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To: The New NY Education Reform Commission

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Subject: Testimony to the Commission regarding Student Achievement and Family Engagement

Commissioners, I am providing written testimony to this important and influential body during what is truly a watershed moment for public education in New York state and our country, a moment driven by mounting concerns about student performance, college- and career-readiness. The anxiety about the state of education and the lack of student achievement has reached such a peak that some have elevated it to a national security issue (Council on Foreign Relations, 2012).

While I am a parent of two elementary school students in a New York public school, I am not writing as a concerned parent. My children are lucky enough to be in a school district frequently recognized for successful outcomes. Rather, I write as the president of Monroe Community College (SUNY), as a member of the American Association of Community College's implementation team on reducing remediation, and as a member of the Governor's Finger Lakes Regional Economic Development Council. From these vantage points, I can see the extreme difficulties encountered by students who arrive at college unprepared for what awaits and by employers who cannot find a skilled workforce. Yet, some solutions to both problems are well within reach. So, today, I wish to encourage the Commission to consider some of the state's most valuable educational assets—its community colleges--as it seeks recommendations that will help “prepare

students to be college and career ready and prepare students to become active citizens.” By virtue of their status as the state’s only open access institutions, the SUNY and CUNY community colleges already have strong and productive histories of collaborating with their local K12 districts, and scaling up some key aspects of these relationships could yield significant improvements in both college and career readiness. In my testimony, I highlight three such partnerships: Early College High Schools, High School Dual Enrollment, and CTE Pathways.

### Early College High Schools

In 2010, Monroe Community College (MCC) was honored to be among 11 SUNY institutions to launch Smart Scholar Early College High Schools (ECHS). Our partnership with the Rochester City School District (RCSD)—the Early College International High School—represented the first ECHS not just in Rochester but in the entire nine county Finger Lakes Region. Students at the Rochester ECHS have the opportunity to earn up to 20 college credit hours prior to high school graduation, and their enrichment activities promote a “college-going” ethos from day one. The quick success of this venture allowed MCC to partner a second time with RCSD to expand the high school, but two years later, the Early College International High School remains the sole example of this innovative practice in the city and the region. The same can be said for most parts of the state outside of New York City: if they are very lucky, parents may find one ECHS in their district, but most will not find any. And, if we are truly focused on improving student achievement and promoting college and career readiness, the lack of access to ECHS that most families face is a significant deficit.

In the 2009 report prepared for the Gates Foundation by AIR and SRI, “Six Years and Counting: The ECHSI Matures,” the researchers established some key findings across multiple ECHS in a cross section of states, including the following:

- Over several years, Early College Students (ECS) have high average daily attendance rates.
- ECHS outperform their local district high schools on state assessments in ELA and mathematics, and 85% made progression from one year to the next with on-time graduations exceeding the local districts.
- ECS students graduated with a college credits that allowed them to achieve significant acceleration in college, from one semester to one year, and well over 80% enrolled in college after high school graduation.

Given the local success that we have seen in Rochester and the longitudinal national data on the positive impact ECHS provides in improving high school graduation, college readiness, college attendance and persistence in higher education, I would encourage the Commission to consider recommending an increase in ECHS across the state. ECHS are not a panacea for all issues impacting high school graduation and college readiness, but they do provide a proven pathway to success for many students.

#### High School Dual Enrollment

Like many community colleges, Monroe Community College partners with local public and private high schools to provide students with the opportunity to complete college classes well before graduation. MCC in 2011-2012 served 3,965 students through high school dual enrollment (HSDE) at 51 high schools and BOCES. All together, these more than 17,000 credit hours added up to more than 582 full time equivalent

enrollments: all within the confines of high school classrooms! Through HSDE, students are able to earn up to 11 college credits per term, with many of these classes counting toward their high school degrees as well. MCC takes the quality of its HSDE program seriously: we are just one of 36 community colleges to be fully accredited by the National Alliance of Concurrent Enrollment Partnerships (NACEP). Over the years, we have seen the tangible benefits of HSDE in the success of our students. For example, one of MCC's top graduates last fall earned enough credits through HSDE to complete his college degree in just one year, transferring to Cornell with academic standing as a junior, which placed him a year ahead of his peers.

