

CITY COUNCIL
CITY OF NEW YORK

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TRANSCRIPT OF THE MINUTES

Of the

COMMITTEE ON HIGHER EDUCATION

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April 20, 2017

Start: 10:09 a.m.

Recess: 11:33 a.m.

HELD AT: 250 Broadway - Committee Rm,
14th Fl.

B E F O R E:

INEZ D. BARRON
Chairperson

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Laurie A. Cumbo
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A P P E A R A N C E S (CONTINUED)

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Initiatives,
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Programs (ASAP)
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Laura Zan
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Robin Ozz
President
National Association for Developmental
Education

Michael Weiss

[sound check]

[pause]

[gavel]

CHAIRPERSON BARRON: Good morning.

Welcome to today's oversight hearing on CUNY Start.

My name is Council Member Inez Barron and I am the chair of the Committee on Higher Education.

In today's changing global economy, a college degree is necessary to ensure good employment and prospects with a solid middle-class income. However, the income gap between those who have a college degree and those who have a high school diploma has continued to grow. For example, in 2015, the typical worker with a bachelor's degree earned an estimated 79% more than someone with only a high school degree [sic], and that was up from 38% in 1979. Furthermore, studies have shown that Americans with college degrees are more likely to live healthier lives, be satisfied with their jobs, and be more civically engaged than their less educated peers.

By 2020, 60% of the jobs will require postsecondary education, 30% will require associate's degrees, and 30% will require at least a bachelor's

degree. Yet despite the importance of a postsecondary education, Governor Cuomo's much-touted Excelsior Scholarship has failed to take into consideration how low-income students need greater financial support. The Governor's Excelsior Scholarship offers only tuition aid for full-time students who complete school in four consecutive years and agree to remain in New York State. As a last-dollar program, it fails to provide financial assistance for the additional expenses beyond tuition associated with pursuing a college education.

Many CUNY students will have their tuition covered by TAP and PELL and thus won't be eligible for the Excelsior Scholarship, which only applies after a student exhausts his or her TAP and PELL. However, because college students need additional money to cover the costs for books, food, transportation, child care, and living expenses, many CUNY students may not be able to go to school full-time because they have to work to meet their daily expenses. These students also are not eligible for Excelsior Scholarships.

In addition to tuition and fees, the costs of attendance include textbooks, technology

1 fees, activity fees, consolidated fees,
2 transportation, personal needs, housing, and medical
3 needs. These costs are often greater than the cost
4 of tuition. While tuition at CUNY is \$4,000 and
5 \$6,000; when the associated educational costs are
6 added for tuition, the cost of attendance at CUNY
7 balloons to \$14,792 for community colleges and
8 \$27,265 for senior colleges. When you examine the
9 household income of CUNY students, 42% have an income
10 less than \$20,000. A more effective first-dollar in
11 scholarship would provide financial support, given
12 regardless of other aid received, scholarship money
13 is not diminished; scholarship money for tuition cost
14 is provided regardless of other aid that the student
15 will receive.

17 The increased amount of aid that low-
18 income (at \$50,000 or less) that students receive can
19 significantly improve the access, retention, and
20 completion of those students. When low-income
21 students receive less than one-fourth of the required
22 educational costs, the graduation rate is 45%. When
23 grants cover more than three-fourths of the
24 educational costs, the graduation rate rises to 68%.
25 Degree level by income shows that enrollment shifts

away from a bachelor's degree program and shifts towards associate degree programs at about the income of \$55,000.

The National Scholarship Providers Association describes unmet needs that are calculated by a formula that considers the expected family contribution. The U.S. Department of Education National Center for Educational Statistics, in 2016 said that the cost of higher education has increased dramatically over the last few years, becoming less accessible to students from low-income families. These students accumulate more student debt and are more likely to default on that debt compared to their more affluent peers.

The Governor's Excelsior Scholarship program perpetuates the gap between low-income and high-income groups, because low-income students are denied the full benefit of aid to assist with the costs of attendance because Excelsior is a last-dollar program, which means students have to use their dollar to pay for tuition before they can apply for the Excelsior Scholarship.

The Excelsior Scholarship was designed hastily and it continues the Governor's policy which

disadvantages low-income families and students of color who are already not receiving the funding which is needed for a sound basic education, which the State Court settlement said was due to them and which the Governor has not met.

To make life even more difficult for students, the Governor has proposed increasing tuition by as much as \$200 per year for the next four years. The Governor's actions betray our hardworking students who are doing everything they can to go on to graduate from college and be competitive in today's global economy. Shame on you, Governor Cuomo.

Despite the advantage of having a college degree, far too many high school students, both across the country and in New York City, are graduating unprepared for college-level coursework. In 2015, less than half of all New York City public high school graduates met the Department of Education's College Readiness Standard, which is based on CUNY's standard. Subsequently, a large percentage of students who have enrolled at a postsecondary institution are not completing their college degrees, making it more difficult to live

1 successfully and complete lives. A smaller
2 percentage of those students who are not college-
3 ready take longer than the recommended time to earn a
4 postsecondary degree; hence, at least one-third are
5 burdened with additional education costs and
6 comparatively higher debt.
7

8 These issues have the greatest impact on
9 minority and low-income students who enroll at
10 community colleges. This is especially important
11 because community colleges are viewed as a gateway to
12 four-year schools because nearly half of all bachelor
13 degree recipients attended community college at some
14 point in their college career.

15 In fall 2015, an estimated 40.1% of CUNY
16 undergraduates were enrolled at a community college.
17 According to the latest CUNY Student Experience
18 Survey, more community college students than senior
19 college students self-identified as Black; that
20 survey indicated that 28.4% of students in community
21 colleges self-identified as Black compared to 24.8%
22 at senior colleges; while 39.9% of students at
23 community colleges self-identified as Hispanic,
24 compared to 25.6% at senior colleges.
25

CUNY students also come from low-income families, where 71% of community college students reported annual household incomes of less than \$30,000 and 27% were age 25 years or older. CUNY students are not your traditional full-time students.

Sixty percent of New York City high school graduates who go on to college attend CUNY. Among first-time freshmen admitted to CUNY associate degree programs, nearly 80% did not meet basic math, reading and/or writing skill standards. Typically, these students who are identified by their performance on the CUNY Assessment Test upon acceptance to the university were placed in the remedial courses to learn or relearn basic skills before they could begin college courses for credit. However, the fact that these students were not in credit-bearing courses has a negative impact on their financial aid, which was essentially being used up before degree completion.

The customary three-year graduation rate for full-time, first-time freshmen across CUNY's community colleges was 11% compared to the national average of 20.4% for the full 2005 to 2008 cohorts. Within six years of their initial enrollment an

average of 30.4% were awarded an associate or baccalaureate degree.

In an effort to address these issues, in 2009 the University launched CUNY Start, an intensive 15-18 week college preparation program that allows students to delay matriculation so that they may save their financial aid for credit-bearing courses. The program is 25 hours a week, offers sections in reading, writing and math in addition to a weekly college success seminary and costs \$75. For those students who only need remedial instruction in math, Math Start is a 12-hour a week program and costs \$35. Participating students have full access to campus resources, including academic and career counseling, libraries, athletic facilities, and receive free MetroCards to offset transportation costs.

In order to be eligible for CUNY Start, a student must have earned a high school or high school equivalency diploma, be admitted to CUNY and enrolled at a campus that offers CUNY Start, and demonstrate a need for skilled development, which is determined by CUNY Assessment Test results; however, certain schools may have additional eligibility criteria.

CUNY Start is currently available at eight schools, and preliminary assessments have shown participants to have higher retention rates, a greater accumulation of college-level credits and higher rates of graduation when compared to students who did not participate in the program. According to an internal study in 2013, after completing the program 62% of students who were in the writing course reached college-level proficiency compared to 26% of non-participants. For CUNY Start students who need developmental math courses, 53% reached college-level proficiency compared to 10% of non-participants. CUNY Start participants have also demonstrated higher grade point averages than non-participants.

