Testimony for New NY Education Reform Commission Meeting
Mohawk Valley Community College
Technology/Performing Arts Conference Center, Room 225
1101 Sherman Drive, Utica, NY

September 24, 2012

Thank you Chairman (Dick) Parsons and members of the Commission for inviting me to speak this afternoon. I am Meg Benke, acting president at SUNY Empire State College. For those of you who do not know us, we are a comprehensive New York State college and we offer associates, bachelors and master's degrees at 35 locations throughout New York State and also through our Center for Distance Learning online. Additionally, I am president of Sloan-C – a consortium of individuals, institutions and organizations committed to quality online education and our institution has extensive experience in the areas of online and blended learning, particularly partnering with community colleges and serving adult learners.

In response to the Commission's request to seek input on the topics of **educational programs that improve student achievement and college and career readiness, including the use of technology in the classroom AND rural access for students**, I submit to you the following testimony:

(with regard to) Embedding remediation into regular course work - including the use of technology with face to face

We submit that some of the issues associated with alleviating obstacles could be lessened by implementing embedded remediation programs into the core curriculum – that is for example not having a student take (or

retake) a basic core subject, but injecting and associating additional remediation into the problem areas. This is not only more expedient, but will, in the long run, save time to degree completion for the student and less teacher overload. Additionally, it will help the student be more confident and less likely to keep slipping, thus causing a downward spiral in the student's educational trajectory.

The traditional methods for evaluating learners' readiness for college and the subsequent skills remediation/development through non-credit course options (remedial courses) have not yielded the best possible outcomes for the wide range of individuals entering higher education. New approaches for academic skills remediation have been piloted in an attempt to move away from a term-long remedial course structure which have the potential of extending learners time to degree completion and increasing the likelihood of their early departure. Embedded remediation strategies, where a learner is taking a credit-bearing study while at the same time concurrently receiving skill remediation services, have been growing in popularity and usefulness. Some of the more promising embedded approaches include: embedding skills development tutors into credit-bearing college courses in order to provide "just in time" writing/reading/math development; required/voluntary skills "labs" and supplemental instruction approaches as part of standard introductory level studies (ex: History 101 + writing lab); and required skill development course assignments, such as attending a specific number of academic support workshops, meetings with academic coaches, and/or utilizing self-paced learning resources as requirements for a final grade. These approaches break the traditional remedial molds that currently channel at-

risk learners into a full non-credit course(s) when they may only need refinement in a few key skill areas.

Additionally, technology has played an important role in helping to diagnose skill deficiencies and provide immediate individualized skills remediation. A number of diagnostic tools are readily available to not only to determine learners' skill levels (i.e. their equivalent reading or writing grade level), but also identify what subtopics the learner has mastered and what topics are in need of development. Such approaches allow learners to refine only the areas in need of remediation, rather than taking a traditional remedial study and being exposed to learning activities they have already mastered. Individualized tailoring of the remediation approach to just the weakness areas identified through a diagnostic process, also known as modularized learning, will likely grow in popularity in the coming years.

The use of online in rural districts in a collaborative way with districts and their current teaching staff

SUNY Empire State College's online offerings are well positioned to serve rural and under-resourced school districts in a variety of ways. First, many of the introductory college courses that have historically been of interest (but unavailable) to high school populations are readily available in the online modality. Courses in business, the social sciences, and information technology are not currently available in many NYS school districts. Second, with decreases in the breadth of College-in-the-High School, International Baccalaureate (IB), and Advanced Placement (AP) offerings, online studies become sufficient alternatives to meet students' educational

interests prior to graduation. Finally, online studies provide new dual-enrollment opportunities for high school learners unable to take advantage of local postsecondary offerings. The reduced/removed time and place restrictions that are common with online delivery allow for academic interests to be balanced with other co-curricular activities (music, athletics, the arts, work, etc.) in which the average high school student participates.

Beyond dual enrollment and college-in-the-high school opportunities, many other online initiatives could prove useful to learners, K12 educators/staff, and parents. Open educational resources can support learners' preparation for the rigors of a postsecondary experience, while also providing useful information to first generation learners' parents about the college environment and expectations. Material useful at both the K-12 and higher education levels (time management, understanding learning styles, information literacy skill development) can be created and utilized by both student populations, as well as the K-12 educator, reducing the need for the educator to find or create such material on their own. Such efforts would contribute to the state's ongoing P-16 pipeline reform efforts and would mirror other state's efforts that utilize online resources and materials at the secondary level.