



Testimony of

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Oversight: Are New York City's Public School Students Adequately Prepared for College?

Before the New York City Council Education and Higher Education Committees
January 19, 2012

Good afternoon. My name is Moira Flavin and I am the Policy Associate for Early Childhood Education, Education, and Youth Services at Citizens' Committee for Children of New York (CCC). CCC is a 68-year-old independent, multi-issue child advocacy organization dedicated to ensuring that every New York child is healthy, housed, educated and safe. I would like to thank Chair Jackson and Chair Rodriguez, as well as the members of the Education and Higher Education Committees, for holding today's hearing to explore the important issue of college and career readiness among New York City students. This hearing is especially timely, as New York State is preparing its application for a waiver to the No Child Left Behind legislation and must adopt college and career ready standards for all students, as well as articulate how students will be supported to meet those standards. CCC hopes that the City Council will weigh in with the State to inform the waiver process.

In my testimony today, I will briefly highlight the Department of Education's data regarding graduation and college and career readiness, and then discuss examples of both preventive and recuperative measures the City can take to keep students on track and prepare them for college.

Forty-six states, including New York, plus the District of Columbia, have agreed to adopt the Common Core Standards developed by the National Governors' Association Center for Best Practices and the Council of Chief State School Officers. The goal of the Standards is to provide a clear and consistent framework to prepare children for college and the workforce. By agreeing to adopt the standards, New York has recognized college and career readiness as the ultimate goal of the education system. According to CCC's analysis of the New York State Department of Education's 2009-2010 report cards, New York City's school system has a long way to go to meet college and career readiness goals. Specifically, 42.4% of students in the class of 2010 met the City standards for reading, while 51.4% of students met the standards for math the same year. The 2010 data also show that Black, Latino, and Native American students fell short of the citywide averages in reading and math, while White and Asian students scored above the averages. Low-income students fell below reading and math averages compared to higher-income students.¹ This data clearly shows that New York City's students, particularly low-income students of color, are struggling in school.

In 2010, the New York City Department of Education reported the graduation rate as 65.1%, a 40% increase since 2005 as measured by the State.² Note this measurement includes all students with disabilities and students graduating with Local and Regents diplomas. While this is an improvement, far too many students are still not graduating. The graduation rates for Black and Latino students (58.2% and 60.6% respectively) are significantly lower than for White and Asian students (78.2% and 82.4%, respectively).³ We also know that many of those who do graduate need remedial assistance in their college programs.⁴ In fact, the *New York Times* reported, using

¹ New York State Department of Education 2009-2010 New York State Report Cards, available at <https://reportcards.nysed.gov/>,

² New York City Department of Education. <http://schools.nyc.gov/Accountability/data/GraduationDropoutReports/default.htm>

³ New York City Department of Education. http://schools.nyc.gov/NR/rdonlyres/678EA9CF-69C0-4CFD-87EF-7E0F670059C2/0/GRADRATE2010_SHORT_HIGHLIGHTS_WEB.pdf

⁴ More than half of NYC students not ready to enroll in college after graduation; need remedial help. *The New York Daily News*. October 24, 2011. <http://www.nydailynews.com/new-york/education/nyc-students-ready-enroll-college-graduation-remedial-article-1.964030>

New York State Education Department data, that only 21.4% of general education students graduate “college and career ready,” meaning they scored at least an 80 on mathematics Regents exams and a 75 on the English Regents (which roughly predicts they will get a C in a similar college subject). Even more concerning, in the same article, the *Times* reported that only 13% of Black students and 15% of Latino students met the “college and career ready” criteria compared to 50% of White students.⁵

Every New York City child needs to have access to a quality education that ensures he or she is college and career ready. A college education is widely recognized as an indicator of success in life and a path out of poverty. According to the National Center for Education Statistics, in 2009, the median of earnings for young adults with bachelors’ degrees was \$45,000, while earnings for young adults with high school diplomas or the equivalent was \$30,000.⁶

CCC strongly believes that we as a city must invest in measures to prevent students from becoming disconnected from school. We must also ensure students start school ready to learn, keep students from falling behind once they are in school, and then help them stay on track for college and career success upon high school graduation. Quality early childhood education, after school programs, school-based health and mental health services, behavioral interventions such as PBIS, and a decrease in the use of suspensions are all critical to ensuring children and youth are prepared to learn and must be supported.

