

Memorandum

TO: New York State Board of Regents and the State Education Department

FROM: Timothy Downs, Ph.D.
Vice President for Academic Affairs
Niagara University

RE: Public Hearing – Buffalo, New York

DATE: December 3, 2012

I would like to thank you for the opportunity to comment on the Statewide Plan for Higher Education. We appreciate the commitment of the Board of Regents to working with the university sectors to shape and lead these directions. I am pleased to comment on the connections between higher education and P-12 schools, the economic contributions of higher education, access and opportunity, specifically in regard to the contributions of the independent sector.

Connections between higher education and P-12

Niagara University's partnership with the business community, community agencies such as United Way, and high needs schools has led to documented increase in pre-kindergarten and kindergarten readiness among 3 and 4-year old children in participating day care centers (over 600 children, 30 centers).

I begin with this as an example of the power of the connections and the real need to use the leverage, knowledge, and sustainability of the higher education community in improving the educational and career continuum for all of our children and families, particularly those most in need. P-16 partnerships are perhaps the single most important area if we are to raise the achievement of all students, ensure they are prepared for and have access to higher education, and have employment opportunities within our global economy. Higher education and P-12 schools must work together – and they are.

It is important to note that in 2011 68% of the total number of teacher preparation programs and 78% of the total number of school leader preparation programs in New York State are offered through the independent sector. There is much attention to the transformation of pre-service programs – from strengthening clinical practice from the movement of candidates across multiple placements to rich, clinical residency models

that support the continuum of pre-service to induction and on-going professional learning; to establishing a strong partnership for accreditation that provides New York with high levels of accountability and rigor; to the implementation of new assessments for teacher candidates. We are pleased to be piloting the edTPA and to be working directly with the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards and Stanford University on a national i3 project (just awarded) to study the impact of our graduates who took and passed the edTPA as they progress through their beginning years as teachers in high needs schools. It is important that the Board of Regents ensures that the new reforms and accountability provisions apply to all providers and pathways and that the Board of Regents work together with our institutions to counter attacks on teacher and leader preparation that are not driven by these research-based reforms.

The role and involvement of higher education in the alignment of the common core standards is central to building an educational continuum that prepares all of our children and youth for 21st century careers. Niagara University is working directly with the Network Team in the Orleans-Niagara region and offers professional development on the common core that has been attended by P-12 and University faculty as an integrated approach. These types of partnerships should be delineated in the expected outcomes and funding behind the reform agenda as integrated curriculum with arts and sciences, education, and business extend the influence of the new shifts.

Connections between higher education and the State's social and economic infrastructure

The Institutions of Higher Education in Western New York have also been at the forefront in economic development and growth in our community. The economic impact of Niagara University alone, for example, exceeds \$206 million annually. Support for this excellence in higher education is most needed as we continue to invest in and transform the economic viability of our community in this region of the State.

Western New York, through the Consortium, has looked at the impetus and opportunity we have in this region to leverage higher education across economic and global considerations. We are always mindful in Western New York and across the State that the independent sector is a major contributor and is positioned to directly bring mission-related initiatives to the forefront. Keeping this in mind as federal and state (through the Governor's initiatives for economic development) strategies unfold will extend the influence of the independent colleges to industry-centered initiatives that prepare New Yorkers for the labor force.

Niagara University brings to the table a strong and accomplished legacy of community engagement. Our partnerships with the business community extend from a coordinated effort to use the leverage of the University to study and address health reforms, to the College of Business Administration's assistance in consulting with family businesses to ensure their viability and success, to the establishment of a Career and College

Readiness Center that will work directly with the area labor force to align training and degrees to needed fields and link with P-12 schools to address core issues of college and career readiness. These initiatives tie to the College Scholar grant Niagara University continues to work on with local school districts. As you have heard from others, we cannot underestimate the resource and opportunity for sustainable reform that stems from involvement of higher education in the State's social and economic issues.

Access and opportunity

I appreciate the data and findings presented in the draft plan. The independent sector must be a key contributor as we are proud of our graduation rates, the mission we bring to the community, and the accountability we instill in terms of retention and support for all students. Given the long way we have to go, we must keep our eye on fiscal issues as programs that fund access and opportunity may be most highly at-risk in the current fiscal environment. The independent sector provides choice for access and opportunity – choice that should not be tied to the “ability to pay” rather than the quality of service that can be obtained. We seek, as you do, higher levels of financial aid to make higher education affordable for all.

It is time to look at policy and regulation to ensure that we have not developed barriers for access and to address issues of continual study as longitudinal databases are formed. Many students of today, whether they are working parents, veterans, or students with disabilities, step in and out of college – we need to be careful that our interest in collecting retention and graduation data will not work against the ability to serve the emerging needs of learners. Furthermore, many of our students are international, adding substantial richness to our campus and the experience of University students – the ability to determine their impact after graduation in keeping with the expectations of a New York workplace (employment) must be considered as profiles and data reports are publically generated.

In addition to numerous education initiatives and partnerships, Niagara University is well engaged with the community and the region to enhance economic growth and stability in Western New York. In terms of service to the community, Niagara University provided over 56,000 hours of service to the region in the last year. This facet of our institution is at the core of our mission, as defined by the works and life of St. Vincent DePaul. Our Institute for Civic Engagement serves as an outreach and catalyst for continuous community development, further verifying the viability and value of Niagara University to the region and State of New York.

In closing, academic excellence in higher education in New York State is found across both public and independent institutions of higher education. Independent colleges and universities are positioned to offer options and opportunities based on their mission, to contribute to the preeminence in terms of academic research, and to prepare our young people for high-value employment. We greatly appreciate the leadership of the

Commission of Independent Colleges and Universities (clcu) in bringing comment and issues to this draft Statewide Plan and to the commitment of the Board of Regents and State Education Department in ensuring that financial opportunities in the State apply across all higher education sectors.

Thank you for the opportunity to speak with you this afternoon.