



Nancy Zimpher: SUNY to launch new foundation

Zimpher's address calls for affordability, preparation programs

By Bethany Bump

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ALBANY — State University of New York Chancellor Nancy Zimpher wants to leave the state's public university system the same way she found it — with a focus on system-wide change.

In her final address to the SUNY community on Monday, Zimpher called for the creation of a private investment fund and center aimed at identifying, developing and implementing successful programs and practices across the 64 colleges and universities that make up the SUNY system.

The programs will focus on college affordability, degree completion and getting students prepared for college and career.

"At the very heart of the State University of New York's brand, we are a whole that is greater than the sum of its parts," she said Monday to a crowd of more than 100 gathered to hear her speak at The Egg in Albany.

Zimpher's last day with SUNY is June 30. An international search for her successor has begun.

The focus on what Zimpher called "systemness" has been a mainstay of her administration since she joined SUNY in 2009. Over the past eight years, she has worked to expand proven programs like Quantway, a math remediation course, and SmartTrack, a financial literacy tool, beyond single campuses to the entire system.

Work is underway to create the SUNY Impact Foundation, which would enable SUNY, for the first time in its 69-year history, to seek investment from the private sector for system-wide initiatives.

The foundation will be subject to oversight by the state Comptroller's Office and Inspector General, Zimpher told reporters after the address.

"We will use the same rules that we use for our other foundations," she said, referring to individual campus foundations.

SUNY will launch a Center for Systems Change at the Rockefeller Institute of Government, its public policy research arm in Albany, to study the concepts of systemness and continuous improvement. The center's mission is to find, develop and implement policies and practices across campuses.

Jim Malatras, the outgoing director of state operations, was named to the newly created position of president at the Rockefeller Institute. He will work with Director Tom Gais.

The hope is that the new center can eventually provide a national model for education systems as well as those used in government, community and business.

Zimpher also used her address Monday to announce emphatic support for Gov. Andrew Cuomo's recently proposed Excelsior Scholarship plan, which would provide free tuition to SUNY and CUNY students whose families earn less than \$125,000 a year.

The plan builds on existing state and federal tuition assistance programs, which benefit

low-income students, to make college more accessible and affordable to the middle class, she said.

"For young people who have written college off because they assume they can't afford it, they'll hear about this and think, 'Maybe college isn't out of reach for me,'" Zimpher said. "The Excelsior Scholarship will capture the attention and kindle the hope of young people who didn't dare to dream of college but now know that they cannot only dream, they can try and they can succeed."

Half of all resident undergraduate students already attend SUNY schools tuition-free via

the state's Tuition Assistance Program, federal Pell grants and scholarships. The governor's plan would supplement, not supplant this aid.

Not everyone is aware of the financial aid for which they may be eligible. As a result, New Yorkers leave \$174 million of federal financial aid untapped each year, Zimpher said.

SUNY will partner with SEFCU to spread the word about the Free Application for Federal Student Aid and host events for students and families.