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**NYCAN: The New York Campaign for Achievement Now**

***Introduction***

Thank you for the opportunity to share my thoughts on reforming New York public schools. My name is Christina Grant, and I am the founding executive director of NYCAN: The New York Campaign for Achievement Now. I am also a native Long Island resident who graduated from Hempstead High School and proudly earned my bachelor's degree from Hofstra University.

Before joining NYCAN, I worked as managing director of new site development at Teach For America, deputy director for the Office of Charter Schools at the New York City Department of Education and associate director of recruitment for Uncommon Schools.

As you shape your plan for improving public school quality in our state, I hope that you will recognize the role early college high schools have played in changing outcomes for New York students—and the need to sustain the program, for the sake of our kids and our state.

I urge you to support funding reform for early college high schools, specifically allowing these programs to access the Tuition Assistance Program so they may survive and grow at a time when New York is rightfully focused on college- and career-preparation.

***The problem***

Today New York is home to 23 early college high school programs, which serve approximately 5,600 students from Long Island to Buffalo. This demonstrates our statewide commitment to ensuring that all students reap the benefits of higher education.

Yet the current funding structure for early college high schools is unsustainable, jeopardizing the future of this successful program. Right now, these programs are funded through \$6 million in state funds, matched by a private donation. But we cannot rely on outside funding to keep this afloat.

Allowing these schools to apply for Tuition Assistance Program funding on behalf of their eligible students will assure long-term sustainability and the potential for growth by offsetting the increased cost of providing college-level instruction, textbooks, curriculum, appropriate staff and other materials.

The investment is tremendously worthwhile: Students participating in the programs can earn up to two years of college credit before even graduating from high school. This puts them well ahead of the curve and significantly increases their chances of graduating with a college degree.

Moreover, early college high schools target low-income students and students of color,



who are underrepresented in college.

***An initiative that works***

Here and nationwide, early college high schools provide an all-important mechanism to help kids who otherwise would not consider college a realistic option prepare for the rigors of higher education<sup>1</sup>. By exposing high school students to college level coursework, these programs offer high-need students the experience they need to be prepared for college.

In 2010-11, 75,000 students in 28 states attended early college high schools. Statistics surrounding those programs are astounding:

More than 250 early college high school graduates earned merit-based college scholarships. Four earned the prestigious Gates Millennium Scholarship, awarded to 1,000 high-achieving, low-income students each year.

- 23.3 percent of graduates earned an associate's degree or technical certificate.
- 77 percent of graduates went on to some form of postsecondary education: enrolling in four-year colleges (52 percent), two-year colleges (23 percent) and technical programs (2 percent).
- Of 109 schools reporting data on graduates, more than half (56 percent) said that students had earned two or more years of college credit.
- 80 percent of early college high schools had a graduation rate equal to or higher than their school district (54 out of 68).
- The average graduation rate for early college high schools was 84 percent, compared to 76 percent for their school district.
- Most impressive, more than three-fourths of early college high school students nationwide aspired to complete a four-year degree following high school.

Simply put, early college high schools address the same critical issues at the heart of Regents reform efforts: improving around anemic high school graduation rates, preparing our students to succeed after 12<sup>th</sup> grade and training this generation to lead in New York's increasingly rigorous workforce.

That's just the sort of program that deserves the commission's support, particularly against the backdrop of New York's current graduation rates. Less than 75 percent of New York high school students graduate on time. Among black and Hispanic students, the rate is about 58 percent.

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<sup>1</sup> NYCAN, "Start College Early, Finish College Strong." March 2012.

Early college high schools are helping students beat those odds. Moreover, students leave early college high schools ready to succeed in the world of higher education. Unfortunately, that's not something New York can say about all its outgoing seniors.

According to SUNY officials, the system spends about \$70 million every year on remediation, making up for gaps in a student's high school education. And nearly half the students who enter New York's community college system need remedial and developmental education.

The gap between "high school graduate" and "college-ready" comes with a hefty price tag for taxpayers and students alike. Modest investments can help support a program that narrows the gap and strengthens college- and career-readiness.

### ***Investing in the future***

Allowing early college high schools to access TAP on behalf of low-income students is no small gesture. New York's 23 early college high school programs are specially designed to serve low-income students and students of color.

These students are too often on the wrong side of the achievement gap. At early college high schools, however, they are graduating on time, pursuing higher education and—perhaps most importantly—fundamentally changing their expectations of themselves.

An investment today would not only change the lives of New York's most disadvantaged students, but it would change the future of our state. Modest investments today could see a return on investment of 254 percent in just 15 years, and 648 percent in 25 years. That's because more of our students will be prepared for the middle- and high-skill jobs that will soon comprise the vast majority of New York's workforce<sup>2</sup>.

### ***Other recommendations for reform***

If we are serious about setting New York schools on the right track, it will take more than one investment. It will take a commitment from community members, lawmakers, your commission and the governor to reforming education laws and other longstanding issues that stifle progress time and again.

Here are two more recommendations:

At a time when New York public schools are striving to accomplish more with less, it's incumbent upon this commission to focus on reforming the cumbersome Triborough Amendment.

Pay hikes required by the Triborough Amendment cost the state government \$140 million

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<sup>2</sup> NYCAN, "Start College Early, Finish College Strong." March 2012. <http://nycan.org/learn/research>



a year, despite a “freeze” on base salaries, according to a 2012 report from the Empire Center for New York State Policy<sup>3</sup>.

The report shows the Triborough Amendment also guarantees pay increases for teachers that add almost \$300 million a year to school budgets across the state.

As school districts strive to work within the two percent property tax cap, these costs mean that basic services and enrichment programs for students will be cut while teachers continue to receive raises that don't match the economic reality. Moreover, New York's public sector is long overdue for a collective bargaining system that both maintains fundamental union rights while mitigating the ever-growing burden on taxpayers.

I also hope the commission will focus on overall accountability measures for public school systems.

Over the past 15 years, for instance, administrative costs in New York schools have increased at four-times the rate of inflation. And while national rates of education spending doubled between 1999 and 2009, New York spending increased by 169 percent<sup>4</sup>.

Needless to say, our students have not experienced the same tremendous growth in learning, test scores or graduation rates. Moreover, student enrollment has decreased by approximately two percent.

Still, New York taxpayers are tasked with filling the gap when a school district lacks the money to honor its financial promises to employees. Clearly it's time for a change.

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<sup>3</sup> Empire Center for New York State Policy, “Triborough Trouble. January 2012.  
<http://www.empirecenter.org/Special-Reports/2012/01/triboroughtrouble011112.cfm>

<sup>4</sup> Citizens Budget Commission, “School Expenditures: New York Compared to U.S.” May 2012.  
<http://www.cbcny.org/cbc-blogs/blogs/school-expenditures-new-york-compared-us>