

**TESTIMONY OF DR. CALVIN O. BUTTS, III, PRESIDENT  
OF THE STATE UNIVERSITY OF NEW YORK  
COLLEGE AT OLD WESTBURY, TO THE NEW YORK  
EDUCATION REFORM COMMISSION**

**July 26, 2012**

My name is Calvin Butts, and I am the President of the State University of New York College at Old Westbury on New York's Long Island and Pastor of the Abyssinian Baptist Church in the City of New York.

Let me begin by thanking Chairman Parsons and all the members of the New York's Education Reform Commission for their collective commitment to improving performance across the spectrum of education – both in the classroom and out of the classroom – to ensure students have the best opportunity to succeed and flourish.

In holding sessions like this one today, you are doing a service by ensuring that vital issues of access, fairness, quality and accountability remain in the forefront of conversation as we together seek to improve the educational process for the citizens of New York.

I am here today chiefly to discuss with you the issues of college readiness and the collaboration that I believe must be better defined across the scope of what we at the State University of New York have defined as the “education pipeline.”

I have what I believe to be a unique vantage point. Through my ministerial calling, I have the opportunity to work with, learn from, and lead a passionate community of people, many who come from backgrounds where college has not been, until recent years, a priority.

Then, as a College President, I am witness to the efforts of men and women of all ages who come from all backgrounds to seek to improve themselves through the achievement of a higher education.

What I find common in both settings is this – many, many students today are struggling to attain the preparation they need to enter and succeed in a college environment.

Of course, what a student needs to enter and succeed in college varies to some degree from student to student. However, in both my Old Westbury and Abyssinian communities, we define college readiness in this way:

- A college-ready student is one who can write well.
- These students are those who have a strong set of quantitative reasoning and mathematics skills
- The college-ready student has the intellectual sophistication to concentrate on topic, delineate what is important, and cull from that cogent arguments and ideas.
- They have learned sufficient research and study skills that allow them to engage with information and data.
- They have attained these writing, math and study skills and have no need for further development or remediation.
- They are motivated to succeed.

Obviously, some students find themselves in circumstances where the support and services in their personal and academic lives help them meet these six characteristics more easily than other students might be able to.

For our students and state to prosper, the objective of each of us in this room must be to better prepare even larger numbers of students for college education.

Reports and studies for years have told us about the value of a college education and shown how it increases a degree holders earning potential by a million dollars or more on average in a lifetime. But beyond monetary value, the earning of a college degree can truly be a life-changing experience – exposing people to new ideas and new opportunities, offering them pathways they might never before have thought possible.

This is especially true across the State University of New York. I am proud to serve as the President of a public college that is part of a system that is dedicating itself to fueling the academic and economic growth of our state.

Following the 2009 appointment of Doctor Nancy Zimpher as Chancellor of SUNY, all members of the SUNY community were invited to take part in a strategic planning effort to chart the course for our system.

Among the most important elements of what became “The Power of SUNY” strategic plan was its commitment to strengthening the Education Pipeline, and particularly to developing highly effective teachers.

The quality of the education we provide to students depends on just two factors. When you strip everything else away, the student and the teacher are the core factors.

I and my colleagues are working to improve and enhance the educational process for students and teachers through our work at both Abyssinian and Old Westbury.

In Harlem, the Abyssinian Development Corporation has taken an active role in responding to the lack of quality educational institutions and programs in District 5, one of New York City's lowest performing school districts.

Today, ADC operates The Abyssinian Head Start and sponsors the Thurgood Marshall Academy Lower School and the Thurgood Marshall Academy for Learning and Social Change.

The Abyssinian Head Start Program embraces the mission to enhance educational and developmental opportunities for children and to enhance the delivery of social services to families. Based on our track record and success, we have been authorized to open three Head Start sites. In total, the Abyssinian Head Start Program serves 144 children and their families, providing quality child care, nutritional meals, programs, and services.

The Thurgood Marshall Academy Lower School is a public elementary school serving approximately 300 students in Kindergarten through 5th grade. The Lower School is a collaboration between Abyssinian Development Corporation, New York City Department of Education, and New Visions for Public Schools. In addition to its high-quality instruction during the school day, the school provides after-school enrichment through the Extended Learning Time program.

The Thurgood Marshall Academy for Learning and Social Change serves some 600 students in grades 6-12. This public middle and high school operates as a collaboration between Abyssinian Development Corporation, New York City Department of Education, and New Visions for Public Schools. In addition to enrichment programs focused on college readiness of students, the school also emphasizes the role of all constituents in the process through its College Ready Communities Initiative. Here, the school engages students, parents, school staff and community partners to aggressively increase students' academic success.