During today's hearing I am interested in receiving an update on CUNY Start's progress, including any changes that have been made since CUNY conducted a study of the program in 2013. In particular, I would like to learn whether students enrolled in the program have continued to successfully complete the program and attain high retention and graduation rates. I am also interested in learning more about the progress of foster care

youth enrolled in the CUNY Start Foster Care Initiative.

I would like to acknowledge my colleagues on the Committee who are present -- Council Member Vacca; Council Member Vanessa Gibson. I would also additionally like to thank Joy Simmons, my Chief of Staff and CUNY Liaison; Sumwali [sp?] Clay, my CUNY Liaison; Ndigo Washington, Director of Legislation; Kiiru Gichuru, Committee Counsel; Chloe Rivera, Committee Policy Analyst; and Jessica Ackerman, Finance Analyst to the Committee.

And with that, I'm going to ask the Counsel if, after I call the first panel, he would administer the oath.

And today we will have Lashallah Burgess, Assistant Director at BMCC CUNY Start -- is she here -- Donna Linderman, University Dean of Students from Success Initiatives at CUNY; and Omar Alonso, a student at BMCC College. Welcome; have a seat. Make yourself comfortable. And the Counsel will ask you if you would raise your right hand and he will the oath.

COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Please... Raise your right hand, please, Alonso. Thank you. Do you

affirm to tell the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth in your testimony before this committee and to respond honestly to the council members' questions? I do. [background comments] Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON BARRON: Thank you so much.
You may begin.

DONNA LINDERMAN: Good morning,
Chairperson Barron and members of the City Council Higher Education Committee. I am Donna Linderman, University Dean for Student Success Initiatives and Executive Director of CUNY Accelerated Study in Associate Programs (ASAP). Thank you for the opportunity to speak to you about CUNY Start, which is realizing unprecedented success in serving students identified with significant levels of remedial need upon admission to our associate programs. I am joined by Lashallah Burgess, CUNY Start Assistant Director at Borough of Manhattan Community College (BMCC), and Omar Alonso, a CUNY Start graduate and current BMCC student. Together I hope we can provide you with a better understanding of CUNY Start and the many ways it is helping students enter our associate programs better prepared for successful completion.

Founded in 2009, CUNY Start seeks to help students admitted into our associate programs with significant levels of remedial needs in reading, writing and/or math -- based on scores on the CUNY Assessment Tests -- and to significantly reduce or eliminate those needs before matriculation. The program began as a pilot at two community colleges (LaGuardia and Kingsborough) and initially focused on GED (now known as HSE) recipients to see if an intensive, one-semester intervention designed and led by master teachers and professional developers from CUNY's Adult Literacy Programs could help students reduce some of their remedial needs before matriculation. Early results demonstrated that even students with the most significant needs, including multiple levels of need, could become fully skills proficient and ready to enter college-credit coursework after completing an intensive, well-designed, and carefully taught program.

CUNY Start expanded to additional colleges in 2010 and based on continued success, embarked on a major expansion beginning in fall 2011. The program also began to admit high school graduates identified with remedial needs and created part-time

programs for students who had need in either reading and writing or math. CUNY Start is now found at eight CUNY colleges (six community colleges and two comprehensive colleges) and has served 16,554 students since inception.

CUNY Start provides intensive preparation in academic reading/writing, math and a college success seminar to students in need of significant remediation. Students temporarily delay starting their degree studies to take the 15-18 week program, depending on the college calendar. CUNY Start seeks to both minimize the amount of required remedial coursework underprepared students must take, and to foster higher levels of persistence and graduation once students start their degree programs.

CUNY Start students pay a modest \$75 fee, rather than having to use financial aid while in the program. This allows them to preserve their financial aid for credit-bearing coursework leading to graduation. The program consists of two phases: 12 weeks of core instruction, after which students retake any needed CUNY Assessment Tests in reading and writing and/or the CUNY Elementary Algebra Final Exam (CEAFE), and then an additional three to six

weeks of instruction, as needed, also followed by the opportunity to retake any required exams.

Instruction in the program is intensive: 25 hours a week in the full-time program, in which students can address all three basic skills needs: read and writing, which is taught as one subject, and math. The part-time program is 12 hours a week in which students can address either math or reading and writing. Both full-time and part-time programs offer the same curricula and hours of instruction and include a college success seminar and advisement.

CUNY Start curricula have been developed by instructional experts from the CUNY Office of Academic Affairs with input from teachers and advisors from our partner colleges. Our math curriculum and pedagogy focuses on helping students grasp math concepts and emphasizes depth over breadth of topics with teachers using a structured questioning approach to help students understand how they arrive at solutions vs. simply memorizing formulas. Reading and writing focuses on helping students learn strategies of effective readers and writers through modeling by teachers and aims to build confidence and reading and writing stamina with

significant feedback provided to student work. Our college success seminar and individual advisement helps students better understand what to expect when they matriculate including learning about campus resources, expectations and requirements in and out of the classroom, specifics of various majors, and possible career paths.

CUNY Start also places a strong focus on teacher training. In addition to training led by our Professional and Curriculum Development Coordinators, all CUNY Start teachers spend one semester in the class of a lead CUNY Start instructor in preparation for teaching in the program. Advisors in training spend a semester working beside an experienced advisor in preparation for taking on their own caseload of students. Once teachers and advisors are trained, they continue to receive coaching and professional development led by our Professional Development Coordinators. This comprehensive approach ensures that the program is delivered with high fidelity to the curricula and pedagogy that have been found to be highly effective to date.

CUNY Start students are demographically similar to the larger associate degree seeking

population at the colleges to which they have been admitted. Based on most recent data from fall 2016: 48% of CUNY Start students are Hispanic, 25% are Black, 7% are Asian/Pacific Islander, 6% are White, and 5% identify as Other. By gender, 41% were male and 59% female. Eighty percent of our full-time students and 56% of our part-time program students are under the age of 20.

CUNY's Office of Research Evaluation and Program Support (REPS) has carefully evaluated CUNY Start and results have been impressive if not unprecedented. As mentioned, the program serves some of CUNY's most academically at-risk students. Based on analysis of students who entered between fall 2009 and spring 2016 (13,254 students), 68% of CUNY Start full-time students entered with three remedial needs and 32% entered with two needs. In terms of individual skills areas: 99% had needs in math, 93% had needs in writing, and 75% in reading.

Upon program completion, however, the picture looks completely different: 51% of full-time students who completed the program were fully skills proficient in all three skills areas, 30% had only one remaining need, and 14% had two remaining needs.

Part-time program participants made similar gains. Across all cohorts served to date, CUNY Start has an average complete rate of 86%. It would typically take a similar student who matriculated immediately instead of going to CUNY Start at least two semesters to realize such gains and they would be using time-stamped financial aid or pay out of pocket to do so.

Analysis of gains in individual skills areas are especially impressive. On average, three-quarters of students who entered CUNY Start full-time or part-time with needs in reading, writing or math and completed the program became fully skills proficient in that skills area. This includes students who entered with two levels of math need (arithmetic and elementary algebra).

Further analysis by CUNY REPS found that when CUNY Start students matriculate, they take and earn more credits with higher GPA and have stronger retention over time than similar non-CUNY Start participants. CUNY Start students who entered the program with remedial math need were also more likely to enroll early in credit math classes once they matriculated and performed better than a comparison group of similar students.

CUNY Start also serves as an important pathway into CUNY Accelerated Study in Associate Programs (ASAP), which has consistently more than doubled the three-year associate degree graduation rates of similar CUNY students. Analysis of former CUNY Start students who joined ASAP demonstrates that they were found to have similar rates of high retention and timely graduation as ASAP students who did not participate in CUNY Start. Staff from both programs actively recruit students together and make the pathway from CUNY Start to ASAP explicit and seamless to ensure that every student who wishes to move into ASAP can do so.

To ensure CUNY Start is also rigorously evaluated by external reviewers, we are pleased to partner with MDRC and CCRC (the Community College Resource Center) on a major random assignment study funded by the U.S. Department of Education Institute of Education Sciences (IES) across four colleges. And Dr. Michael Weiss of MDRC, who serves as co-principal investigator for that study is here today and will share more details about this important study.

