

# 2009 Professional Staff Congress/CUNY Questionnaire for NYC Candidates

Candidate for: **City Council**

(Borough President, City Council, Comptroller, District Attorney, Mayor, Public Advocate,)

City Council District: **23**

Borough: **Queens**

Name: **Mark S. Weprin**

Campaign Address: **73-20 Bell Blvd.**

**Oakland Gardens, NY 11364**

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Email Address: **Mark@markweprin.com**

Political Party Affiliation: **Democrat**

Occupation: **New York State Assemblymember**

Current Employment / Employer: **New York State Assembly**

Are you an incumbent: Yes \_\_\_\_\_ No  Number of years in office: **15 years in the NYS Assembly**

Under the current term limits law, how many more additional terms, after this one, will you be able to serve? **3, in the New York City Council**

Education:

High School: **Jamaica High School**

College: **SUNY Albany**

Graduate / Professional: **Brooklyn Law**

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1. I received support to pay for college from:  
(Please check all that apply)

Pell Grant

NYS Tuition Assistance Program

Scholarship

Student Loans

Family

Self

Other Source \_\_\_\_\_

- 2. In my view, paying for public higher education (CUNY) should primarily be the responsibility of:  
(check only one)

- Students
- Parents / Family
- Government
- Employers
- All of the above

(Please attach additional sheets as necessary to answer the following questions.)

- 3. Public funding to public higher education has fallen sharply over the last two decades. Since 1991, NY State funding per student for CUNY senior colleges fell 14% and, for CUNY community colleges, it fell by 25.6%.<sup>1</sup> Though NY City began to restore funding to CUNY community colleges five years ago, proposed budget cuts this year will eliminate this advance. What would you do to increase public investment in CUNY?

**As a member of the city council I will fight against any proposed budget cuts to CUNY. It is crucial to garner strong public support for higher education in New York City. The betterment of CUNY is an imperative to society and the stability of our local and national economy.**

- 4. More than 50% of CUNY students come from households with annual income below \$40,000, but students will pay 15% more on average next year to attend a CUNY senior college and 14% more to attend a community college if tuition hikes go through. Overall, student tuition makes up 40% of CUNY’s total operating revenue and the CUNY Master Plan (“CUNY Compact”) calls for regular, annual tuition hikes.

- 4a. Do you support or oppose the current tuition increases?
- 4b. Do you support or oppose the CUNY Compact’s call for annual tuition increases?
- 4c. What would you do to relieve the burden on students and families to pay for CUNY?

**No one should be denied the chance to go to college because of an inability to pay. We need to fully fund financial aid.**

- 4d. Some economists argue that earning a college degree enables a student to get a good-paying job upon graduation, and, therefore, government policy should be structured around an expectation of students to finance their education by taking out loans. Do you agree or disagree with a higher education financing policy that is structured around students taking out loans to finance tuition increases? Why or why not?

**Some students of higher education may choose to pursue careers that are less lucrative than others. The accumulation of debt and interest from a system based totally on loans could deter students from working in the field that they are best suited for or have a true passion for.**

- 5. CUNY enrollments are higher than at any other time in its history, but in 1975 (the last enrollment peak), CUNY had 11,500 full-time faculty and now it has 6,800. Similarly, there has been a decline in the number of professional and support staff. CUNY now has 9,000 adjunct faculty and 1,000 adjunct professional staff who are part-time and low-paid. The dramatic decline of the full-time workforce and reliance on an exploited and over-stretched part-time workforce compromises the quality of education and the University’s ability to deliver educational services to students.

<sup>1</sup> Fiscal Policy Institute Report: “New York State’s Underinvestment in Public Higher Education, “ January 15, 2009

5a. What specific policies would you advocate to provide CUNY with the resources to hire more full-time faculty, counselors, professional and other staff?

**As a former adjunct professor at Queens College, I believe that a fair teacher-student ratio should be achieved and maintained. As an Assemblymember, I fought for budgets that provided billions of dollars to SUNY and CUNY institutions. As a City Councilmember, please be assured that I will continue in my strong support.**

5b. What specific policies would you advocate to improve the wages and working conditions of part-time adjunct faculty and staff that currently provide half the instruction at CUNY?

