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Gov. Paterson adds \$350,000 to state budget for the Syracuse Say Yes to Education program for college tuition funds

The money will allow graduates from Syracuse to attend state colleges.

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Gov. David Paterson has revised his budget proposal to include \$350,000 for the Say Yes to Education program in Syracuse and establish it as a state-recognized and state-funded program.

Patterson's addition, announced Thursday, must be approved by the state Legislature. But Syracuse Superintendent Dan Lowengard said he's pleased the governor added SUNY and CUNY tuition for city graduates to his proposal.

The \$350,000 will likely cover state tuition for this year's seniors.

Say Yes, a New York City-based nonprofit, helps districts launch initiatives to improve student achievement and graduation rates and includes the promise of free tuition at participating colleges.

Say Yes President Mary Anne Schmitt-Carey said the proposal's language not only calls for funding this year but also establishes Say Yes-Syracuse as a program that can be included in future state budgets.

About 24 private colleges have agreed to waive tuition for Syracuse graduates, but so far, efforts for state approval of free tuition at SUNY and CUNY schools have failed.

Syracuse University and the Central New York Community Foundation have committed money to cover state college tuition temporarily so the district can continue lobbying the state. Lowengard and Schmitt-Carey said local fundraising will continue to build up five Years' worth of tuition, in case the state does not fund Say Yes in the future.

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