Because math is such a significant barrier to CUNY associate seeking students (74% of our fall 2016 first-time freshmen at our community colleges required some level of remediation in math), CUNY Start also developed and created a condensed eight-week intervention modeled on our semester-long CUNY Start math program. Math Start was piloted in 2014 and 2015 at three colleges with support from the Petrie Foundation and is now being expanded to 4,000 students over the next three years thanks to generous support from the City.

Math Start has realized impressive outcomes serving students who are proficient in reading and writing but still have significant remedial math needs. Most recent findings from our summer 2016 program that served nearly 500 students demonstrate that 97% of Math Start students entered in 2016 with both pre-algebra and elementary algebra needs. Ninety one percent of students completed the eight-week program and 81 percent of program completers became skills proficient in math. Students pay only \$35 to participate in Math Start, which is now offered at seven CUNY Start partner

colleges in summer and at some colleges in fall and late spring eight-week sessions.

Remediation is one of the major challenges facing community colleges across the country and prevents thousands of low-income students from earning a college degree. CUNY is deeply committed to continuing to be a portal for all New Yorkers who wish to realize their educational goals and to improve their social mobility through degree completion. The University is currently engaged in a major reform of its remediation practices at all levels and CUNY Start and Math Start will play critical roles in helping to ensure that all students are served effectively and can enter and complete their degree studies in a timely manner. We are pleased to be able to demonstrate that with the right curriculum, instructional model and staff that previously unimaginable success rates are possible for all our students. It is both an honor and privilege to serve them and we thank the City Council for your interest and support of our work.

LASHALLAH BURGESS: Thank you, Donna.

Good morning, members of the Committee.

My name is Lashallah Burgess and I am the Assistant

Director for the CUNY Start and Math Start programs at the Borough of Manhattan Community College, also known as, and often referred to as BMCC.

Some of my testimony echoes with what Council Member Inez Barron had described and also Donna Linderman; however, I would like to offer a few BMCC-specific outcome updates.

CUNY Start and Math Start are low-cost, intensive remediation alternatives for community college students who are required to enroll into developmental education courses. CUNY Start is a 16-week program that offers pre-college math and/or reading and writing as needed. Math Start runs for eight weeks and students focus mostly on improving their math skills. In each program there is an Academic Advisement component that provides students with tools and support for acclimating to college life and planning their educational futures. Open dialogue and regular group work fosters close relationships between the advisors, teachers and students and these bonds help to build student's confidence and lead them toward success.

BMCC CUNY Start is located near the BMCC main campus. The CUNY Start program operates out of

the Murray Street building and follows the campus semester calendar. There is a full-time program where students focus on all three subject areas and attend classes for 25 hours per week. There is also a part-time program where students are either in reading and writing or math and attend classes for 12 hours per week. In CUNY Start at BMCC, we have run 17 classes consistently for the past few semesters. Last year, 84% of CUNY Start students completed the program, 78% became math proficient, and 67% became proficient in writing.

In summer 2014, Math Start launched as a result of the success of CUNY Start and a high need for math remediation. Math Start is expanding this year with an off-site pilot program at the CUNY School of Public Health in Harlem. In addition, the program will enroll 200 students for the summer '17 session -- doubling enrollment from last year. On average, Math Start at BMCC has a 95% completion rate, 90% skills proficiency rate and 95% matriculation rate.

In both CUNY Start and Math Start, eligible students are those who have 12 credits or less, who have scored low on the CUNY placement exams

and need to increase their proficiency in order to become exempt of remediation.

Both programs are attractive to students and are effective because they help to save time and money. Students spent less time in remedial level classes and even have two opportunities to retake placement tests for a fraction of the cost of a credit-bearing course.

Tuition in CUNY Start is \$75 and in Math Start it is \$35, which was mentioned. This fee includes books and materials. Students do not use financial aid to cover the cost, allowing their financial aid funds to be used for their credit courses when they complete the program.

And as Donna mentioned, there is also a strong partnership between CUNY Start and ASAP. A pipeline is in place for eligible students who complete CUNY Start to go directly into the ASAP program upon reducing or eliminating their remedial needs. Students do well in ASAP after transitioning from a structured program as CUNY Start where the expectations are similar.

CUNY community college students really benefit from the advisement, academic and financial

support that the programs offer. For many of our students the opportunity is life-changing. On behalf of BMCC and the CUNY Start and Math Start programs, I would like to thank the City of New York for supporting these important programs. I also appreciate the invitation to come and speak with you today. Thank you.

OMAR ALONSO: Hello everyone. My name is Omar Alonso. I was born in Mexico and I got my GED in Spanish four years ago with the help of Union Settlement Association in East Harlem. I live in Brooklyn and I am now in my second year at BMCC. I am a computer science major and I hope to do computer programming in the field of electrical engineering.

In the fall of 2015, I decided to attend college, and after many years out of school, I started to think about my future and decided to apply to CUNY. I decided on BMCC because it was more affordable than other colleges.

I learned about the CUNY Start program during the orientation and I attended an information session and I learned that the program was only \$75. I knew that I really needed it because I didn't pass

the CUNY Assessment Tests in math in and writing.
The \$75 fee was the best investment of my life.

When I first started in CUNY Start, it was really frightening because I didn't know what to expect. I am not a traditional student; I hadn't been in school for so many years, so everything was completely new for me. I didn't know what a GPA was, an essay, credit classes; what being a full-time student meant. All of this was completely empty words to me. The beginning in CUNY Start was very challenging because I had to work at the same pace as my classmates and that really gave me headaches thinking of doing good and keeping the rhythm. But my writing teacher Daimys and my math teacher Clyde and my classmates were very patient with me. Since the beginning, the CUNY Start staff emphasized respecting each other and for the first time I felt kind of weird because everyone was being nice with me; instead of bothering me, they were helping me out. Daimys helped me become a better writer and Clyde helped me understand algebra. I didn't know any of it when I started. At the end of the program I passed both writing and the math exams. CUNY Start also helped me learn a lot about college. While I

was in CUNY Start, I was part of a leadership group. The leadership group inspired me to join the Dream Team at BMCC. The Dream Team is a club for undocumented and DACA students.

The CUNY Start seminar that was taught by my advisor Kim, she helped me learn how to navigate the college and learn more about the campus. During seminar we did a presentation on our major and career plans and goals. This was a good experience for me because I had never given a presentation or a speech before and now I'm giving this one today. I knew that I wanted to work with computers and technology and this program helped me to figure out that I wanted to be a computer science major.

At the end of CUNY Start the hard work paid off -- my writing, reading and math skills were so much better than before, and this means a lot to me because I went from nothing to something. I gained confidence and I was ready to start college on the same level, just like a regular student. The CUNY Start program is well designed because it allows the new students to learn about everything they need to know about the college. I know I still have a lot to learn, but I know that I am on the right track and

I'm still a peer mentor for the new CUNY Start students. I want to help students who are just like me as they are entering the college.

When I finished CUNY Start, the program connected me to ASAP. My CUNY Start advisor Kim also told me about the Dream.US scholarship, which I was awarded in my first semester. The Dream.US only pays for tuition, so the financial support that I get from ASAP, like the MetroCard and help with books, is really helpful to me and I don't have to be worried about how I am going to get to school or pay for my textbooks. It allows me to focus on my school work. The advisement that ASAP provides makes it a lot easier for students. ASAP also provides tutors for my classes and I really take advantage of that.

Thank you for your time and listening to my story, and I would like to thank CUNY, BMCC and all of those who made this possible for offering CUNY Start to me and I really hope the program will be expanded to serve more students just like me. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON BARRON: Thank you, great job, really great job, thank you so much; I'm glad

you're here, you enriched the panel by your personal story.

I want to thank the panel for coming and I do have some questions and my colleague, Council Member Vacca has questions also.

So as you talk about CUNY Start, what is the cost to operate CUNY Start?

