY, which includes, but is not limited to, the cost of transportation, textbooks and student fees, combined with the high cost of living in NYC, means that many current students, who largely come from low- and modest-income families, would not have the opportunity to earn a college degree if it were not for state and federal financial aid; and

Whereas, While funding provided through the NYS Tuition Assistance Program (“TAP”) as well as various public and private scholarships can help to close the opportunity gap by subsidizing tuition, these programs have not been enough to fully counter the State’s austerity approach to funding public higher education; and

Whereas, CUNY is often the best option for a college education for poor and working class New Yorkers, for communities of color, for new immigrants and for the urban middle class, yet students are confronted with larger and larger classes increasingly taught by underpaid adjuncts, limited access to academic advisors and a single mental health counselor for every 2,700 full-time students; and

Whereas, The CUNY New Deal (S.4461-A/A.5843-A), sponsored by State Senator Andrew Gounardes and State Assembly Member Reyes, respectively, would waive all tuition and create certain staff-to-student ratios, including a ratio of one clinical health counselor per 1,000 students, 65 full-time faculty members per 1,000 students by academic year 2026, and one academic advisor per 600 students by academic year 2025, in order to increase student success; and

Whereas, The CUNY New Deal presents a comprehensive approach to improving the student experience at CUNY, providing the appropriate academic, social and emotional support students need to stay on track to graduate and providing the resources needed to renovate CUNY campuses while reducing the need for students to seek outside income to cover tuition and other expenses; now, therefore, be it

Resolved, That the Council of the City of New York calls upon the New York State Legislature to pass, and the Governor to sign, The New Deal for CUNY (S.4461-A/A.5843-A), which is intended to reestablish the City University of New York as an engine for social and economic mobility by waiving all tuition and creating certain staff-to-student ratios in order to increase student success.

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3. *Id.* [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. CUNY, *Academics* (n.d.), *available at* <https://www.cuny.edu/academics/>. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
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7. New York Education Law, § 6201, at 4. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
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9. *Id.* [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. Scrivener, Susan, Gupta, Himani et al, MDRC, *Becoming College Read: Early Findings from a CUNY Start Evaluation* (July 2018) *available at* <https://www.mdrc.org/sites/default/files/CUNY_START_Interim_Report_FINAL_0.pdf> [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. *See* *supra* note 8. [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. CUNY, *Developmental Education*, *available at* <https://www.cuny.edu/about/administration/offices/undergraduate-studies/developmental-education/>. [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
13. Kim, Jeanette et. Al. 2020. *CUNY Start: A Resource Guide for Reforming Developmental Education in the College Transition Space*, p.1 *available at* <http://www1.cuny.edu/sites/cunystart/wp-content/uploads/sites/51/2020/08/30080_CUNY_START_Resource_Guide_WEB_F20200813.pdf>; *see also,* CUNY, *Memorandum on Changes in CUNY’s Remedial Assignment Practices for Spring 2020 Admissions*, (Dec. 13, 2018) *available at* <https://www.cuny.edu/wp-content/uploads/sites/4/page-assets/about/administration/offices/undergraduate-studies/developmental-education/Changes-in-CUNY%E2%80%99s-Remedial-Assignment-Practices-for-Spring-2020-Admissions-12132018.pdf>. [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
14. *Supra* note 7. [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
15. *Id.* [↑](#footnote-ref-15)
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17. Kim, Jeanette et. Al. 2020. *CUNY Start: A Resource Guide for Reforming Developmental Education in the College Transition Space*, p.5 *available at* <http://www1.cuny.edu/sites/cunystart/wp-content/uploads/sites/51/2020/08/30080_CUNY_START_Resource_Guide_WEB_F20200813.pdf>. [↑](#footnote-ref-17)
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20. *Id.* [↑](#footnote-ref-20)
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23. *Id.* at 5. [↑](#footnote-ref-23)
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31. *See* CUNY*, CUNY Start, available at* <https://www1.cuny.edu/sites/cunystart/program/cuny-start/>; CUNY, *Math Start*, *available at* <http://www1.cuny.edu/sites/cunystart/program/math-start/>. [↑](#footnote-ref-31)
32. *Supra* note 8. [↑](#footnote-ref-32)
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36. CUNY*, CUNY Start, available at* <https://www1.cuny.edu/sites/cunystart/program/cuny-start/> (CUNY Start operates on the following 8 campuses: (1) Borough of Manhattan Community College, (2) Bronx Community College, (3) College of Staten Island, (4) Hostos Community College, (5) Kingsborough Community College, (6) LaGuardia Community College, (7) New York City College of Technology, (8) Queensborough Community College. [↑](#footnote-ref-36)
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38. *Supra* note 34 at 3. [↑](#footnote-ref-38)
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48. *Supra* note 45. [↑](#footnote-ref-48)
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58. *Id.*  [↑](#footnote-ref-58)
59. CUNY Start, *Enrollment Snapshot Spring 2021*, *available at* <https://www1.cuny.edu/sites/cunystart/wp-content/uploads/sites/51/2022/01/SP21_CUNYStart_EnrollmentSnapshot_2022119.pdf>. [↑](#footnote-ref-59)
60. Math Start, *Enrollment Snapshot Spring 2021*, *available at* <https://www1.cuny.edu/sites/cunystart/wp-content/uploads/sites/51/2022/01/SP21_MathStart_EnrollmentSnapshot_2022114.pdf>. [↑](#footnote-ref-60)