



A Levy Institute Policy Memorandum

# COST ESTIMATE FOR NEW YORK STUDENT VOTER EMPOWERMENT ACT

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This memo estimates the annual statewide cost of implementing the **Student Voter Empowerment Act (A.3954–A/S2056-A)**. The Act requires every public and private college or university campus in New York State to designate a **Student Voting Coordinator** and maintain a baseline set of nonpartisan voter outreach, voter education, and annual reporting activities.

## BACKGROUND

Since the enactment of the 26<sup>th</sup> Amendment in 1971, which lowered the voting age from 21 to 18, colleges and universities have been important venues for voter registration and voting.

There are particular barriers to registration and voting for college students, many of whom are voting for the first time and reside away from home. This is reflected in voter data for youth voters, who, as a whole, consistently vote less frequently. According to the [US Census Bureau](#), in 2024, voter turnout among 18–24 year olds was only 47.7%, 27 points behind the 65+ group (74.7%). In the 2022 midterms, there was an even greater gap, with only 27.6% of 18–24 year olds voting, nearly 40 points fewer than the turnout of the 65+ group (66.8%).

**New York State does not fare well in the youth voter category.** According to data compiled by [Tufts University's Center for Information and Research on Civic Learning & Engagement](#), in the 2024 general election, New York had the lowest youth voter turnout rate in the Northeast and Mid-Atlantic, with just 42% of young people (ages 18–29) casting ballots—compared to 47% nationally. Meanwhile, neighboring states like Pennsylvania and New Jersey saw significantly higher youth voter turnout, with 56% and 54% of young people casting ballots, respectively.

The proposed New York State Student Voter Empowerment Act systematizes, codifies, and expands civic engagement practices at colleges and universities that contribute to informed student electoral participation. This Act strengthens voter engagement on college campuses by requiring each institution to designate a Student Voting Coordinator to implement a two-year Student Voter Action Plan and organize at least three civic events annually. It ensures students receive election-related information through multiple channels (such as in-person high-traffic areas, email, text, social media, website), and standardizes student voter registration practices in collaboration with local election boards.

**The Act builds on previous federal and state requirements.** Colleges and universities are already involved in registering students to vote. Federally, the 1998 Reauthorization of the Higher Education Act of 1965 requires colleges to make “good faith effort to distribute a mail voter registration form ... to each student enrolled in a degree or certificate program and physically in attendance at the institution, and to make such forms widely available to students at the institution” during years in which there are federal or gubernatorial elections.

[New York State Election Law](#) already requires all institutions of the State University of New York and the City University of New York to:

- Create a webpage for voter education that contains: an application for an early mail ballot; contact information for the appropriate county board of elections; a link to an application for an early mail ballot; and contact information for the administrator responsible for voter registration assistance on each campus.

| Category                          | SUNY             | CUNY             | Private            | All Institutions   |
|-----------------------------------|------------------|------------------|--------------------|--------------------|
| Coordinator                       | \$772,298        | \$521,203        | \$2,477,171        | \$3,770,672        |
| Civic Events                      | \$51,200         | \$20,800         | \$151,200          | \$223,200          |
| Enrollment                        | 387,363          | 237,671          | 533,819            | 1,158,853          |
| Campuses                          | 64               | 26               | 189                | 279                |
| <b>Total Cost</b>                 | <b>\$823,498</b> | <b>\$542,003</b> | <b>\$2,628,371</b> | <b>\$3,993,872</b> |
| Adjustment for Current Activities | \$321,791        | \$61,925         | \$227,428          | \$611,144          |
| <b>Adjusted Total Cost</b>        | <b>\$501,707</b> | <b>\$480,078</b> | <b>\$2,400,943</b> | <b>\$3,382,728</b> |

- Provide an application for voter registration and an application for an early mail ballot to each student in each such institution.
- Provide an annual report to the state board of elections that includes, among other things, summaries of efforts the institution made to register voters, copies of website information, and data on student registrations.