DONNA LINDERMAN: So CUNY Start costs about \$2100 per student for the semester, and that's for the cost of all the teachers, the advisors, the folks that administer the program, any materials -- that's a fully-loaded cost.

CHAIRPERSON BARRON: And how many participants do you presently have in the CUNY Start program?

DONNA LINDERMAN: So on average, this year we're serving about 3,300 students in CUNY Start and you know we're probably going to serve about 800 students in Math Start this fiscal year.

CHAIRPERSON BARRON: So is every student who's interested in participating in CUNY Start given the opportunity to participate or is there a cutoff; do you have a cap to a limited number?

DONNA LINDERMAN: So we do set enrollment targets with each college and some of the programs fill up faster than others. I'll let Lashallah talk to you about kind of the enrollment patterns at BMCC, for example, but we try to offer a combination of both full-time and part-time programs so that all students who want to participate can participate. We try not to turn any student away that wants to be in the program. BMCC is our largest program and I think a couple of yours fill up quite quickly. Do you want to talk about your patterns at BMCC?

LASHALLAH BURGESS: Absolutely. Yes and so to answer your question, there are enrollment targets in reading, writing and math and there is a score range where students have to fit in between; it's usually on a lower level and we see students who have triple remedial needs as well as the lowest level of math at BMCC. The pattern that we're seeing is that there tends to be a higher demand for math classes; that's changing over the semester and we've noticed that the trend is becoming that more students have reading and writing needs. So this semester we're focusing on expanding more in math, for the Math Start that's opened up, and also expanding

reading and writing in CUNY Start rather than Math Start.

CHAIRPERSON BARRON: So I heard you reference a score range; is there a minimum score that a student has to achieve in order to be considered for CUNY Start, is...

DONNA LINDERMAN: Can I defer to Laura Zan in the audience **[inaudible]**...? [crosstalk]

CHAIRPERSON BARRON: Sure. You can come up. [background comments]

DONNA LINDERMAN: You'll have to be sworn in.

[background comment]

CHAIRPERSON BARRON: You'll have to be sworn in and we'll...

DONNA LINDERMAN: Yeah. Yeah.

CHAIRPERSON BARRON: No problem, come.

DONNA LINDERMAN: I'll just... I'll give you the general and then she can give you...

[crosstalk]

CHAIRPERSON BARRON: Okay.

DONNA LINDERMAN: the specifics. So for the... to participate in the full-time program students have to have failed the math portion of the CUNY

1
2 Assessment Test and either reading or writing. But
3 the colleges do establish target score ranges, aiming
4 to target students and serve students with the
5 highest level of need. So if a student falls at a
6 cut point, for example in writing, where they could
7 go into ASAP, we would want the student to go into
8 ASAP. They would not be precluded from joining CUNY
9 Start if it was financially more beneficial to them,
10 but the program tries to target students who are at
11 the lower end of the Assessment Test scores. So
12 actually, Laura's here and she can tell you the
13 specific CAT [sic] scores for BMCC.

14 CHAIRPERSON BARRON: Welcome... [crosstalk]

15 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Will you...

16 CHAIRPERSON BARRON: we're just going to
17 swear you in.

18 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Right. Raise your
19 right hand, please. Do you affirm to tell the truth,
20 the whole truth and nothing but the truth in your
21 testimony before this committee and to respond
22 honestly to the council members' questions?

23 LAURA ZAN: **[inaudible]**

24 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you.
25

CHAIRPERSON BARRON: Thank you. So can you expand a little bit more on that?

[background comments]

LAURA ZAN: Sure.

CHAIRPERSON BARRON: Give us your name, please.

LAURA ZAN: My name is Laura Zan; I'm the Lead Advisor at the BMCC CUNY Start program.

CHAIRPERSON BARRON: Okay.

LAURA ZAN: So we recently changed to the ACCUPLACER scores -- that's a new test that the college started administering -- and... [interpose]

CHAIRPERSON BARRON: Could you say that again, ACCU...

LAURA ZAN: ACCUPLACER.

CHAIRPERSON BARRON: PLACER.

LAURA ZAN: Yes.

CHAIRPERSON BARRON: Okay.

LAURA ZAN: So for the writing test, for example, students need a 56 to pass the CATW test and this one has remained the same because the CATW has remained the same and our cutoff is a 30. So a student can go anywhere above a 56 and then they get

into English 101; anywhere below that, they are in any of the remedial classes, and a 30 is the cutoff.

For the math, the student has to score anywhere below a 56, so we take any level of math that is remedial.

CHAIRPERSON BARRON: Okay, so when you say the cutoff is 30... [crosstalk]

LAURA ZAN: Uhm-hm.

CHAIRPERSON BARRON: in order to be considered for CUNY Start you have to score 30 or below?

LAURA ZAN: Thirty or above.

CHAIRPERSON BARRON: Thirty or above. What about students who score below 30?

LAURA ZAN: We accept the students on a case by case basis; it really depends. Sometimes a student might be an ESL student and that's why they have below a 30, in which case we might refer them to the CLIP program, which is another program in the continuing ed system which could be really much better for a student who is an ESL student who needs a lot more, you know, English as a second language help for 25 hours a week first and then we tell them, okay, you know once you finish anywhere between one

to three semesters with CLIP and you have a lot more fluency in English, you can come back to CUNY Start and continue, should you still need reading and writing or math instruction.

CHAIRPERSON BARRON: And what are the fees associated with the CLIP program?

LAURA ZAN: The... [background comment] oh great.

CHAIRPERSON BARRON: Okay.

DONNA LINDERMAN: Actually, CUNY Start was heavily modeled on CLIP; it's also a \$75 fee, 25 hours a week, and it's the same idea, a very intensively, purposely designed program let by master teachers.

CHAIRPERSON BARRON: So are all students that are 30 or below referred to the CLIP program; do they have that opportunity to participate; do they know about it; how are they informed; do you just, as a matter of course do that...? [crosstalk]

DONNA LINDERMAN: So CLIP has existed for more than 25 years, it's a very, very well-known program. If for some reason a student did not know about it and it was determined, for example, based on their writing score, that they were an ESL student;

the program staff would let them know about CLIP and refer them to that program.

CHAIRPERSON BARRON: So CLIP is specifically designed for ESL?

DONNA LINDERMAN: Yes, it's CUNY Language Immersion Program and it's specifically for students who need to improve their academic English in order to perform successfully in our degree programs.

CHAIRPERSON BARRON: What about those students who are not ESL students but who scored 20 on that Assessment Test, are they eligible to apply for any of the programs that CUNY has?

DONNA LINDERMAN: So if you have a high school diploma or GED... [crosstalk]

CHAIRPERSON BARRON: Yeah, well... [laugh]

DONNA LINDERMAN: you can... you can... you can certainly matriculate and as Laura and Lashallah were explaining, we do take students on a case by case basis. But CUNY Start is an intensive program, especially if you're in the full-time program; it does require 25 hours a week, intensive group work, a lot of writing; we want to make sure it's a good fit for the student, and if it is determined that it is a

good fit; the student would be welcomed into the program.

CHAIRPERSON BARRON: I have lots more questions, but I'm going to allow my colleague, and I see we've been joined by Council Member Cabrera as well. We're going to ask Council Member Vacca to pose his questions.

COUNCIL MEMBER VACCA: Thank you. Thank you. I wanted to ask; what is the rate? What is your retention rate; how many students drop out? I know that what you're offering is intensive...

DONNA LINDERMAN: Yes.

COUNCIL MEMBER VACCA: and I wanted to know what do we do to retain students and what is the rate of dropout?

DONNA LINDERMAN: So CUNY Start, on average, has an 86% completion rate, so 86% of the students who are officially enrolled finish the program; it's very, very high.

COUNCIL MEMBER VACCA: So these are very committee students.

DONNA LINDERMAN: They are.

COUNCIL MEMBER VACCA: Are any of them taking a remedial course at the same time that

they're in CUNY Start; are they focusing on math, for example, but taking a writing remedial course, or tell me about that connection.

