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Chancellor James Milliken Lays Out New Vision for CUNY

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Spelling out a new vision for the sprawling City University of New York, Chancellor James B. Milliken said Monday he wants to add full-time faculty and advisers, expand job internships for students and streamline administration.

Many elements of his plan seek to improve the institution's low graduation rates, a common problem at public colleges in urban areas where many students arrive unprepared.

"We need a culture of completion at CUNY where the norm is getting 30 credits a year," he said. He said this plan stems from about a year of conversations with CUNY leaders, faculty and outside experts, and will be refined by feedback. Skeptics said it would be hard to make headway without a massive influx of funding, thousands of additional faculty members and upgrades to buildings.

One of the largest public universities in the country, CUNY has 24 schools and colleges serving about 270,000 degree-seeking students. Many are low-income and immigrants.

By 2021, the chancellor aims to double the three-year graduation rate for students pursuing associate degrees, which is now about 18%. By 2024, he wants to raise by 10 percentage points the six-year graduation rate for bachelor's programs, now about 55%.

Mr. Milliken's goals are among many outlined in a "strategic framework" to help its students succeed in a tough global economy. The plan calls for easier transfers and more shared services among the CUNY sites, and a major expansion of a track known as ASAP, for Accelerated Study in Associate Programs. ASAP gives students extra advising, tutoring, books and smaller classes, and outside evaluations have found it boosted graduation rates.

While the program costs more per student, one independent study found it saves taxpayer money over time by increasing its graduates' lifetime earnings and reducing reliance on public assistance.

Barbara Bowen, president of the Professional Staff Congress, said her union asked to have a representative on the committee devising the strategic framework and didn't get a seat, but its members were interviewed.

She said the initiatives sounded worthwhile but no real progress can be made under the institution's "starvation budget," which by her count needs \$2 billion more yearly.

Stephen Brier, professor of urban education at the CUNY Graduate Center and co-author of "Austerity Blues: Fighting for the Soul of Public Higher Education," said he backed the ideas in the plan "but it's tinkering around the edges rather than confronting the fundamental problem, which is that CUNY has been underfunded for 25 years or longer."

The chancellor is expected to make his pitch for \$2.539 billion in state support in fiscal 2018 in Albany Tuesday at a legislative hearing.

Gov. Andrew Cuomo's proposed budget boosts state support to \$2.465 billion. His plan increases funding for CUNY senior colleges by \$30 million, proposes broader scholarships for middle-class families, and seeks to limit tuition hikes, among other changes.

The governor's plan for capital investments would include \$284 million for CUNY senior colleges and \$80 million for community colleges, and \$55 million for CUNY 2020 challenge grants.

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