



TESTIMONY FROM THE ASSOCIATION FOR A BETTER NEW YORK
TO THE NEW YORK STATE EDUCATION COMMISSION

July 26, 2012

Good morning Commission Members and guests. I am Jennifer Hensley, Executive Director of the Association for a Better New York. ABNY is among the city's longest standing civic organizations advocating for the policies, programs and projects that make New York a better place to live, work and visit. We represent the broad fabric of New York's economy, and our membership includes New York's most influential businesses, non profits, arts & culture organization, educational institutions, labor unions and entrepreneurs. Thank you for the opportunity to speak with you today about the critical need to improve New York State's public education system.

I'd like to address the critical issue of workforce readiness for New York's students and the need to increase our efforts to develop students' skills in STEM fields – Science, Technology, Engineering and Math – to meet the demands of a rapidly changing workforce. Once manufacturing, publishing, financial services and other industries drove our state's economy. Today, Information Technology is driving the job growth in New York State. In fact, IT jobs grew 28.7% in New York between 2007 and 2012, while in that same period, manufacturing jobs decreased by 29.5%.

This job growth includes jobs with name-brand companies like Google and Facebook, but it also includes startup companies, like Omni-ID that moved from Europe to establish their headquarters in Kodak Park in Rochester New York, and JPMorgan Chase which has hired IT professionals in its data centers and on its trading floors. As federal mandates and demand for operational efficiencies put more pressure on firms to digitize things like medical records, and employ technology in everything from marketing to project management, traditional jobs will increasingly require technical skills. And New York's public school students are largely unprepared to meet the growing demand for this skilled workforce, or to pursue college degrees in computer science or engineering.

The truth is that our schools are not sufficiently focused on developing skills in STEM fields. The private sector has stepped up to the plate to promote these areas. For example, Time Warner Cable launched its "Connect a Million Minds" initiative, which promotes STEM after-school opportunities to parents and communities. Cornell

University, which is opening its applied sciences graduate school in New York City this fall, has pledged to work with nearly 200 teachers touching as many as 10,000 New York City public school students to promote STEM training and education. Finally, venture capitalist Fred Wilson recently partnered with the Bloomberg Administration and the New York City Department of Education to launch the city's first Software Engineering Academy, as part of the city's renewed focus on Career and Technical Education for the 21st Century.

These are only some of the initiatives that the private sector has launched to assist in developing the next generation of talent that will fuel the growth in these companies. But these opportunities should not be available selectively, to those lucky enough to live in a district served by these few schools or limited partnerships. We encourage the Commission to think about how these examples can be expanded to be available statewide, in region- or district-specific ways that will be most effective for students and communities.

As this Commission makes its way across the state listening to stakeholders on all sides of the debate discuss their concerns and perspectives, ABNY encourages you all to remember that the goal of the public education system should be, first and foremost, to prepare the next generation of New Yorkers to succeed in the world. This means we have to re-imagine the approach to technical education and give students today the tools to be innovative, creative, and also scientific. It means that we have to encourage computer literacy and embrace online tools in ways that are effective and expose students to the programs and applications that are driving today's new economy.

New York's business community is growing. Companies are hiring. There are jobs to be had, even in this slow economic recovery. The problem is that New York State is not producing the talent to fill these jobs, which is continuing to grow. By 2018, New York is expected to require more than 423,000 STEM jobs, up from 385,000 in 2008. To meet this demand, and to prepare our children for the jobs of the future, we need a more rigorous academic structure. We need more engaged parents and communities. We need more flexible and effective models for teaching, and we need more accurate evaluation tools.

These are all significant institutional challenges and I am sure that my colleagues here today and throughout the state bring some innovative solutions for your consideration. Regardless of how these challenges are addressed, I think our goals are all the same – students must come first, and their readiness for college and careers is the true test of our state's success at addressing our education crisis. STEM education is a critical part of this readiness and thus, essential to our state's success in education reform.

Thank you for your time today. Of course, I look forward to any questions.