Early childhood education has been proven to benefit children’s cognitive, emotional, and social well-being, reduce special education enrollment and grade retention, and increase test scores and high school completion.⁷ Quality after-school programs are also paramount to ensuring children’s academic success and that they are college and career-ready. It is also widely recognized that positive engagement of youth in their schools and communities is critical to their successful development and their ability to graduate high school and to become college and career ready. Youth services provide critical venues for students to participate in academic enrichment programs, to develop and practice skills that support leadership and civic engagement, and to explore their creativity. For example, in an October 2010 report entitled *New York After 3pm*, the Afterschool Alliance stated that while the 28% of New York City youth that participate in after- school programs is significantly higher than the national average of 15%, there are still more than one in five NYC children who go home alone after school.⁸ Incidentally, CCC feels strongly that now is not the time for additional cuts to youth services throughout the City, as so many children depend on these services for academic and social enrichment and parents for support to remain in the workforce.

The use of early warning indicators can also be useful in identifying struggling students and intervening to keep them on track for college and career. In research to develop their Early Warning System tool, the National High School Center identified attendance, behavior, and

⁵ Graduation Rate Rises; College Readiness Lags. *The New York Times*. June 24, 2011.

<http://cityroom.blogs.nytimes.com/2011/06/14/graduation-rate-rises-but-college-readiness-lags/>

⁶ National Center for Education Statistics <http://nces.ed.gov/fastfacts/display.asp?id=77>

⁷ Public Policy Forum. Matrix of Early Childhood Education Outcomes
<http://www.publicpolicyforum.org/Matrix.htm> 2007.

⁸ Full report available at http://www.afterschoolalliance.org/documents/AA3PM_New_York_City_10202010.pdf

course performance (in terms of course failures and credits earned) during the first year of high school as the key predictors of high school completion.⁹ The National High School Center provides a guide to schools and districts for how to collect and use this data to track and support students. CCC urges the City to explore ways in which schools can collect these vital indicators and implement early warning systems across City schools.

In addition to investing in critical preventive measures such as early childhood education, after-school, and early warning systems, we must continue the important work of getting off-track students back on track for college and career readiness. In 2005, former Chancellor Joel Klein established the Office of Multiple Pathways to Graduation to analyze and respond to the needs of over-age and under-credited youth. In a 2006 study supported by the Gates Foundation and the Parthenon Group, the New York City DOE documented that there were approximately 138,000 students in the City between the ages of 16-21 who were over-age and under-credited. At the time, seventy thousand of these students were still enrolled in school, while 68,000 had already dropped out. The report went on to state that 48% of entering freshmen become over-age and under-credited in high school.¹⁰

Equally striking are the statistics from the June 2005 cohort of students, which illustrate the breakdown of age and literacy level of the students entering high school.

Within the June 2005 cohort:

- 5% of over-age and under-credited (O/A-U/C) youth (about 3,000) entered high school overage, but with sufficient literacy skills.
- 19% (12,000 students) entered high school overage and with literacy challenges.
- 24% of O/A-U/C youth (approximately 16,000) entered high school on-age with sufficient literacy skills.
- 52%, or 34,000 students, entered high school on-age with literacy challenges.