These efforts in Harlem are proving successful as some 90 percent of Thurgood Marshall Academy graduates go on to pursue a college education. In fact, I am proud to say that a Thurgood Marshall Academy graduate will serve this year as president of the Student Government Association at SUNY College at Old Westbury.

Like the efforts of Abyssinian, the work of the faculty and staff at SUNY College at Old Westbury is having a dramatic effect on the education pipeline, both on Long Island and in New York City.

At Old Westbury, our efforts have occurred across a broad spectrum, touching both students and teachers.

We have earned funding for and initiated a Smart Scholars Early College High School program in Roosevelt, New York, among the most challenged school districts in our state. In the past two years, more than 100 students have been engaged in college-level work beginning in their junior year, including taking courses in English, mathematics, and biology.

We were pleased to be among the recipients of funding from the University of the State of New York for this program.

We offer a similar program called Long Island College Readiness in partnership with Westbury Public Schools. Through funding made available by the Carnegie Corporation of New York, eligible students in Westbury begin discussions about college entry and preparedness as sophomores and move on in their junior and senior years to take up to 16 credits of coursework from Old Westbury.

Offered in collaboration with Harlem RBI is our Harlem RBI University, which is entering its fourth year this fall. Here, the College and its partner were recently renewed for funding from the Teagle Foundation for a program focused on identity and engagement. Through this engagement, the College works with 30 African-American and Latino high school juniors from New York City each year. These students participate in introductory sessions at Harlem RBI in New York City, followed by a summer residency at Old Westbury, and a post-residency visit to campus to attend a college class and workshops during their senior year of high school.

Our focus for teachers is just as active and even more long-standing.

For 27 years, Old Westbury has been the home of The Institute of Leadership Training for Teaching Mathematics and Technology. Developed to help alleviate the serious shortage of qualified mathematics teachers, the Institute has trained more than 600 teachers across the K-12 spectrum. The main objective of the Institute is to develop a core of 25 in-service teachers each year who are trained in the latest approaches to integrating mathematics with technology and who will, in turn, train their peer teachers in their school districts.

For the past 26 years, we have been proud to host LIMACON, the Long Island Mathematics Conference. More than 500 mathematics educators each year have benefited from this conference, which is today recognized as one of the largest one-day mathematics educators' conferences in America. Since its founding, this conference has enhanced and promoted mathematics education in the Long Island and metropolitan New York City area by touching the professional lives of more than 10,000 teachers.

In addition, we have been actively engaged for more than 30 years in the education of future teachers through our School of Education. In a program approved by the field's most prestigious accreditor, the National Council on the Accreditation of Teacher Education, we prepare our teacher candidates through a rigorous program and that includes traditional student teaching experiences late in their studies. Additionally, though, all of our teacher-candidates must take part in an earlier Observation and Field Experience requirement that places them in local schools to observe different settings and instructional modalities.

The latest endeavor being explored is the creation of the Doshi STEM Charter School on the campus of SUNY College at Old Westbury. This high school would be focused on science, technology, engineering and mathematics and would be developed with the financial support of Doctor Leena Doshi and the Au Foundation.

This charter application has three key objectives:

- To provide high quality STEM instruction for the students who attend and offer them access to an early college experience to foster greater persistence into higher education,

- To interest and prepare young people to enter STEM disciplines in college and beyond as a means of supporting and growing interest in STEM careers so vital to the future of Long Island's economy; and
- To create a living laboratory on our campus that the students and faculty of the College can partner with and learn from as they work to continually improve and enhance the preparation of future teachers.

All of the programs and activities I have outlined here are playing a critical role in improving the education pipeline. They serve as examples of what can and must be done, but by no means are they the only solutions.

The role of this commission is incredibly important as you seek ways to improve and reform the programs, systems and activities that impact the success of students across the state.

As you conduct your work, I will leave you with two requests.

First, we must ensure that this process is a collaborative one. We together – elected officials, education leaders, teachers, businessmen, and parents – are the people who must find it in ourselves to work together to make meaningful change. I urge this commission to continue to be the conduit for that collaboration.

Second, I believe we must restore the luster to what it means to be a teacher. It seems to me that, in the United States today, teachers are not as highly regarded as they were in decades past. Instead, much of what we read and hear denigrates teachers when the minority of them is less than stellar, rather than celebrating the great many more who offer excellence every day.

If we want to be certain we offer students the highest caliber education we can provide, we must be sure we are attracting the best and brightest to the profession of teaching. Throughout your work, I ask you to do all that you can to elevate the societal regard for teachers.

Chairman Parsons and the members of the Education Reform Commission, your work on behalf of the state's students is incredibly important and deeply appreciated. We look forward to continuing to work with you to improve all of our performances for the benefit of the people of New York.

Thank you.