

**Testimony of Dr. Regina S. Peruggi, President
Kingsborough Community College, The City University of New York
to
New York State Board of Regents
December 2012**

Good morning. My name is Regina Peruggi. I am president of Kingsborough Community College, recently named by the Aspen Institute for Community College Excellence as one of the top ten community colleges in the nation. I am speaking to you today – providing a community college perspective – in support of the 2012-2020 Statewide Plan for Higher Education. The seven community colleges of CUNY, enrolling approximately 98,000 students, have been in the forefront of community college education across the state and nation. Not only do our retention and graduation rates compare favorably to those of other urban community college systems, but we have also been leaders in implementing major workforce programs that promote economic development in the state. We are committed to maintaining high quality educational services, while at the same time serving record numbers of students with innovative approaches that will efficiently and effectively improve student outcomes.

Innovative approaches are apparent in most CUNY community college initiatives, but one of the areas in which they are most apparent is developmental education. Although community colleges enroll approximately half of all college students, many of those students arrive in their freshman year under-prepared for college-level work. At Kingsborough and throughout CUNY, nearly 80% of first-year students require remediation in either reading, or writing, or math. Almost 20% require remediation in all three of those areas. A challenge of such dimensions requires a multifaceted strategy. I am pleased that the new Statewide Plan embraces the concept of various approaches to developmental education. For example, our college has had nationally recognized success in the use of learning communities in which small groups of students together take courses linked around common themes. We've

discovered, through studies conducted by MDRC, a well-respected research organization, that learning communities help students to progress more quickly through developmental classes and to persist in their studies. For the past decade we have incrementally expanded the use of learning communities, especially in the freshman year and especially connected to developmental courses.

The use of learning communities, however, is only one approach to remediation. Recognizing that early intervention is critical to the effectiveness of developmental education, CUNY has established CUNY Start, in which students are given the opportunity to address developmental needs prior to their enrollment as college freshmen. In addition to being better prepared to handle all of their college course work, students will also gain the distinct advantage of saving precious time toward degree attainment and preserving their limited semesters of financial aid.

Of course, the ideal situation in our colleges would be not to have the need for developmental education at all. That is one of the reasons why CUNY has forged partnerships with the New York City Department of Education to heighten awareness of college requirements, to raise the expectations of students, and to improve their academic performance as they transition to college level work. One example of an effective partnership of longstanding with the DOE is College Now which operates in numerous City high schools. This program, which originated at Kingsborough, not only addresses developmental education needs prior to college admission, but also gives high school students a taste of college by offering many courses for college credit. A much newer initiative, and one that the Master Plan specifically endorses, is the Early College High Schools. In the New York City Early College public schools, students as soon as the sixth grade begin their preparation for college. By the time they reach their junior and senior year in high school, many are ready to take college-level courses, taught on-campus by our college faculty. Some students may even be able to earn an associates degree at the same time that they receive their high school

diplomas. At the Kingsborough Early College Secondary School we will soon graduate our first class of students, several of whom have already taken a sufficient number of college credits and achieved the grades necessary to have been admitted into Phi Theta Kappa, the community college honor society, at last year's induction ceremony!

Those are just a few of our innovative academic strategies. But strategies that are strictly academic won't fix the whole developmental problem or necessarily prevent the frustration that inhibits college completion. Because over 40% of Kingsborough students come from families with annual incomes of less than \$20,000, many practical obstacles to education exist in their complicated lives. These students require creative student services. For example, Kingsborough established one of the very first branches of Single Stop USA on a community college campus. Single Stop is a national not-for-profit organization focused on alleviating poverty's negative impact on education by assisting eligible low-income students in obtaining public benefits, tax credits, and other essential services. Since 2009, Single Stop has worked with more than 30,000 CUNY students, helping them to access benefits, legal services, financial counseling and tax refunds worth nearly \$60 million.

The role of CUNY's community colleges is an expanding one. In addition to our major community college mission of preparing students for transfer to a four-year institution or providing them with skills necessary for immediate entry into the workforce, we are playing an increasingly prominent role in economic and workforce development. Through both our credit and our non-credit programs, and increasingly with those programs working in tandem, we are delivering workforce training to our local communities. For example, with millions of dollars in support from federal, state, and city grants, the Kingsborough Center for Economic and Workforce Development has provided training to individuals entering the healthcare, food service, and hospitality industries – industries that are drivers of the New York City economy. Currently, Kingsborough is leading of a consortium of eight CUNY colleges that was awarded a \$20 million grant from the US Departments of Labor and Education to provide

targeted training and workforce development for economically displaced workers. In light of the efforts that CUNY community colleges are devoting to economic and workforce development, it's gratifying that the new Statewide Plan has defined "responsibility to CUNY's urban setting" as one of its primary missions. Helping to develop the City's economy and the workers to meet its needs is a major part of that responsibility.

CUNY's community colleges have assumed the role of the "new Ellis Island" for those seeking an opportunity to improve their lives and the lives of their families in New York City. We are the actual and metaphorical gateway to the American dream for thousands of New Yorkers. Maximizing the potential of this "new Ellis Island," however, requires multiple coherent educational strategies and the support of the State and City to execute those strategies. That is exactly why I support implementation of the 2012-2020 Statewide Plan for Higher Education. Thank you.