These groups have distinct characteristics and therefore require distinct interventions. For example, the 52% of students who are age-appropriate for their grade levels need targeted assistance to address their literacy challenges, but they have managed to stay on track with their peers. They may be able to continue on track with the appropriate support from well-trained and supportive teachers. Other students, though, particularly those entering high school already over-age and with literacy challenges, have significant needs and need recuperative measures in order to catch up. The data shows these students falling behind early in their academic careers, either due to chronic struggles or due to an isolated event that interrupted their education. Thus, it is clear that a large portion of O/A and U/C youth need interventions in elementary and middle school to keep them on track for graduation, college, and career. A 2008 report by Advocates for Children clearly documents the issues facing over-age and under-credited middle school students, particularly those with special needs. CCC is pleased that the Department of Education, under Chancellor Walcott, has pledged to focus on improving middle schools and students'

⁹ Developing Early Warning Systems to Identify Potential High School Drop-outs. National High School Center. http://www.betterhighschools.org/pubs/ews_guide.asp 2009

¹⁰ *Pathways to Graduation: Data-Driven Strategies for Differentiated Graduation Rate Improvements*, 2008. The Parthenon Group. <http://www.parthenon.com/GetFile.aspx?u=%2fLists%2fIndustries%2fAttachments%2f9%2fParthenon%2520Graduation%2520Pathways%2520Summary%25202008.pdf>

transition to high school. The City must continue to invest in providing students with quality instruction and support throughout their academic lives, but especially early, before they get off track.

The Department of Education's Multiple Pathways to Graduation's portfolio of programs (now under the Office of Postsecondary Readiness) has benefited thousands of students since the portfolio was developed. Though outcome data is somewhat limited, there are encouraging trends emerging. According to a report from the Alliance for Excellent Education, the MPG programs are being used as models for similar programs nationwide. The report states that initial data shows transfer schools with a median graduation rate of 52.5 percent—significantly higher than the previous average of 15 percent for similar over-age and under-credited students enrolled in traditional high schools. Furthermore, the number of over-age and under-credited students and dropouts under the age of twenty-one has been reduced by 13 percent, from 132,286 in 2005 to 114, 584 as of March 2009. Also, roughly one quarter of the 2007–08 graduates from Multiple Pathways to Graduation programs enrolled in two- or four-year colleges the following year.¹¹ When the DOE first released data on Young Adult Borough Centers citywide in early 2011 (which included a 6 year graduation rate and the number of credits students accumulated in relation to the number with which they began), 14 of the 23 programs received As and Bs.¹² Lastly, in a three year evaluation of Learning to Work programs citywide, Metis Associates found that, overall, Learning to Work programs in transfer schools, YABCs, and GED programs had been more successful than traditional high school settings in graduating over-age and under-credited youth. Among Learning to Work programs, transfer schools had the highest 6-year completion rates (35%), followed by YABCs (31%) and GED programs (22%). By comparison, the graduation rate for over-age and under-credited youth from traditional high schools is 22%. The report states that these findings confirm that the Learning to Work program models equal or exceed the results of traditional high schools.¹³

While CCC is very pleased that DOE's school progress reports have begun to include data on students' college and career readiness, CCC urges the City to continue collecting and sharing outcome data for alternative programs and investing resources in these programs when promising trends such as those described above emerge.

While many students have benefited from the Department of Education's Multiple Pathways to Graduation portfolio citywide, even these programs have credit requirements such that youth nearing the age of 21 who have accumulated very few credits may be unable to enroll. Moreover, the capacity across the City is limited, and these programs, including Learning to Work, among others, are facing additional cuts that will prevent them from accepting all eligible students. CCC urges the City to protect investments in programs for over-age and under-credited youth and

¹¹ All data taken from *What Federal Policy Makers can Learn from New York City's Multiple Pathways to Graduation Initiative* Alliance for Excellent Education. June 2011. <http://www.all4ed.org/files/HelpingStudentsNYC.pdf>

¹² *New Grades for Schools for Students on the Brink of Dropping Out*. Gotham Schools February 2, 2011. <http://gothamschools.org/2011/02/02/new-grades-for-schools-for-students-on-the-brink-of-dropping-out/>

¹³ *Evaluation of New York City's Learning to Work Initiative for Over-Age and Under-Credited High-School Youth: Student Outcomes (2005-2008)*. June 2010. http://www.metisassociates.com/publications/downloads/Metis_06-10_LearningtoWorkEvaluationReport.pdf

continue to explore options for students who cannot access these programs due to their credit level or age.

