

Adirondack Early College High School
Testimony
NY Education Reform Commission
Lake Placid, August 28, 2012

Ensuring Support for College Readiness for Rural Students

I am Joe Pete Wilson, from North Country Community College, and I serve as Coordinator of the Adirondack Early College High School. I am a graduate of Lake Placid High School and I have worked for fifteen years as an academic advisor and admissions officer at the University of Vermont and the University of Utah.

Not enough students graduate from high school, then enter and complete college, prepared for success in the workforce. My experience working with college students makes me a whole hearted believer in the need to begin actively preparing students for college success while they are in high school. This preparation can increase high school graduation rates, improve college going and college degree completion, and put students on a successful career track.

The Adirondack Early College High School was formed to create a college-going culture for what ACT calls the “Forgotten Middle” students who are not the academically elite of their high school but are capable of completing high school and entering college. In 2008, ACT reports that “fewer than two in ten eighth graders are on target to be ready for college-level work by the time they graduate from high school.” (“The Forgotten Middle: Ensuring that All Students Are on Target for College and Career Readiness before High School” Executive Summary, page 1; 2008; ACT.ORG)

Our early college high school program targets the students who face challenges – the first generation college goer, the economically disadvantaged student, and the educationally at-risk student. We align an integrated curriculum pathway for these students providing academic and personal supports, and prepare them to earn at least 20 college credits while meeting Regent’s graduation requirements. Through this program, students and their families understand that college education is achievable.

The State Education Department’s “Smart Scholars” provides resources for the Adirondack Early College High School, a consortium among the three Tri-lakes High Schools, Lake Placid, Saranac Lake (8 miles from here) and Tupper Lake (30 miles from here) and North Country Community College. One of the great benefits of this program is stimulating discussion among educators at all levels to align curriculum to create a seamless educational pipeline.

The Adirondack Early College High School faces challenges, serving an area greater in size than Rhode Island. Rural students face many challenges – economic hardships, shouldering adult responsibilities, and a history of not going to college – that urban students encounter. Rural challenges are the small size of the schools, the great distances, the lack of public transportation,

the limited though increasing access to broad band services. Delivering education is expensive in this sparsely populated region.

We are concerned about sustaining these efforts when the Smart Scholars funding ends. Allowing these students to access tuition assistance for college courses taken while in high school will maintain their momentum toward completing high school, then college and entry into the workforce.

We urge you to consider the challenges that rural areas face and ensure that rural students have access to the same opportunities that benefit urban and suburban students.

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