



Frequently Asked Questions

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What is Say Yes to Education?

Say Yes to Education is a nonprofit organization founded in the late 1980s by money manager George Weiss, whose business is headquartered in New York City and Hartford, CT. In 1987, Weiss promised 112 sixth graders at a Philadelphia public school, that when they graduated high school, he would pay for their college education. He also provided the students, and their families, with supports to help them reach that goal. He repeated this promise over the next two decades with other groups of children in Philadelphia, as well as in Cambridge, MA, Hartford, CT, and Harlem in New York City. In the mid-2000s, in response to Weiss' desire to take the idea of Say Yes to scale, the organization expanded its strategy to apply to entire communities – and to make its services available to all of the children enrolled in a community's public schools.

Since then, Say Yes has helped galvanize its partner communities around three main goals. First, Say Yes helps communities build local endowments that provide last dollar tuition scholarships so public school graduates can afford and complete a postsecondary education. Second, Say Yes works with the community to build student supports that help students every step of the way. In other Say Yes communities, these include after-school programs, summer programs, tutoring, legal assistance, health services and more. Third, Say Yes works with school leadership to ensure students are on the path to academic success.

Today, Say Yes college scholarships and services are available to more than 65,000 public school students from kindergarten through high school. Most reside in Syracuse and Buffalo, New York – the two locations where Say Yes has been implemented citywide.

What will Say Yes do for Guilford County?

The Say Yes Guilford partnership will provide an unprecedented opportunity for our whole community to work together to ensure that every graduate of the **Guilford County Schools system (GCS)** can get a college education or postsecondary certificate. Say Yes communities enjoy a significant, positive economic impact. Say Yes creates a more educated labor force, incentives for businesses to start or relocate into a community, a stronger tax base, increased property values and more. Say Yes can help revitalize our community and improve economic outcomes, while also helping students and families achieve their dreams of a college education.

Why did Say Yes choose Guilford County as a partner community?

Following a national competition, the Say Yes Board of Directors and senior management team chose our community for several reasons, including the openness of community partners to work together, the high percentage of our public school students who are from low-income backgrounds, and the steady leadership within GCS. Other reasons include the quality of our local colleges and universities, and the potential for raising the money needed for the college scholarship endowment that will benefit students for years to come.

What does Say Yes to Education know about our community?

The organization has already invested more than \$1 million in our community to conduct feasibility studies, to share their vision and to create some basic structure for moving forward. The Say Yes team has met with diverse stakeholders from across our community to explore what it would mean to bring Say Yes here. This includes parents, students, teachers, nonprofits, business leaders, faith leaders, college and university administrators, and local government officials.

Has Say Yes done this work in other communities?

Yes. Say Yes has implemented programs with groups of students ranging in size from 50 to 300 in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania; Hartford, Connecticut; Cambridge, Massachusetts; and Harlem, New York. Its community-wide strategy was piloted in the upstate New York city of Syracuse and has since been implemented in Buffalo, New York's second largest city. Guilford County becomes the first county implementing Say Yes, and the first location outside of the Northeastern United States.

When will Say Yes tuition scholarships be available to students?

Say Yes scholarships are available to students who graduate from GCS high schools in spring of 2016 – this coming spring's graduating class. While many details remain to be worked out, students enrolling in colleges, universities and other postsecondary programs as soon as the fall of 2016 who meet the partnership's eligibility requirements (see *below*) will be able to do so with Say Yes scholarships.

When will Say Yes services be available to students?

We anticipate the first phase of services would begin in GCS starting in 2016. Planning teams and working groups of Guilford County community members will identify services students and families need, and which services already exist but are not easy to access. In Syracuse, the services have been phased in over a period of five years. In Buffalo, services are still unfolding in the third year of Say Yes.

Scholarships

Who will be eligible for tuition scholarships?

Students who graduate from GCS high schools beginning in spring 2016 will be eligible. There are some basic requirements for student eligibility, including different tiers for eligibility depending on the length of enrollment in GCS.

The following tiers have been approved by the Scholarship Board based on continuous enrollment in Guilford County Schools.

Grade entered and continuously enrolled	% Last Dollar Tuition Scholarship
6-12	100%
7, 8, 9-12	75%
10-12	50%
11-12	25%
12	0%

* This is the working policy for the 2015-2016 school year. The Scholarship Board will continue to meet to refine policies.

What if my child is enrolled in a charter school in Guilford County?

The Guilford County community and Say Yes are currently focused on a partnership with the Guilford County School System (GCS) and providing scholarships to graduates of GCS. There could be a pathway in the future to expand the effort to include graduates from a charter school in Guilford County. The costs and parameters associated with an expansion would need to be evaluated by local leadership down the road once a sustainable program is up and running with GCS. In the meantime, the Operating Committee and the Scholarship Board will develop a process for determining that pathway.

Students who transfer into and graduate from a GCS school after having attended any other non-GCS school in a lower grade will be eligible. The chart above reflects the tiering eligibility based on when a student enters the GCS system.

How will scholarships to in-state public universities work?

An endowment built with local, private contributions will provide last-dollar tuition scholarships for all graduates of GCS to attend North Carolina public colleges, universities, or community colleges. These scholarships will close the gap between grants and aid, like Pell grants, and the cost of in-state tuition. Graduates will be eligible for a scholarship to an in-state public university regardless of family income. Students with Pell grants and other support that cover the full cost of tuition may be eligible for Opportunity Grants to help with other college costs.

What will students need to be eligible for tuition scholarships at those public colleges and universities?

Students who graduate from GCS will be eligible for the tuition scholarships starting in the spring of 2016. This means they need to stay on track to graduate and to meet the admissions criteria for the degree or certificate programs they'd like to pursue, at the institutions where they would like to pursue it.

During the student's senior year of high school, he or she will apply for Pell Grants and other outside financial aid. If the student is accepted to and enrolls at a one-, two- or four-year degree or certificate program, Say Yes will provide a last dollar tuition scholarship to cover tuition costs that are not covered by other grants and scholarships.

The tuition scholarship will be available to full-time students for a total of eight semesters over the five years after high school graduation. These scholarships do not cover the full cost of attending college. Other costs of attendance like room and board, books and fees will need to be covered by other grants and scholarships, loans and/or family contribution.

However, other grants, scholarships and loans can be packaged together along with the tuition guarantee to make college affordable.

How will the scholarships work at private colleges or universities?

More than 100 private colleges and universities across the country participate in the Say Yes National Higher Education Compact. Compact members agree to provide scholarships to students in Say Yes communities, and include schools such as Harvard, Yale, Dartmouth, Davidson College, Duke University, Northwestern University, Notre Dame, Syracuse University, Tulane University, Vanderbilt University and more. A full list of the national compact members is available on the website. *(Note: as indicated on the website, a handful of smaller Compact institutions, most of them located within 60 miles of the Say Yes chapters in Buffalo and Syracuse, only provide scholarships to students in those communities.)*

These institutions have agreed to waive tuition for students in Say Yes communities who are admitted to their programs and who have annual family incomes of \$75,000 or less. When a graduate of GCS is admitted to a private school in the Compact—and his/her family earns \$75,000 or less annually – the student's tuition would be covered, after outside aid like Pell Grants has been taken into account. Expenses such as fees and living expenses would not be covered by the Say Yes scholarship.

If admitted to a private institution in the Compact, students with family incomes greater than \$75,000 will qualify for an annual scholarship of up to \$5,000 from our local endowment to reduce the tuition burden. *(Note: the final determination of a particular's family income, as it pertains to scholarship eligibility, rests with the private colleges and universities themselves.)*

Remember, all students (regardless of family income) are eligible for the Say Yes "last-dollar" scholarships to attend any of the 16 public colleges and universities in the North Carolina system, along with numerous community colleges.

Which private colleges and universities are members of the Say Yes Higher Education Compact?

More than 100 colleges are part of the overall Say Yes National Higher Education Compact. A complete list is available on the website.

Do public and private colleges/universities use different admissions criteria for students in Say Yes communities?

No. Students still need to do the work to get into college – and the admission standards for applicants don't change. The difference is that tuition will no longer be a barrier to attending and completing postsecondary education.

Will other college expenses (fees, living expenses) be covered by the Say Yes scholarships?

Say Yes tuition scholarships cover only the cost of tuition. Depending on endowment funding, there may be Opportunity Grants for students to help defray other costs. Private colleges and universities in the Say Yes Higher Education Compact may also provide other direct scholarships to cover other costs. Family contributions, work-study programs, and student loans can be packaged together to cover costs and make college affordable.

How will scholarships be funded?

Scholarships will be funded through an endowment set up by generous donors in our community. Conversations are already underway with local foundations, businesses and individuals who believe that Say Yes will have a strong, positive economic impact on students, their families and everyone in Guilford County.

Are public funds being used to pay for Say Yes scholarships?

No, the Say Yes scholarship endowment will be built and sustained with private dollars. Many students in our community will continue to be eligible for Pell Grants, which are funded with public dollars and for other state and federal grants and aid programs.

How much money will our community need to raise in order to fully fund the scholarships?

Leaders working on this effort established a \$70-million goal for the endowment. That goal was established working with experts who have designed cost models for other communities and was based on data related to Guilford County School students.

Student Supports and School Success

How will the student supports work?

Starting with our youngest learners and ending only after students reach the goal of college graduation, the Say Yes investment of \$15 million over five years will help provide seed money to build and/or expand upon supports that students and their families need outside the classroom to achieve academic success. Our local Operating Committee and Community Leadership Council, as well as smaller working groups will decide what is needed and local service providers will provide the supports. In other communities, tutoring, after-school programs, summer programs, medical care, counseling and legal help have been provided.

Say Yes will also invest in the technology to help educators and parents gauge students' progress toward college readiness and keep them on track. It will also fund a small coordinating staff in Guilford County.

Who will determine what supports would be needed in Guilford County?

Parent, school, government, non-profit and community leaders will be responsible for making key funding and operational decisions. This will be done through a governance structure that will include a community leadership council, an operating committee and several working groups.

What other steps will help ensure student success?

Say Yes will work with GCS leadership to make sure that students are on the academic pathway to postsecondary completion. Following a financial analysis of GCS, Say Yes will make recommendations about how to invest existing funds to achieve goals in the school system's strategic plan and yield stronger postsecondary outcomes.

Leadership, Organizing and Getting Involved

Who is leading this effort?

A local Planning Team with broad representation from across the county has been working with Say Yes to Education during our phase as a finalist.

Working groups that include Planning Group members and others from the community are addressing several key areas that are vital to making Say Yes work in our community. During the exploratory phase, those groups have been focused on fundraising and communications, as well as on developing memoranda of agreement for key partners and preparing a kind of inventory or catalogue of all the services currently targeted at children and their families.

Soon, a new governance structure that includes a local Community Leadership Council, Operating Committee and Scholarship Board will be put in place to lead the effort. A small local coordinating staff will also be hired.

How can I help?

We need you to get involved and help spread the word! If you'd like to become a member of a working group, please send an email to sayyesguilford@gmail.com. If your faith community, civic group, business or other organization wants to learn about Say Yes, we would be happy to provide a speaker. If you love public speaking, join the speaker's bureau.

Helping every child get ready for high school and college success starts right here, right now. There are lots of ways for you to volunteer in our schools. Check the Guilford County Schools website for details.