The following study offers estimates of the cost of the Act for colleges and universities, drawing on previous studies in the state of California, which implemented a similar act, public information, and information provided by institutions and groups like [ALL IN Campus Democracy Challenge](#). The study offers two outcomes, one based on the total cost of plan implementation across college campuses in New York, and one taking into consideration the investments by campuses that are already known to fulfill and/or exceed state and federal requirements. The study was conducted by Bard College's Levy Economics Institute and the Bard Center for Civic Engagement in cooperation with GenVote.

### COST ASSESSMENT

The estimate assumes campuses implement the Act by designating an existing **full-time staff member** in a coordinator-level role and allocating **a defined portion of that employee's work time** to Student Voting Coordinator responsibilities. Salary costs are based on an estimate of **publicly available entry-level coordinator salaries and fringe costs**, applied across **279 campuses** and **1,158,853 enrolled students** statewide.

At a minimum, the Act requires each campus to put in place: a **Student Voting Action Plan**, at least **three voter outreach events (civic events)** per academic year, dissemination of informational materials on voting, voter registration and other election matters via in-person and digital channels, a **campus voter education webpage** with required information, **coordination with local boards of elections** (including pre-filled registration applications

where applicable), and an **annual report** documenting campus voter engagement efforts.

The table above presents two estimates: the **Total Cost Model**, which reflects the full cost of fulfilling the requirements of the legislation across all campuses, and the **Adjusted Total Cost Model**, which reflects the cost after subtracting estimated coordinator-related expenses for campuses already known to produce Student Voting Action Plans.

### TOTAL COST MODEL

Under the total cost model, the statewide annual cost reflects the total cost of fulfilling the requirements of the legislation. The largest share of the estimated cost is staff time. The estimate also includes funds for civic events.

Under this model, the estimated annual cost to implement the Act statewide is **\$3,993,872**, which corresponds to an average cost of approximately **\$14,315 per campus**.

The total cost model estimates neither account for the investments that are already made by institutions for voter registration and education, nor what they should already be spending were they to be fully compliant with current state mandates.

### ADJUSTED TOTAL COST MODEL

To provide a refined estimate of program costs, we offer an adjusted total cost model that discounts the cost of institutions that are already known to produce voter plans. Forty-six campuses identified by ALL IN (SUNY: 24; CUNY: 4; Private: 18) submitted Student Voting Action Plans in 2024. The statewide annual estimate is reduced by \$611,144 when the estimated coordinator-related costs associated with those campuses are subtracted.

Under this model, the adjusted estimated annual cost to implement the Act statewide is **\$3,382,728**, which corresponds to an average cost of approximately **\$12,124 per institution**.

## ANNUAL COST BREAKDOWN

Rather than applying a single uniform percentage of staff time across all institutions, the model allocates **different Full-Time Equivalent (FTE) percentages based on campus size and type**, to account for differences in expected workload. These FTE percentages were informed by **collected FTE workload information from 20 institutions** that have already implemented Student Voting Coordinator roles. Using this data, we developed reasonable workload approximations.

Campuses are grouped into four categories:

- 2-year community colleges: 15% FTE
- 4-year campuses with fewer than 3,500 students: 15% FTE
- 4-year campuses with 3,500–10,000 students: 20% FTE
- 4-year campuses with more than 10,000 students: 25% FTE

For **SUNY and CUNY institutions**, these FTE percentages are applied to an estimated coordinator-level salary and fringe rate appropriate to each public system. This produces a per-campus coordinator cost that **scales with institutional size** and expected scope of responsibilities. Those category-specific per-campus costs are then multiplied by the number of campuses in each size group within SUNY and CUNY.

For **private institutions**, the same size-based FTE structure is used, but salary and fringe assumptions are based on **publicly available coordinator-level salary data from Skidmore College, Vassar College, and Cornell University**. To reflect differences in campus scale, we assign **25% FTE to Cornell and 15% FTE to Skidmore and Vassar**, based on their student populations. These campus-level costs are averaged to create a representative private-sector coordinator cost, which is then applied across **189 private campuses statewide**, distributed by size category.

Civic event costs are estimated uniformly across all institutions to support required outreach and planning activities. We assume **four civic events per campus per year with \$200 allocated per civic event**, which results in an annual civic events allowance of **\$800 per campus**. It is then scaled by the number of campuses in each category, yielding **\$51,200 for SUNY, \$20,800 for CUNY, and \$151,200 for private institutions**.

Under the **Total Cost Model**, which reflects implementation across all campuses statewide, the estimated annual cost to implement the Act statewide is **\$3,993,872**.

In order to estimate the **Adjusted Total Cost Model**, we remove coordinator-related costs for campuses that already submitted Student Voting Action Plans in 2024. These include 24 SUNY campuses, 4 CUNY campuses, and 18 private institutions. For each group, the same per-campus coordinator costs used in the main model are applied and subtracted from the Total Cost Model estimate. In doing so, the model uses the same size-based FTE percentages and four campus categories for SUNY, CUNY, and private institutions, scaled accordingly before subtraction. This adjustment reduces the overall cost by \$611,144.

Under the **Adjusted Total Cost Model**, the adjusted estimated annual cost to implement the Act statewide is **\$3,382,728**, which corresponds to an average cost of approximately **\$12,124 per institution per year**. This estimate reflects the additional resources needed to bring remaining campuses that are not implementing voter action plans into compliance with the Act.

## SOURCES

### CUNY

“FY2025 Fringe Benefit Rates Memo.” Office of Budget and Finance, City University of New York, 2024, pp. 1–2.

“Article 9: RF Central Office Salaries and Wages.” PSC–CUNY Research Foundation Collective Bargaining Agreement, Professional Staff Congress–CUNY, 2024.

### SUNY

“UUP Professional Employees Salary Schedule, Staff/Faculty 2021–2025 (Salary Level 2 Minimum, Effective July 1, 2025).” State University of New York at Purchase, 2025.

“Fringe Benefit Rates, Fiscal Year 2025.” Research Foundation for the State University of New York, 2024.

### Private College Benchmarks

“Program Coordinator Average Salary.” Cornell University, Office of Human Resources / Zippia Salary Benchmark, 2025.

“Employee Benefit (Fringe) Rates, FY2025.” Office of Sponsored Programs, Cornell University, 2024.

“Office Specialist: Yearly Salary Benchmark.” Vassar College, Human Resources / Indeed Salary Data, 2025.

“Definitions for VC Sign-Off Transmittal Form.” Grants Office, Vassar College, Oct. 2020.

“Area Coordinator: Salary Benchmark, Saratoga Springs, NY.” Skidmore College, Human Resources / Indeed Salary Data, 2025.

### **Enrollment Baselines**

City of New York, Mayor’s Office of Operations. *Mayor’s Management Report: City University of New York (CUNY), FY 2025*. City of New York, 2025.

Stringer, Kate. “SUNY Enrollment Grew 2.9% in Fall 2025, Continuing Upward Trend.” *Higher Ed Dive*, 23 Jan. 2025.

“Largest Private Colleges in New York.” *CollegeTuitionCompare*, 2025.

### **ALL IN**

ALL IN Campus Democracy Challenge. “State and City Campus Voting Challenges” and *New York State Status and Awards Reports*, 2024. ALL IN identifies 46 New York campuses already participating in the ALL IN Campus Democracy Challenge and having submitted democratic engagement action plans in 2024. 2024 is the last for which we have a complete annual record of submissions.

### **ACKNOWLEDGEMENT**

Research support provided by Generation Vote.

## APPENDIX

### Appendix A. Inputs and Formulas

#### A.1 Core Inputs Used in the Model

- **Campuses modeled:** SUNY (64), CUNY (26), Private (189), Total (279)
- **Enrollment modeled:** SUNY (387,363), CUNY (237,671), Private (533,819), Total (1,158,853)
- **Coordinator staffing model:** Existing full-time staff member with **size-based FTE allocation**
- **FTE Percentages by Campus Type and Size**
  - 2-year community colleges — **15% FTE**
  - 4-year campuses with fewer than 3,500 students — **15% FTE**
  - 4-year campuses with 3,500–10,000 students — **20% FTE**
  - 4-year campuses with more than 10,000 students — **25% FTE**

These FTE levels were informed by collected workload information from institutions that have already implemented Student Voting Coordinator roles and scaled according to institutional size.

- **Private Institution Salary Benchmark**

Average of publicly available coordinator-level salaries and fringe rates from Skidmore College, Vassar College, and Cornell University.

- **Cornell modeled at 25% FTE**
- **Skidmore and Vassar modeled at 15% FTE**

These benchmarks are used to derive a representative private-sector coordinator cost applied across private campuses in the model.

- **Civic Events Allowance**

**4 civic events per year × \$200 per event = \$800 per campus annually**

This reflects expanded coordination and outreach planning needs under the Act.

#### A.2 Methodology

##### 1) Staffing Model (Coordinator Cost)

This estimate models implementation as a partial assignment of an existing full-time staff member at each campus. Each campus designates a coordinator-level staff member and allocates a defined percentage of that employee's annual work time to Student Voting Coordinator responsibilities.

The coordinator's cost per campus is calculated as:

**Coordinator cost per campus = Annual Salary × FTE % × (1 + Fringe Rate)**

These per-campus costs are then multiplied by the number of campuses in each category to produce system-level totals. For private institutions, the salary benchmark is derived from **Skidmore, Vassar, and Cornell**, with FTE levels scaled to institutional size.

## 2) Implementation Support (Civic Events)

The estimate includes an implementation allowance for civic events and coordination activities required to support outreach and compliance.

Assumptions:

- 4 civic events per campus per year
- \$200 per civic event
- **\$800 per campus annually**

This cost appears as **“Civic Events”** in the statewide summary table.

## 3) Total

For each institution group:

- **Total = Coordinator Cost + Civic Events**

Statewide per-student estimate is calculated as:

- **Cost per student = Statewide Total / Total Enrollment**

## Appendix B. Coordinator cost calculation

### B1. CUNY

Annual salary (benchmark): \$69,267.50

Fringe rate: 49%

| Campus Category   | Campuses  | FTE      | Cost per Campuses | Category Total   |
|-------------------|-----------|----------|-------------------|------------------|
| Community College | 7         | 15%      | \$15,481          | \$108,369        |
| 4-yr <3,500       | 6         | 15%      | \$15,481          | \$92,887         |
| 4-yr 3,500–10,000 | 3         | 20%      | \$20,641          | \$61,925         |
| 4-yr >10,000      | 10        | 25%      | \$25,802          | \$258,021        |
| <b>Total</b>      | <b>26</b> | <b>—</b> | <b>—</b>          | <b>\$521,203</b> |

### B2. SUNY

Annual salary (benchmark): \$53,179

Fringe rate: 40%

| Campus Category   | Campuses | FTE | Cost per Campuses | Category Total |
|-------------------|----------|-----|-------------------|----------------|
| Community College | 30       | 15% | \$10,726          | \$321,790      |
| 4-yr <3,500       | 15       | 15% | \$10,726          | \$60,895       |
| 4-yr 3,500–10,000 | 14       | 20% | \$14,301          | \$200,225      |

|              |           |          |          |                  |
|--------------|-----------|----------|----------|------------------|
| 4-yr >10,000 | 5         | 25%      | \$17,877 | \$89,386         |
| <b>Total</b> | <b>64</b> | <b>—</b> | <b>—</b> | <b>\$772,298</b> |

