



*The Commission on*  
**INDEPENDENT**  
*Colleges & Universities*  
*in New York*

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# Addressing New York's Teacher Workforce Shortage

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An Analysis of the New York State Masters-in-Education  
Teacher Incentive Scholarship Program

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## Overview

The Masters-in-Education Teacher Incentive Scholarship Program was established in April 2015 with the goal of addressing the critical need for qualified teachers in New York State's K-12 education system. Recipients of the scholarship must agree to live in New York and teach for five years at a public elementary or secondary school. In exchange, up to 500 recipients are awarded scholarships each year in an amount up to the annual tuition for a master's in education degree program at a New York State public college or university.

However, New York State continues to face ongoing challenges in ensuring a sufficient pool of qualified educators to meet the needs of its diverse student body. Teacher shortages, especially in high-demand areas, affect schools across the state.

One way to address this critical workforce shortage is to expand access to the Masters-in-Education Teacher Incentive Scholarship Program to all students, regardless of their school choice. Under current law, only students enrolled in one of the 33 public colleges and universities<sup>1</sup> offering educator preparation programs are eligible for this scholarship. This requirement excludes students from pursuing education at any of the 73 independent colleges and universities in New York which offer 1,210 registered programs in educator preparation, providing a diverse and robust range of specialties and areas of study. Many aspiring teachers choose to attend these private nonprofit colleges and universities, which confer 58 percent of the master's in education degrees in the state.

In excluding the majority of colleges offering education preparation programs from this scholarship program, the State is severely limiting its ability to address the teacher workforce shortage. According to the Higher Education Services Corporation (HESC), 126 full-time equivalent students (FTEs) at either SUNY or CUNY were enrolled in the Master's in Education Teacher Incentive Scholarship Program in academic year (AY) 2023-24. With 500 scholarships available each year, this amounts to approximately 75% of total available scholarship spots going unfilled. In HESC's Annual Report for 2024, it is reported that \$762,000 was awarded to scholarship-eligible students in 2023-24. With the current state allocation set at \$1.2 million, this leaves behind more than one-third of total funding dollars that could be used by deserving students enrolled in the independent sector and pursuing their Master's Degree in Education, which is also required by the State to achieve professional certification in the field.

To build on its efforts to develop a robust teacher workforce, New York State should expand access to the Masters-in-Education Teacher Incentive Scholarship Program to all students, thus increasing access to education preparation for prospective teachers and improving educational outcomes statewide. In February 2025, Assembly Higher Education Chair Alicia Hyndman and Senator Patricia Fahy reintroduced legislation

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<sup>1</sup> There are 16 SUNY campuses and 17 CUNY campuses which offer teacher education programs.

(S4909/A5685) to expand eligibility for the Masters-in-Education Teacher Incentive Scholarship Program to include students at independent colleges and universities.

### **Teacher Workforce Shortage in New York State**

New York State is facing a significant teacher shortage, with projections indicating a need for more than 180,000 new teachers over the next decade ([Governor Hochul, 2022](#)).

There are several root causes driving the teacher workforce shortage, with low wages being chief among them. Even accounting for the more generous benefits that teachers may receive (such as health insurance and retirement benefits), teachers earn significantly less on average than the majority of other highly educated workers ([Economic Policy Institute, 2022](#)). These low wages, compounded with job difficulty, contribute to declining interest in becoming a teacher. One national survey found that fewer than one in five Americans would encourage a young person to become a teacher, citing low wages, lack of resources, and a stressful work environment as major factors ([National Opinion Research Center, 2022](#)). As a result, enrollment in New York's teacher education programs has declined by 50.4% since 2009 ([Take a Look at Teaching](#)). Simultaneously, more than one-third of New York's teachers are eligible or will soon be eligible to retire ([New York State Teachers' Retirement System, 2024](#)).

When there aren't enough teachers to cover all of New York's classrooms, school districts are sometimes required to fill gaps with inexperienced teachers, placing the quality of a student's education at risk. According to the [New York State Education Department \(NYSED\)](#), 24% of teachers statewide are considered inexperienced and 9% of teachers are teaching out of their subject or field of certification. These gaps are wider for schools in high-poverty areas, where 38% of teachers are considered inexperienced and 21% of teachers are teaching outside of their subject or field of certification.

Much like the rest of the country, New York's teacher workforce is defined by a stark lack of diversity that does not reflect the increasing diversity of the student population. According to [NYSED](#), white teachers make up over 70% of the state's teaching workforce, while Black and Latino teachers account for just over 20%. By contrast, the state's student body is much more diverse, with Black and Latino students representing approximately 45% of the K-12 student population. In many urban districts, more than half of the student body is Hispanic or Black. Approximately 23% of New York's population is foreign-born, and a significant portion of students speak a language other than English at home ([U.S. Census Bureau, 2024](#)).

This disparity is especially pronounced in high-need areas, where the lack of diverse teachers may contribute to cultural disconnects and lower student engagement. Increasing the number of teachers who share similar backgrounds or have training in culturally responsive teaching can create a more inclusive and supportive learning

environment. Expanding access to financial aid programs, like the Masters-in-Education Teacher Incentive Scholarship, for students at more colleges and universities would help recruit and retain a talented pool of future educators. ([Desiree Carver-Thomas, 2018](#)).

## **Teacher Certification Requirements in New York State**

New York State requires that all teachers meet specific certification requirements to work in public schools. These requirements are designed to ensure that teachers are highly qualified and capable of delivering quality education to students. To obtain certification, teachers must:

1. Complete a Bachelor's Degree: Teachers must hold at least a bachelor's degree from an accredited institution.
2. Complete a Teacher Preparation Program: These programs include both coursework and supervised student teaching.
3. Pass State Exams: Teachers must pass a series of exams, including the New York State Teacher Certification Examinations ([NYSTCE](#)).
4. Complete Continuing Education: Teachers are required to complete professional development courses throughout their careers to maintain certification.
5. Meet Master's Degree Requirements: In certain teaching roles, especially in subjects like Special Education or ESL, a Master's degree may be required within a specified period after being hired ([New York State Education Department, 2024](#)).

The Masters-in-Education Teacher Incentive Scholarship Program plays an essential role in helping teachers meet these certification requirements by providing financial support for advanced degrees.

## **Opportunity in the Independent Sector**

Independent colleges and universities in New York State have a long history of preparing high quality educators. In the 2022-2023 academic year, Independent Sector Institutions produced 58 percent of the master's in education degrees in the state (IPEDS, 2023). Including these institutions in the Masters-in-Education Teacher Incentive Scholarship Program would:

- Increase Opportunity: Many students choose private institutions for their unique programs, faculty, and research opportunities. By expanding eligibility for scholarships to these students, New York can increase access to higher-quality teacher preparation programs.
- Maximize Investment: Private colleges and universities are important partners in the state's educational ecosystem. By investing in these institutions, the state can leverage their resources and expertise to train teachers who are well-equipped to meet the diverse needs of New York's students.

- **Enhance Access:** Independent institutions attract a diverse range of students from varied socioeconomic and cultural backgrounds. Opening the Masters-in-Education Teacher Incentive Scholarship Program to independent college students would help ensure that a broader range of educators can enter the profession.

With the growing teacher shortage in New York State, exacerbated by retirements, attrition, and the increasing demand for specialized teachers, there is a pressing need for greater investment in teacher preparation programs, especially for the independent sector.

## **Conclusion**

The Masters-in-Education Teacher Incentive Scholarship Program is an essential tool for addressing the teacher shortage in New York State, improving teacher quality, and increasing the diversity of the teaching workforce. However, to maximize its effectiveness, it is critical that the state expands the program to include students at independent colleges and universities. This expansion will help ensure that more aspiring teachers have access to the financial support needed to complete their advanced degrees and enter the classroom. In doing so, New York can strengthen its education system and provide all students with the opportunity to succeed.