The benefits of HSDE are long established (American Association of State Colleges and Universities, 2002; Boswell, 2001; Martinez & Bray, 2002), and such benefits led the Community College Research Center (2008) to recommend that districts expand eligibility requirements for enrollment and expand outreach to underserved populations by providing HSDE tuition-free for low income students. This last recommendation was echoed by the recently convened SUNY Remediation Task Force, which supported a change to allow students to use TAP to fund dual enrollment in high school. Just this past week, Jobs for the Future released a study of HSDE that tracked almost 33,000 students that yielded even more support for broadening this best practice:

- HSDE students were more than twice as likely to enroll in a Texas two- or four-year college, and nearly twice as likely to earn a degree.
- 54.2% of HSDE graduates earned a college degree, compared to 36.9% of non-HSDE grads.
- 47.2% of HSDE graduates earned a Bachelor's degree, compared to 30.2% of

non-HSDE grads.

These benefits held for all racial groups and for students from low-income families.

The evidence in support of HSDE as a practice that not only promotes high school graduation but also college readiness, enrollment and persistence is overwhelming.

However, because in NY, the decision about whether to fund HSDE falls to individual districts, too often the cost is passed along to parents—who either cannot or will not pay it. If NY were to follow the example of other states and find a way to provide HSDE tuition-free to low income families, it would reap enormous benefits in improved education attainment.

#### CTE Pathways

A specific subset of HSDE is gaining traction nationally and locally with Monroe Community College and several of our feeder districts: Career and Technical Education (CTE) Pathways. Through this structured approach to HSDE, students attain college credits within a specific career path. For example, locally, students in the Rochester City School and Gates-Chili School Districts can earn up to nine credit hours toward MCC's Optical Systems Technology degree. At present, almost 80 students are in this track, including students at one of the state's recently designated "priority schools."

Offering the CTE Pathway at this underperforming high school (East HS) may be especially important. A study of CTE dual enrollment in New York City by the Community College Research Center (2008) yielded a significant and relevant finding: "Males, low-income, and low-achieving high school students all appear to benefit from participation in dual enrollment to a greater extent than their dual enrollment peers who enter college courses with more social, economic, and educational advantages" (p. 5). In

other words, the structure, relevance, and high expectations offered through CTE Pathways move the academic attainment needle in significant and positive ways for the very groups of students frequently dissuaded from participating in HSDE.

When one couples the improved student outcomes in high school graduation, college and career readiness, and college persistence with the well-documented gap in the middle-skills workforce pipeline (“New York’s Forgotten Middle Skills Jobs” 2011), the solution found within CTE Pathways seems like the proverbial “no-brainer.” In fact, as a result of its study of CTE dual enrollment in both New York City and Florida, the Community College Research Center (2008) recommended that districts expand such options for students and that community colleges do more to integrate dual enrollment into their own CTE programs. Simply put, there is no risk and only reward to such recommendations.

Earlier this year, I had the privilege of speaking to the NYS Regents on the potential of career pathways to improve both high school and community college completions, using MCC’s partnerships and outreach as a model. The presentation was well-received, and my understanding was that the Regents were going to consider increasing the ability of high school students to participate in CTE tracks that would equal traditional college preparatory tracks in their rigor and quality. As this discussion proceeds, based on the success we have had and that has been seen nationally, I would strongly recommend integrating CTE dual enrollment to the fullest extent possible, and would echo the earlier recommendation regarding general dual enrollment: make it free for low income families.

Conclusion

To be sure, education at all levels is facing significant problems as it looks to the future, and without question, these problems seem especially acute in Rochester. However, at MCC, we remain hopeful that outcomes can improve. This is not a hope borne of rosy-eyed optimism but is rather one borne out of evidence-based practice. We have partnered with our districts on all of the strategies listed above—and many more—and have seen real improvement in student attainment, in college readiness, and in college enrollment. Our industry partners are equally convinced of the positive results: underscoring their belief with scholarship funding and co-op/internship opportunities for students. So, I respectfully urge the Commission to consider the fundamental role that community colleges can and should play in partnering with districts, students, and families to support a strengthened educational pipeline.

#### References

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