DONNA LINDERMAN: Sure. No, students that join CUNY Start defer their matriculation for the semester they're with us. So because the program is so intensive, either 25 hours a week in the full-time program or 12 hours a week in the part-time program, it would be very, very challenging to also be taking a credit or a remedial class on the degree side of the house, so we ask them to defer their matriculation, to work with us, and then the program helps them formally matriculate, ideally, into ASAP the following semester.

COUNCIL MEMBER VACCA: Do you have people who are instructors in the program who are linguistically sensitive to the many cultures we have in the City; are they able to work with students who speak different languages and that may be a barrier for them to have the writing skills that they should have, etc.?

DONNA LINDERMAN: Right. So it's not a requirement that the teachers in our program are trained as ESL teachers, but I can tell you that we

1 screen our teachers very, very carefully for cultural
2 sensitivity, they go through a full semester of
3 training in the classroom of a lead teacher, or in
4 the case of an advisor, side by side with one of our
5 experienced advisors, and one of the kind of central
6 tenets of our program is that we are deeply sensitive
7 to our students' backgrounds, you know, regardless of
8 what those might be -- linguistic, cultural -- so
9 that every student is treated as sensitively and
10 respectfully as possible while they're in the program
11 and then guided into a degree program on the credit
12 side of the house.
13

14 COUNCIL MEMBER VACCA: Do you offer the
15 day care services at CUNY while students are enrolled
16 here? Because they may not technically be enrolled
17 in the college per se; are they eligible to have day
18 care services to assist them during this period?

19 LASHALLAH BURGESS: Unfortunately,
20 because the students do not pay the college fees,
21 their children aren't eligible for the day care
22 services because of insurance purposes and that sort
23 of thing. So the students pay the \$75 fee which
24 covers the cost of the program, but it doesn't
25 include the day care services on campus.

DONNA LINDERMAN: I can tell you that if the... once the students matriculate, those services -- and most of them do -- then those services would become available to them as matriculated students.

COUNCIL MEMBER VACCA: The Chair had spoken to you about numbers of students enrolled, but I'm afraid to ask this question because it has fiscal implications. But what is the need; what do you perceive to be the need should this program be... I'm sure you have... is there a waiting list for this program is the first question and how many people are we turning away because of funding; that comes to mind right away?

DONNA LINDERMAN: Right. So we currently are not turning students away; we have the capacity to serve students who want to join the program; the program is optional, and remember, we recruit the students when they're on their way in the door as admitted students. So if I came to BMCC and I took my CUNY Assessment Test and I was determined to be a good fit for CUNY Start, Lashallah and her staff would let me know about the program, its benefits, and I would then get to decide, do I want to defer my matriculation and go into the program. So there is a

1 high need, about 15% of our CUNY Community College
2 students -- based on our fall 2016 data for first-
3 time freshmen -- had three levels of remedial need,
4 so that's about 2,500 students, but of those 2,500
5 students -- I'm just using that as an example --
6 there might be some students in that group that
7 think, as Omar did, that this is the best thing since
8 sliced bread and yes, this is for me; I want to sign
9 up right away, and there may be other students that
10 say I don't want to defer my matriculation; I want to
11 jump in and take regular remedial courses and take my
12 chances. So at the moment we don't have a waiting
13 list, but I think there is a need for this program,
14 there will always be students coming to CUNY that
15 have significant levels of need and a program like
16 this, to our mind, is the right fit for a student who
17 would benefit from a very intensive, carefully
18 designed and well-delivered program before they
19 formally matriculate.
20

21 COUNCIL MEMBER VACCA: Is there a
22 counseling component or are there counseling services
23 available to these students?

24 DONNA LINDERMAN: Absolutely. So the
25 program has a fully integrated advisement component,

1 so Omar talked about his advisor, Kim, who led his
2 college success seminar, so our advisors teach a
3 weekly college success seminar that's designed to
4 help students learn about the college, to understand
5 what to expect when they matriculate, terminology,
6 the various offices and resources on the campus; it
7 also helps them think about their majors and what
8 their possible career paths might be. In Omar's
9 case, he was interested in computers and technology
10 and through the seminar and one on one advisement; he
11 made a decision to become a computer science major in
12 anticipation of pursuing his interest in electrical
13 engineering as a field. But Lashallah was a former
14 advisor before she became our assistant director;
15 I'll let her describe a little bit to you about the
16 individual advisement and group advisement services
17 specifically.
18

19 LASHALLAH BURGESS: So the advisement
20 component is also very intensive, the advisors meet
21 with students on a weekly basis and our advisors
22 carry a caseload of 75 students each, so they meet
23 with students to do group work in the classroom in a
24 teaching setting as well as meeting with students
25 individually -- and I can't tell you how often they

1 meet with students on a one on one basis weekly. But
2 the advisement curriculum is also designed very
3 carefully to help students to get to understand
4 college language and to become adapted to college
5 life, to learn about offices and departments on
6 campus that students may not be familiar with; some
7 of the terms, like Bursar or Registrar are sometimes
8 foreign to students when they enter college, so the
9 advisors are helping them to learn to navigate the
10 college and to visit these offices, to learn to
11 advocate for themselves and to understand what
12 questions are important to ask when visiting these
13 offices and what to expect.

14 And so it is an intensive model;
15 students, like I said, meet with the advisors
16 throughout the entire program on a weekly basis and
17 then the advisors, at the end of the program, when
18 students complete the program, also help students to
19 register for their classes to make sure that they
20 land in the appropriate classes.

21 COUNCIL MEMBER VACCA: I have to tell you
22 a lot of this sounds like -- there are similarities
23 to College Now -- I taught College Now many years ago
24
25

at CUNY, and that's where high school... as you know,
that's where high school students are acclimated...

LASHALLAH BURGESS: Uhm-hm.

COUNCIL MEMBER VACCA: and this seems
like the counseling component is similar. But I did
want to ask; how many people would you define -- you
know when we think of students, we think of students
as coming out of high school, but how many students
are adults, returning to get... you know, who have
gotten their GED maybe later in life; what are we
looking at insomuch as the **[inaudible]** is concerned...?
[crosstalk]

DONNA LINDERMAN: So... So we know... I have
to get back to you with the specifics; in our part-
time program, that's where we see slightly older
students, so 56% of the students in our part-time
program are under the age of 20, so more traditional
age. So the remaining 44% are slightly older
students who have been out of school for a little
while, and in our full-time program it's about 20% of
students who might be over the age of 20 who might've
been out of school for a bit.

LASHALLAH BURGESS: I just want to add
that we have a very close relationship with the adult

literacy program at BMCC and we recruit directly from that program as well, so we see many adult students, as Donna said, who generally enroll into the part-time program, because they're adults and they have outside obligations.

COUNCIL MEMBER VACCA: Thank you both very much. Continue the good work.

CHAIRPERSON BARRON: Thank you Council Member. I have additional questions. Your information on your website about CUNY Start lists the colleges by program and I see that included in your list you have Guttman, indicating there are 48 students, but I don't see Guttman listed as one of the sites. So that's the first question.

DONNA LINDERMAN: So Guttman was part of our Math Start pilots...

CHAIRPERSON BARRON: Okay.

DONNA LINDERMAN: in 2014 and 2015, and then we ran a fall program for them this past year; because Guttman is not currently recruiting year-round, it didn't make sense to keep the program there on a permanent basis, because they don't admit students in the spring. We remain open to possibly continuing to run Math Start programs, but we

currently don't consider that a permanent CUNY Start site for that reason.

CHAIRPERSON BARRON: And in looking at the other colleges and the enrollment numbers that they have, I'm surprised that Medgar Evers College only has 251, where that's a school that really has admissions criteria that is lower than many of the other...

DONNA LINDERMAN: Right.

CHAIRPERSON BARRON: colleges, so how is it that there are only 251 at Medgar?

DONNA LINDERMAN: So that is one of our newer programs and we hope to grow the program; in fact, it is going to be growing this fall. But some of it is based on capacity, so when the program began, we didn't -- we have to have enough staff trained to run the program, so we don't just go out and hire teachers, they have to spend a full semester in training in the classroom of one of our lead teachers and the same thing with someone who's an advisor who then might coordinate one of our smaller programs, which is the case at Medgar. So it is one of our newer programs, it just started a couple of years ago; we absolutely hope to grow the program.

And actually, I was just there last week talking about ASAP and CUNY Start and the college is committed to growing the CUNY Start program as well.

CHAIRPERSON BARRON: Good. And I heard reference to preparation of the staff and that there's a cultural sensitivity that's developed amongst the teachers; where in your curriculum would I see a reflection that the curriculum reflects the cultural diversity of the students that are a part of CUNY?

DONNA LINDERMAN: So I think that would probably be best reflected in our advisement curriculum explicitly and I would have to get back to you; would have to... our math curriculum is 900 pages and our reading and writing curriculum is about 500 pages, and advisement also several hundred, so I would be very happy to provide curriculum documents to you, examples of training that reflects that... [crosstalk]

CHAIRPERSON BARRON: Okay, I would appreciate that.

DONNA LINDERMAN: Yeah, of course.

CHAIRPERSON BARRON: You know, I'm a teacher at heart, so I'm always looking at that... [crosstalk]

DONNA LINDERMAN: I know you are. Yes.

CHAIRPERSON BARRON: so thank you for that.

DONNA LINDERMAN: Yes.

CHAIRPERSON BARRON: I have a couple of other questions. So your data also says that of the 6,860 full-time students, 5,909 completed the program between fall '09 and fall '15. Do you have any information as to those students that did not complete the program; do you have any information as to students who took the tests twice and didn't pass -- which I understand is twice **[inaudible]** that it's offered in your program; do you have any statistics on that?

DONNA LINDERMAN: You mean how they did after they left us...? [crosstalk]

CHAIRPERSON BARRON: Yes.

DONNA LINDERMAN: I don't have them with me; I would be... [crosstalk]

CHAIRPERSON BARRON: Okay.

DONNA LINDERMAN: very happy to provide them to you. We do know that students that complete the program with us matriculate in very high numbers -- Lashallah mentioned it -- BMCC and their Math Start program, for example, is 95%; on average, across all programs, about 80% of our students complete and matriculate. I cannot tell you the similar statistic for students who did not pass or who left us, but we can certainly look into that.

CHAIRPERSON BARRON: Okay. And are students bound to remain at the campus where they took the CUNY Start program or is there a capacity for them to...

DONNA LINDERMAN: They're not bound; most do. The vast majority of students stay at the college where they were originally admitted and then participated in CUNY Start, but they are absolutely not bound. I think we see about a 5% kind of mobility rate across the program where a student might go to another college when they matriculate and that's perfectly fine if that's what they would like to do.

LASHALLAH BURGESS: And just to add to that; when students do leave CUNY Start and go to

another college immediately, it's generally to go to a senior level college, so for senior level college, for example, like John Jay doesn't accept students who have remedial needs, those students would come into a CUNY Start program to eliminate those needs and then go on to the senior level college. But as Donna said, it's a very small percentage.

CHAIRPERSON BARRON: That's good to know that they're not limited to remaining at the community college if they know that they want to go to a four-year college. That's good... good to know.

And then you answered the question -- CUNY senior colleges do not offer any remedial courses; is that correct?

DONNA LINDERMAN: They don't.

CHAIRPERSON BARRON: Okay.

DONNA LINDERMAN: There's... in 1999 -- I know this is a matter of concern for you -- and in 1991, remediation was relegated to the community colleges.

CHAIRPERSON BARRON: Although Harvard and Yale I believe do offer remedial classes for students who are coming in, just to put that on the record

[inaudible]... [crosstalk]

DONNA LINDERMAN: Yep.

CHAIRPERSON BARRON: And are there fee waivers -- we know... you know, for most of us, \$75, oh, \$75, that's great, but are there fee waivers that are offered to students that don't have the \$75?

DONNA LINDERMAN: So to date, the \$75 fee for CUNY Start or \$35 has not been a large barrier. If a student did come to us and say I can't pay this, two things would happen, one is; we would want to talk with the student who had -- remember, they had planned to matriculate...

CHAIRPERSON BARRON: Right.

DONNA LINDERMAN: they had planned to become a student that would have transportation and textbook costs, as you so eloquently stated in your introductory remarks, that are much more expensive sometimes than the actual tuition. So first we would want to have a conversation with the student of, how were you planning on funding your education as a matriculated student if a \$75 fee is an issue? If they needed time to pay it, we would allow them that time; if an agency or somebody else wanted to pay it; that would be fine. In rare cases where a student really did have a problem paying it, we might waive

1 it. But we want to make sure that the students, you
2 know, understand that going to school is not
3 completely free, that there... this is a modest fee and
4 we would hope that they would be able to cover it.
5 But if there was an issue where a fee really could
6 not be paid, we would find a way to waive it for the
7 student.
8

9 CHAIRPERSON BARRON: That's great. I
10 have a few more questions. Now you said that the
11 passing score was 56; is that 56% or is that 56
12 questions out of 70 questions? What is that 56;
13 that's 56% out of 100%? [background comment]

14 DONNA LINDERMAN: It's... It's... Yeah, I
15 don't...

16 LASHALLAH BURGESS: It's on a scale. It
17 isn't a percentage out of 100. The way CUNY... and as
18 Laura said, it recently changed, so students are now
19 taking a new test, but on the CATW, the way CUNY
20 scores the exam is that there are several chief
21 readers who read the student's writing as they come
22 in and each of those readers gives the student a
23 score and so 56 is the passing score for the writing,
24 but it isn't out of 100%.

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2 CHAIRPERSON BARRON: Okay. And the math
3 is the same thing; it's not 56% out of 100%?

4 LASHALLAH BURGESS: It isn't, and I
5 honestly don't understand **[inaudible]**... [crosstalk]

6 CHAIRPERSON BARRON: 'Cause 56% sounds
7 really low.

8 DONNA LINDERMAN: It's uh... Yeah, it's...
9 [crosstalk]

10 CHAIRPERSON BARRON: Fifty-six sounds low
11 in thinking of a percentage...

12 DONNA LINDERMAN: Sure.

13 CHAIRPERSON BARRON: so that's why I
14 wanted to know.

15 LASHALLAH BURGESS: It's on a scale.

16 DONNA LINDERMAN: Yeah, it is on a scale.
17 We can get you... that... [crosstalk]

18 CHAIRPERSON BARRON: Okay.

19 DONNA LINDERMAN: that's not any of our
20 direct area [sic], but we could absolutely get you...
21 [crosstalk]

22 CHAIRPERSON BARRON: Okay.

23 DONNA LINDERMAN: the scoring rule book
24 so you have a better understanding of how it's
25 scored... [crosstalk]

CHAIRPERSON BARRON: Okay, great. And then, if you could perhaps get to us the -- oh I asked the question about what happens if a student fails the test twice, what happens to that student?

DONNA LINDERMAN: Oh, so the student can matriculate and take regular remedial coursework at the college, so...

CHAIRPERSON BARRON: But they're not able to remain in CUNY Start?

DONNA LINDERMAN: No. So CUNY Start is not really set up to be a repeat program; if a student did the part-time reading and writing program and then the next semester wanted to do the part-time math program -- for example, if money really was an issue and they really wanted to preserve there financially; that's fine, but we don't set the program up so the students can repeat it. You know, the idea is to help them enter the college, so they would be guided by program staff to what the appropriate remedial intervention would be for them on the credit side of the house.

CHAIRPERSON BARRON: And did you tell us how many CUNY Start instructors are employed and what's their qualifications; what's their academic;

what are their credentials; what do they bring to this?

DONNA LINDERMAN: So we have 98 teachers across the program right now -- 60 math teachers and 38 reading and writing teachers. We look for teachers with instructional backgrounds that have at least a bachelor's -- master's preferred -- who have taught in developmental education, adult literacy, DOE, so we don't have a minimum number of years of experience, but they have to have at least a couple of years of teaching experience, but more than anything, what we look for are instructors that are open-minded to improving their professional practice; to teaching in a highly collaborative setting, because it doesn't matter how many years of training or experience they have; they have to go through our training. So we look for people who are open-minded and willing to learn a new curriculum and potentially way of teaching.

CHAIRPERSON BARRON: And then in terms of -- I heard you say that each instructor has an advisement for 75 students; what's the ratio in the instructional portion of the class; what's the ratio?

DONNA LINDERMAN: So each teacher would be assigned to teach two classes...

CHAIRPERSON BARRON: And what's the size of the class?

DONNA LINDERMAN: Twenty-five, and the advisors have a maximum caseload of 75 students. So if you think of our full-time program -- Lashallah will probably explain this better than me -- it's a pod where there's a -- in the full-time program there would be a reading/writing teacher, a math teacher, math tutors, writing assistants, as well as an advisor.

CHAIRPERSON BARRON: Okay, so those are the staff people for the program? Could you give that to me again?

DONNA LINDERMAN: Oh sure. So we have reading and writing teachers, math teachers, we have writing assistants and math tutors, as well as our advisors, and then we have the program administrators at the college as well as in my office, which includes a total of 10 professional development coordinators; these are the staff that design the curriculum, train the teachers and advisors and are out across the system on any given day observing teachers, giving

feedback, running trainings; delivering professional development.

CHAIRPERSON BARRON: So do you have a number for the total staff that are a part of the CUNY Start program; what's that total number...?

[crosstalk]

DONNA LINDERMAN: Yes, it's currently 229 staff across all colleges and the central office.

CHAIRPERSON BARRON: Okay. And the requirements -- well you can get them to me, the requirements to be a math tutor or a program administrator; if you could get those to me, I'd appreciate that... [crosstalk]

DONNA LINDERMAN: Sure. Yeah, we... we can send you job descriptions if that would be helpful... [interpose]

CHAIRPERSON BARRON: Great. And then also, if you could send me the demographic makeup of the CUNY Start students, in terms of age, the class [inaudible], the race, the gender...

DONNA LINDERMAN: Yep.

CHAIRPERSON BARRON: if they've graduated from a New York City school or if they came perhaps

from a foreign high school; that would be...

[crosstalk]

DONNA LINDERMAN: Right.

CHAIRPERSON BARRON: information that we would... all of that data would be great. And I certainly want to commend the student that was here. I got into all of these questions and I... I wanted to particularly commend you and to encourage you -- commend you for stepping out and deciding that you wanted to explore whatever opportunities were there, and encourage you to continue to go on, and I thought I heard you say something to the effect of well, I was nothing and now I'm something. I just want to say to you; I don't believe that any person is nothing; I think that perhaps people don't recognize what their value or their worth is, but certainly every person has value and worth and it's a part of us as a society to help them realize what that it is and to maximize that, and I hope that you achieve all that you've set out to do and appreciate what you're doing; also, to encourage other students to be a part of that.

And I thought I had another question... Oh, thank you. I knew there was something else. What

1 impact do you think the Excelsior Scholarship is
2 going to have on students that are in your CUNY Start
3 program?
4

5 DONNA LINDERMAN: So a lot remains to be
6 seen about... [crosstalk]

7 CHAIRPERSON BARRON: Yeah, it's a very
8 metamorphosis [sic]...

9 DONNA LINDERMAN: what the specifics...

10 CHAIRPERSON BARRON: out there, it's very
11 vague.

12 DONNA LINDERMAN: yes, will be of
13 Excelsior. What I can say is; I believe that CUNY
14 Start will help cue more students up to be eligible
15 for the program, based on what we know now, because
16 we will be helping more students eliminate or
17 significantly reduce their remedial needs so that
18 they would then potentially be eligible to be... you
19 know, at the starting line to earn the 30 credits a
20 year. Now I know a lot remains to be figured out
21 about it, but programs like CUNY Start help students
22 like Omar and others wipe out their remedial need,
23 and that's very critical so that when they start
24 their degree studies they can build degree momentum,
25 which means credit accumulation.

CHAIRPERSON BARRON: In terms of those students at senior colleges, realizing that they generally have higher standards of admission, and that the Excelsior program will perhaps offer an opportunity for students of families with an income of \$100,000, do you anticipate that there will be a difference in the ethnic makeup of students going into CUNY based on perhaps utilize the Excelsior Scholarship and that we might see diminished numbers of low-income students who are Black, Latino, Asian?

DONNA LINDERMAN: I have no way of predicting that; I know that... based on what we know now, CUNY is not anticipating any access limitations based on Excelsior, but so much remains to be seen, so it's a question I can't answer directly.

CHAIRPERSON BARRON: Okay. I think that's it; if I have other questions, I will certainly... Oh, I'm sorry. We've been joined by Council Member Jumaane Williams; I had all of my focus here. Do you have questions that you would like to offer the CUNY Start program?

COUNCIL MEMBER WILLIAMS: No, thank you, Madam Chair, but I do want to just put on the record my hesitation with the Governor's new Excelsior

1 program [background comment] the so-called
2 "progressive budget," which I don't think it was at
3 all, and I don't think the Excelsior program's going
4 to be much benefit to CUNY, particularly with the
5 four-year graduation that has to happen. So I'm very
6 disappointed on what's being touted now, and even
7 though we have pictures with Bernie Sanders,
8 [background comment] I don't know that that's what he
9 had in mind, as well as it doesn't affect the most
10 low-income student, so I just want to make sure I put
11 that on the record and we shouldn't give... we should
12 give credit where credit is due, but we need to put
13 it in perspective and not give too much credit. So
14 thank you.

16 CHAIRPERSON BARRON: Thank you. I'll
17 have to share with you my comments about the
18 Excelsior Scholarship program, which differ from the
19 Op Ed that was in the *Daily News* by both the
20 Chancellor of CUNY and SUNY. I'll share that with
21 you as well. [background comments] Oh okay. Good,
22 I look forward to that; I think we'll probably be on
23 a similar wavelength. Okay, thank you so much for
24 your testimony; I do appreciate your coming and
25 sharing the information with us. Doing great work,

we appreciate it; we encourage you, and we hope that the City Council will be able to continue to support you and expand the program and the work that you're doing. [background comment] Thank you. [background comments]

And we'll call the next panel; it's Robin Ozz -- I hope I pronounced that right -- and Michael Weiss. They were here; will they please come forward? [background comments] [pause] [background comments]

Thank you and welcome. I'm going to ask my counsel to swear you in.

COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Please raise your right hand. Do you affirm to tell the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth in your testimony before this committee and to respond honestly to the council members' questions?

MICHAEL WEISS: I do.

COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON BARRON: Thank you; you may begin.

ROBIN OZZ: Good morning Chairperson Barron, members of the Higher Education Committee, and colleagues.

I am Robin Ozz, President of the National Association for Developmental Education, or NADE, a professional organization that includes almost 2500 faculty and learning support professionals from across the United State. NADE seeks to improve the theory and practice of developmental education at all levels of the educational spectrum, the professional capabilities of developmental educators, and the design of programs to help all students achieve their educational goals.

To that end, it is with great pleasure that I come to testify today on behalf of NADE in wholehearted support of the CUNY Start program. CUNY Start epitomizes the holistic paradigm of true developmental education which addresses the needs of the student whether they are cognitive, affective, financial, social, or academic.

Remedial education has been under great scrutiny, especially since the advent of the completion agenda in 2010, and unfortunately the most popular reforms have not been designed and implemented by developmental educators who understand that silver-bullet academic solutions do not work.

That is why CUNY Start brings hope to my field -- it addresses the whole student.

In this era of bottom-line, one-size-fits all, fix them and get them through education reforms, CUNY Start stands apart. There are several popular one-shot programs that address academic deficits only, but the beauty of CUNY Start is that it is a holistic program that builds on strengths; that instead of just filling perceived gaps, it builds successful college students who feel as if they belong in college.