CCC would be remiss not to mention the impact of suspensions on students' college readiness, as the DOE's approaches to discipline can cause serious interruptions in students' education. We are pleased that the City Council has held many hearings on this critical issue and voted to require the DOE to release the suspension data. CCC continues to be deeply troubled by that data, and particularly by the disproportionate number of students of color and students with special needs being suspended. We feel strongly that it is counterintuitive to remove students from school when successful educational outcomes result from engaging children and youth in school. Students who are suspended are less likely to do well in school and are more likely to drop out.¹⁴ CCC urges the City to continue analyzing the data closely, supporting teachers and school staff in their efforts to best meet students' needs and keep students engaged in education, and to move forward with implementation of restorative justice approaches to discipline, the expansion of school-based mental health programs, and other promising practices.

Finally, our goal as a City must be to ensure that, not only are students college and career-ready, but that they can afford to attend college. CCC urges New York City to take a leadership role in ensuring that families have access to college savings platforms. All research shows that asset development and college savings platforms are vital tools for families to plan for their children's futures and to make college attainable. Furthermore, college savings platforms have been tested nationally and reviewed rigorously, and national studies suggest that early and consistent savings for education positively impacts school performance and college entrance.¹⁵ The Harlem Children's Zone was an early pilot site for such platforms. Today, thanks to an investment from the Citi Foundation, the Knowledge is Power Program (KIPP) Charter Schools have partnered with the Corporation for Enterprise Development (CFED) to implement college savings platforms in five New York City schools. Given both the cost of college education and the need to improve student connections to college and career, the City has a real opportunity to explore how to best to connect a greater number of students and parents to savings platforms.

In sum, New York City's public school children deserve a quality education that prepares them for college and career. CCC recommends the City consider the following preventive and recuperative strategies to better engage students in school and promote college and career-readiness:

- Invest in quality early childhood education, known to improve children's educational, social, and emotional outcomes later in life.
- Protect and expand existing funding for after-school opportunities for youth, which, like early childhood education, provide vital supports for students, parents, and communities.
- Invest in keeping students on track and engaged in school before they get off track.
- Support schools to develop and implement early warning systems to identify students at risk for dropping out, and help schools target those students with supportive services.

¹⁴ Education Interrupted: The Growing Use of Suspensions in New York City's Public Schools (2011). The New York Civil Liberties Union. <http://www.nyclu.org/publications/report-education-interrupted-growing-use-of-suspensions-new-york-city's-public-schools->

¹⁵ Taking stock of ten years of research on the relationship between assets and children's educational outcomes: Implications for theory, policy and intervention. 2011. <http://csd.wustl.edu/Publications/Documents/WP11-08.pdf>

- Continue to explore and invest in alternative strategies to suspension that keep students engaged in school, including school-based mental health programs and behavioral interventions such as PBIS.
- Protect alternative programs, such as GED, Learning to Work, YABCs, and transfer schools.
- Continue to collect and share data on student outcomes in alternative schools, and invest in programs demonstrating positive outcomes for students.
- Engage public and charter education partners, the financial sector, and foundations in dialogue about creating concrete opportunities to connect children and families with savings platforms to make college attainable.

There is no doubt that ensuring that all of New York City's students are college-and-career ready is a daunting task. Given the schools currently face, it is clearly time for the City to do more, not less, for children. CCC urges the City to make early and consistent investments in children in order to provide them with a solid foundation for success and to prevent them from getting off track and disengaged.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify.