



**Testimony before the NYS Education Reform Commission  
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Mr. Chairman and Honorable Members of the Commission, I am John E. Jablonski, President of Clinton Community College, one of the 64-campus of the State University of New York. Welcome to the North Country, and thank you for the opportunity to describe Clinton County's ongoing education reform initiative, better known as THRIVE.

The Clinton County THRIVE Partnership was launched in December 6, 2011. On that date, Chancellor Nancy Zimpher helped us to announce that Clinton County, New York, had become the first *rural* community in the nation to join the national Strive Network. You may know that the Chancellor was one of the founders of the original Strive Partnership in Cincinnati. That partnership has grown into the national Strive Network.

As commissioners, you are well aware of the context for education reform in New York State. The context in Clinton County is similar, although not identical. According to estimates in the 2006-2008 American Community Survey, Clinton County's high school graduation rate of 83.8% is not much different than the state and national averages of 84.6% and 85.3%, respectively. However, the bachelor's degree attainment rate for adults 25 and older is 21.5%, well below the state and national averages of 32.3% and 28.0%, respectively. If Clinton County is to thrive – that is, have a strong regional economy and a sustainable quality of life – it must address issues of educational attainment and workforce development.

A precursor to the Clinton County THRIVE partnership was a public-private partnership that we called the Workforce Development Roundtable. The focus of the Workforce Development Roundtable was the critical transition from high school to college. As the members of the Roundtable discussed the challenges facing our community, it did not take long to recognize that the problems that we needed to confront were problems that extended beyond the narrow interface between high school and college.

The saying goes, "If children who enter kindergarten are not ready to *learn to read*, then they will not be able to *read to learn* by the time they complete third grade." If children are not able to read to learn, it should come as no surprise that their performance in middle school and high school will suffer, and that many will not be college-ready. Indeed, the problems that we are all trying to solve are not exclusively the problems of high schools and colleges.

And so, the Clinton County Workforce Development Roundtable was reborn as the Clinton County THRIVE Partnership, with a much broader scope that spans from cradle through career. We have chosen to make our unit of analysis the community, rather than the school or the student.

The THRIVE Leadership Council is a public-private partnership whose membership is at least “50% plus one” from the private sector. The top educational leaders from SUNY Plattsburgh, Champlain Valley Education Services and Clinton Community College are active in the partnership, but as a group, we have deliberately avoided becoming a body of “educators advocating for education.” Instead, we have positioned ourselves as a body of thought leaders who are working to advance the future of the entire community.

Other members of the THRIVE Leadership Council include the chief executive officers of the community’s most prominent organizations:

- Champlain Valley Physicians Hospital (CVPH) Medical Center (the county’s largest employer)
- CITEC (which coordinates various training programs)
- The Development Corporation
- Northern Insuring
- ETS Jobs
- Georgia Pacific
- The Joint Council on Economic Opportunity (which administers Head Start in our community)
- Mountain Lake PBS
- The North Country-Plattsburgh Chamber of Commerce
- The North Country Workforce Investment Board
- *The Press-Republican* newspaper
- The United Way of the Adirondack Region.

The THRIVE motto, “nurturing growth together,” indicates our sense of shared purpose as we work collaboratively to develop a community that thrives. In keeping with the framework developed by the national Strive Network, we have adopted a Student Roadmap to Success and a set of community-level goals. The Roadmap identifies opportunities for support from educators, family and community. The six goals adopted by the THRIVE Partnership correspond to key transition points along the Roadmap. In order to operationalize the goals, we have developed a set of measurable indicators. These indicators draw data from existing sources:

- The New York State Education Department
- The State University of New York
- The Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS)
- The U.S. Census Bureau and others.

It is our intention to use these data at the community level to determine where “the dial is set” today, so that collectively, we can take appropriate steps to “move the dial” in the years to come.

Our 2012 Baseline Report to the community will be unveiled in October. It is a snapshot of the state of our community in terms of our goals and the corresponding indicators. From this Baseline Report, the THRIVE Leadership Council will identify a set of community priorities. We will commission several action/implementation teams to develop and apply specific intervention strategies to our community's most pressing problems. Annually, beginning in 2014, THRIVE will issue a community report card, tracking our progress using the indicators contained in the 2012 Baseline Report.

One of the most important notions underlying the THRIVE Partnership is "shared accountability and differentiated responsibility." We all share in the effort to strengthen our economy and to develop a sustainable quality of life, but each of us is uniquely positioned to pull on the levers that are available to us in our respective roles. Left to our own devices, our results would be haphazard, at best. But by building our collective capacity, and by coordinating our efforts through collaborative action, we intend to maximize our results in Clinton County.

Thank you for your kind attention. I look forward to responding to any questions you may have.