Other strengths that research shows work with helping students succeed:

1. Program students do not feel as if they are being labeled remedial and not smart; instead, they are CUNY Start students. Words matter, especially to students who are taking a risk even by stepping onto a college campus.

2. The program is low cost. Research shows most students do not continue in remedial courses because of finances.

3. It is rigorous. Students are taught college-level material and treated as capable

1 students. They are not pandered to and treated as
2 stupid.

3
4 4. It is holistic. Not only are
5 academics addressed, but college and financial
6 literacy are covered as well.

7 Finally, students build a network of
8 support. We know this is the one quality of any
9 program that will retain students and contribute to
10 their success to the greatest degree. And I have a
11 citation here, but in my rush, I didn't give you the
12 full citation; I will be glad to do that. Students
13 feel as if they have a family on campus, that the
14 program builds their confidence and they are
15 encouraged never to give up.

16 If I could redirect all the time, talent,
17 and treasure now spent on misdirected remedial
18 reforms into one area, I would redirect them into
19 holistic programs such as CUNY Start and ASAP as
20 well. With these programs, CUNY is an exemplar of
21 developmental education, and I thank you on behalf of
22 my organization and my field.

23 CHAIRPERSON BARRON: Thank you.
24
25

MICHAEL WEISS: Thank you for the opportunity to offer some thoughts here on CUNY Start.

My name is Michael Weiss, and I am a senior researcher from MDRC; we're a nonprofit, nonpartisan social policy research organization that is dedicated to learning what works to improve policies and programs that affect the poor.

Just over a decade and a half ago, MDRC began conducting rigorous evaluations in higher education, including the first ever randomized controlled trial at a community college, here in New York City at Kingsborough Community College. Within the City of New York alone, MDRC has partnered on projects to evaluate the effectiveness of several different programs here at CUNY, including learning communities, performance-based scholarships, CUNY ASAP, LaGuardia's GED Bridge program, and now CUNY Start. This longstanding relationship I think demonstrates CUNY's willingness to partner with an independent third-party to allow programs to undergo gold standard evaluations so the CUNY can then rely on credible evidence to inform its practice.

I'll skip over some of the written testimony that has been discussed already, including the challenges of remedial education and some of the details of the program, but just want to highlight a few things, and one is that CUNY Start is a markedly different approach to helping students who have developmental education requirements, both with respect to the student experience and its theory of action. So as mentioned earlier, students who are assessed as needing developmental education coursework who are in CUNY Start focus exclusively and intensively on remedial education during a student's first semester in postsecondary education. This is in stark contrast to the more typical approach where students take a mix of remedial coursework, but they also sometimes take college-level coursework that don't have requirements in subject areas. And as a result, it's expected that after one semester students in CUNY Start are going to do much better in terms of their developmental coursework, but they're not going to have made any progress in their college-level coursework yet, and this is sort of a tradeoff and it will be very

interesting, at least to us, to see whether or not this tradeoff in the long term seems to be worth it.

According to CUNY's internal analyses of the program, it has yielded promising results for participating students, but as noted earlier, due to CUNY's commitment to an independent, external evaluation, MDRC (the company I represent), CUNY, and the Community College Research Center (CCRC) at Teachers College, Columbia University, are partnering to determine the effect of CUNY Start on students' academic success, compared to the usual courses and services offered at CUNY's colleges. This project is a large-scale, randomized, controlled trial evaluation, and it is financially supported by the federal government's Institute of Education Sciences. The evaluation will also examine in addition to the effect on academic progress, it will examine how the program is implemented and the costs; some of which have been raised today.

So what questions will we answer? This evaluation will provide rigorous evidence about the effect of CUNY Start on students' academic outcomes, relative to the more traditional pathways that students take if they are not in CUNY Start but have

these same remedial needs. And the kind of questions we'll answer are:

What is the effect of CUNY Start on students' academic outcomes? Do the effects vary across different student populations, including those who attend full-time vs. part-time, as well across different settings? So as mentioned earlier, this is operating in many colleges, so we'll try to see, are the effects the same or different across the different colleges implementing this program.

We'll also look into how CUNY Start is implemented; the degree to which the model is implemented with fidelity, so you know, are they sort of doing what they set out to do with respect to program services? And then also, how different are these services actually from the kind of more traditional services that are offered to students in regular developmental courses? And then finally, we'll look at the costs associated with CUNY Start and how these costs compare to those effects.

So I think answers to these questions are critical for ongoing work at CUNY to improve the outcomes of students referred to remediation. Moreover, they are also important to the national

developmental education reform conversation, since so few programs have proven effective for students with significant remedial needs, the kind of students that CUNY Start serves.

So the progress we've made so far to date on this project are that over 3800 students at four of CUNY's community colleges have consented to participate in this rigorous random assignment evaluation. The academic outcome data for these students are not yet available, so I apologize that this testimony doesn't have sort of results yet. But early research on the implementation of the program finds that the program model is generally being implemented as it is designed, and we'll begin writing a first major report from this study, including early indicators of academic progress, later this year, and the report is expected to be publicly available in the spring of 2018, so we'd be happy to come back and present on that at some point as well.

So I'll leave it there. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON BARRON: Thank you so much; I appreciate your coming and presenting your testimony.

Just a question for the MDRC. How long have you had a relationship with evaluating programs at CUNY?

MICHAEL WEISS: So that first randomized control trial that I mentioned at CUNY's Kingsborough Community College began around 15 years ago, and that was the first large-scale randomized trial that had been conducted in higher education. Since then at CUN... [interpose]

CHAIRPERSON BARRON: And what was the study about?

MICHAEL WEISS: It was about Kingsborough's Learning Communities program, students co-enrolled in two or three classes together; they received other forms of support as well, including academic support, tutoring support, and textbooks.

CHAIRPERSON BARRON: Great. Do you examine colleges in other areas of the country?

MICHAEL WEISS: Yeah, we do. So I just kind of skipped over that part of the testimony. We have done work throughout the entire United States, including evaluations at over 30 community colleges in the country, including over 35,000 students across the nation, so New York, because we are located here,

is one of our major focuses, but we do work all across the country.

CHAIRPERSON BARRON: And have you found any other localities that have a program similar to CUNY Start?

MICHAEL WEISS: It does appear to be pretty unique. Certainly some of the unique features are the intensity, you know as mentioned, 25 hours a week, focusing only on these two subject areas; the professional development seems very unique. Across the country, when you look at the kinds of trainings that usually occur for instructors are much less intensive; oftentimes kind of one-shot deals, and not the kind of intensive ongoing professional development, including -- as mentioned by the folks that run the program -- a semester of on-boarding, where you're sort of working in a CUNY Start classroom but not actually the lead instructor, and then even ongoing instruction once you are in a classroom; that is more the kind of thing you see in K-12, but pretty uncommon in community colleges.

CHAIRPERSON BARRON: Do you have any inquiries from other institutions as to how they

might replicate it or do they want to come and look at it and check it out and see what's happening?

MICHAEL WEISS: We hand those right over to Donna and her friends.

CHAIRPERSON BARRON: Okay, great. Thank you so much; appreciate. [background comments]

MICHAEL WEISS: And they do, yes. And to be clear, like they... it's their program, they run it, so... [interpose]

CHAIRPERSON BARRON: Right.

MICHAEL WEISS: we would just send them their way and...

CHAIRPERSON BARRON: Great. Okay, good. Thank you so much for coming; I appreciate your testimony.

MICHAEL WEISS: Thank you.

[background comments]

CHAIRPERSON BARRON: Thank you so much for all of you who came to hear the testimony about this effective program that CUNY is running, and we're looking to see how we can in fact expand it and continue to support it and make sure that we provide an opportunity for students to be able to really maximize their potential and get into college and

graduate from college and become effective people
working in our society; making improvements for
everyone. Thank you, and with that, this hearing
adjourned. Thank you.

[gavel]

C E R T I F I C A T E

World Wide Dictation certifies that the foregoing transcript is a true and accurate record of the proceedings. We further certify that there is no relation to any of the parties to this action by blood or marriage, and that there is interest in the outcome of this matter.



Date June 23, 2017