

*November 10, 2015*

*Testimony to*  
**The Common Core Task Force**

*Presented by*  
**Kelly Chezum, Vice President for External Relations**  
**Clarkson University | Box 5500 | Potsdam, NY 13699**  
[www.clarkson.edu](http://www.clarkson.edu) | [kchezum@clarkson.edu](mailto:kchezum@clarkson.edu) | 315-268-4483

Commissioner Elia and Ms. Conklin-Spillane, thank you for the opportunity to present remarks to the Common Core Task Force on behalf of Clarkson University.

To provide context for your panel, please let me share a few pieces of information about our institution and reach in the education community.

Clarkson University is a private, nationally-ranked research university in New York State with students in the municipalities of Potsdam, Beacon, Manhattan, and soon to include Schenectady as well as online. New Yorkers make up more than 65% of our student body.

Based on our roots as a technological institution, more than 80% of Clarkson's student body is enrolled in STEM disciplines (Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics). We are also known for our outstanding access to education for all students who are qualified to enroll. One in three students comes from a household that makes less than \$40,000 per year; one in four from a household that makes less than \$20,000 per year.

Speaking to the supply of potential students qualified to enroll, schools like Clarkson find ourselves on the front line on the effects of an education system that does not prepare enough students in New York State for the challenges of college and work, and especially in the STEM disciplines that has the demand of industry and corporate partners.

This is why we strongly endorse the Common Core standards and Common Core-aligned assessments advocated by Governor Cuomo.

Statistics on the growing "skills gap" are widely known. According to the National Skills Coalition, "middle skill" jobs, those that require more than a high school diploma but less than a 4-year degree, account for 51 percent of the state's labor market, but only 39 percent of workers are trained to this skill level.

Based on additional educational assessments that Clarkson offers all incoming students to help them prepare for collegiate level coursework, we had 294 students – nearly 40% of the first-year class-- that were provided extra summer classes and preparatory education in mathematics to get them ready for their first-year of college in addition to ongoing tutoring and student success support systems to strengthen the retention of newly enrolled students.

At Clarkson, our Fall Career Fair had 170+ employers looking for people to start STEM careers. We have a more than 95% placement rate of our students in the first year after graduation. While employers are successful in recruiting at Clarkson, they need more talent than we can offer.

Employers also report not only have trouble finding workers with the right technical skills, but with “soft” skills such as critical thinking, problem solving and showing up to work on time. Those are further standards to deploy.

New York is at a crossroads, and it is critical that we continue implementing the Common Core standards and Common Core-aligned assessments, while making reasonable improvements to ensure that: teachers have access to the professional resources they need to teach to the new standards; test questions are age and grade-level appropriate; and attention is given to ELL and special needs students.

Backing away from high education standards and quality assessments, instead of taking steps to improve implementation, would be a disservice to the approximately 6 out of 10 high school graduates who are unprepared for college and the work world.

We have a great university and college system in New York State that is ready to prepare the next generation of leaders and to give people the skills they need to succeed. We know employers are struggling to fill open positions.

Supporters of the “opt-out” movement fail to consider these three very basic questions:

- How will students fare in college and work if they are not challenged during their K-12 education?
- How will we prepare students for careers that demand rigorous innovation to keep America competitive and solve world challenges?
- How would a student’s future employer respond if that student chose to simply “opt-out” of an annual evaluation?

We have an opportunity now to improve on what *has* been a rocky implementation process. As a member of the New York State Business Council, Clarkson University further endorses the recommendations that came from their collaborative work with universities and industries to ensure a smoother transition to the new education standards and more rigorous assessments:

- Commission an independent review of state assessments.
- Ensure that teacher certification requirements are strongly aligned with the standards.
- Encourage districts to reduce the number of local assessments.
- Provide further professional development for teachers and principals.
- Increase parent understanding of assessments through fact sheets and forums.

Thank you, again for the opportunity to speak to Common Core Task force and learn of our interest in seeing these standards work for all New Yorkers.