### B3. Private

| Institution Group  | Size Category | FTE Used | Salary   | Fringe | Cost per Campus |
|--------------------|---------------|----------|----------|--------|-----------------|
| Cornell University | >10,000       | 25%      | \$53,179 | 35%    | \$17,947        |
| Vassar College     | <3,500        | 15%      | \$47,521 | 38%    | \$9,836         |
| Skidmore College   | <3,500        | 15%      | \$56,965 | 35%    | \$11,535        |

### B4. Estimated Annual Cost

| Institution Group | Campuses   | Enrollment       | Coordinator Cost   | Civic Events   | Total              |
|-------------------|------------|------------------|--------------------|----------------|--------------------|
| SUNY              | 64         | 387,363          | \$772,298          | 51,200         | \$823,498          |
| CUNY              | 26         | 237,671          | \$521,203          | 20,800         | \$542,003          |
| Private           | 189        | 533,819          | \$2,477,170        | 151,200        | \$2,628,370        |
| <b>Total</b>      | <b>279</b> | <b>1,158,853</b> | <b>\$3,770,672</b> | <b>223,200</b> | <b>\$3,993,872</b> |

### Private Average Cost Used in Model

| Benchmark institution                       | Coordinator cost per campus |
|---|-----------------------------|
| Cornell                                     | \$17,947                    |
| Vassar                                      | \$9,836                     |
| Skidmore                                    | \$11,535                    |
| <b>Average private per-campus cost used</b> | <b>\$13,106</b>             |

- 2-year community colleges — **15% FTE**
- 4-year campuses with fewer than 3,500 students — **15% FTE**
- 4-year campuses with 3,500–10,000 students — **20% FTE**
- 4-year campuses with more than 10,000 students — **25% FTE**



## Appendix C. Adjusted Estimate Calculation (Excluding 46 campuses)

Table: Adjustment Calculation Summary (46 Campuses)

| Institution Group       | Category                               | Campuses Excluded (2024 AP Submitted) | Coordinator Cost per Campus Used | Excluded Cost (Group Total) |
|-------------------------|--|---------------------------------------|----------------------------------|-----------------------------|
| SUNY                    | Community                              | 6                                     | \$10,726                         | \$64,358                    |
|                         | 4-year <3,500 students (15% FTE)       | 4                                     | \$10,726                         | \$42,905                    |
|                         | 4-year 3,500–10,000 students (20% FTE) | 10                                    | \$14,301                         | \$143,018                   |
|                         | 4-year >10,000 students (25% FTE)      | 4                                     | \$17,877                         | \$71,509                    |
| <b>SUNY Total</b>       | —                                      | <b>24</b>                             | —                                | <b>\$321,790</b>            |
| CUNY                    | Community College (15% FTE)            | 3                                     | \$15,481                         | \$46,443                    |
|                         | 4-year <3,500 students (15% FTE)       | 1                                     | \$15,481                         | \$15,481                    |
| <b>CUNY Total</b>       | —                                      | <b>4</b>                              | —                                | <b>\$61,925</b>             |
| Private                 | 4-year <3,500 students (15% FTE)       | 11                                    | \$9,836                          | \$108,205                   |
|                         | 4-year 3,500–10,000 students (20% FTE) | 1                                     | \$11,535                         | \$11,535                    |
|                         | 4-year >10,000 students (25% FTE)      | 6                                     | \$17,947                         | \$107,687                   |
| <b>Private Total</b>    | —                                      | <b>18</b>                             | —                                | <b>\$227,428</b>            |
| <b>Total (Excluded)</b> | —                                      | <b>46</b>                             | —                                | <b>\$611,144</b>            |

*Excluding campuses already implementing ALL IN Action Plans in 2024*

|  |                    |
|--|--------------------|
| Baseline statewide estimate (all campuses) | <b>\$3,993,872</b> |
| Excluded cost (46 campuses)                | −\$611,144         |
| <b>Adjusted statewide annual total</b>     | <b>\$3,382,728</b> |