**As a member of the city council and a strong supporter of public higher education, I would advocate that an adequate amount of capital be allocated to CUNY in order to meet these needs.**

6. What are your views on New York City's current tax structure? If you are elected, what specific tax and revenue policies would you advocate?

7. What fiscal policies would you advocate to help New York City maintain public services during the current recession?

**During this time of severe fiscal crisis, it is important that we remained focused on responsible budget priorities. Public education has been and always will be one of my top priorities.**

8. In your view, where does CUNY stand, as a priority, in New York's economic development and economic recovery?

**Our city depends on motivated, capable, educated people entering the job market and keeping the economic wheel in motion. CUNY provides many with the skills necessary to forge ahead and contribute to the momentum of the city's growing economy.**

9. Academic freedom is important because adherence to it allows colleges and universities to best serve the public interest. For this reason, the university must be a place where all ideas, even those that are unpopular, may be freely expressed and debated without interference from management, trustees or public officials. Yet, for short-term political advantage, politicians have undermined academic freedom by publicly attacking unpopular speech by faculty and calling for punitive action by college or university managements. Such public calls go beyond simple disagreement.

9a. Do you agree that it is necessary to uphold academic freedom at CUNY and other colleges and universities? Will you agree to avoid taking unfair political advantage of unpopular speech on campuses?

**Within an academic environment, faculty and students should be free to express their opinions, popular or not, given our rights as American citizens.**

9b. Academic freedom also extends to pedagogical practices, academic standards and curriculum and program decisions. Who do you believe is best placed to make determinations about these matters: faculty, college administrators, community organizations, private businesses, or public officials?

**I believe that academic freedom is a right that extends to all affected parties involved in setting academic standards, curriculum and program.**

10. Do you believe that public employees should have the same right to strike as private employees? Please explain?

11. In general, public employees have had more generous health and pension benefits than private employees. Some politicians have used this disparity to argue for a diminution of public employee benefits and blamed New York's fiscal problems on such benefits. Do you believe public employees' health and pension benefits should be maintained, reduced, or enhanced? Please be as specific as possible.

**While I do not wish to decrease the health and pension benefits of persons in the public sector, I am hopeful that with the advent of President Obama's healthcare initiative comprehensive universal health insurance will be available to everyone.**

12. Incumbents, please list your committee and subcommittee memberships and indicate if you are chair:

**New York State Assembly committee memberships: Chair, Committee on Small Business, Member, Committee on Codes, Member, Committee on Education, Member, Committee on Judiciary, Member, Committee on Ways and Means.**

13. Please list the bills you have introduced or co-sponsored in support of CUNY and higher education, or other actions you have taken in this cause:

**During the current legislative session:**

**A03162, "an act to reduce duplication of academic degree programs within the state university," A03385, "an act to prohibit the unlawful sale of dissertations, theses and term papers," A06631, "an act to authorize and directs the commissioner to develop guidelines for transportation of students on field trips, " A01245, "public schools emergency alert act," A08695, "an act to ensure that adequate funding is provided and maintained for New York City public schools," A04090, "an act to establish the Asian Lunar New Year day as a school holiday for city school districts," A07556, "an act to require school districts to investigate and report on the status of polychlorinated biphenyls."**

**Aside from sponsoring and cosponsoring numerous pieces of important, progressive legislation for the betterment of higher education and public schools, in all the years that I have been in the Assembly, I have had a higher education student interning in my office.**

14. Please list other legislation that you have introduced or co-sponsored in the last two legislative sessions:

**Too numerous to list...Available upon request. See [www.assembly.state.ny.us](http://www.assembly.state.ny.us).**

15. Please describe other actions you have taken in support of union-related initiatives:

**My continuous support of union initiatives has earned me the support a myriad of unions including UFT, CSA, RWDSU, DEA, and the Teamsters among others.**

Return completed questionnaire and brief personal biography to:

Professional Staff Congress / CUNY  
61 Broadway, Suite 1500  
New York, New York 10006

(212) 354-1252  
Fax: (212) 302-7815  
Attention: Amanda Magalhaes  
[amagalhaes@pscmail.org](mailto:amagalhaes@pscmail.org)

We encourage you to send the questionnaire and attachments via email or by fax.