

New York State Senate Committee on Higher Education
Maintaining Quality, Equity & Affordability in Public Higher Education
throughout the Pandemic and Beyond
November 16, 2021

Testimony of Dr. Christine Mangino, President/
Queensborough Community College, The City University of New York

Good Morning Chair Stavisky and members of the Senate Committee on Higher Education. I'm Dr. Christine Mangino, President of Queensborough Community College. Thank you for inviting me to share the work that we do to ensure our students have equal access to resources, tools, and support that enable their success.

Before I begin, I want to acknowledge your tireless and time-honored advocacy. Your investment in students transforms their lives and strengthens our state. I thank you.

Queensborough serves one of the most diverse college communities in the Country:

- 29% of our nearly 11,000 students identify as Asian; 28% Black; 28% Latinx; and about 13% identify as White.

Our students come from over 117 countries and speak 60 plus languages. More than half report a household income of less than \$30,000 a year. Nearly half are the first in their families to attend college, and 55% are women.

Thanks to your help, nine out of ten Queensborough students graduate debt free.

They work. They care for family. Yet, nearly a third say they're worried about having enough food to eat. More than 40% reported loss of income due to COVID.

We empathize with their struggles, strengths, and successes.

- Wai (Why) lost his job during the pandemic at the same time that his father was diagnosed with cancer. Because of his cultural norms, he was hesitant to ask for help. But our faculty and staff saw his need. And we were able to connect him with mental health support via Queensborough's hyflex counseling center. Last week Wai was accepted to Columbia University to pursue his dream of becoming a doctor.
- Nicole lived out of a suitcase because COVID devastated her family's finances. She told us: "I didn't calculate how difficult it would be to concentrate, hungry." We interceded with emergency funds and support via our campus food pantry. Nicole graduated in May and today, she's enrolled at an Ivy League.

- Andre, a student in CUNY’s Black Male Initiative program is unemployed and homeless. He receives extensive support at Queensborough. I want to quote him: “The idea of supporting young black scholars to believe in themselves and help them learn, grow and mature is a beautiful thing.”

And it is, indeed, beautiful, when you’re able to provide a community with the tools and resources to succeed. Over the course of the pandemic, we have:

- Extended the reach of our food pantry and fed more than 800 students and their families;
- Provided students with more than a thousand laptops and related technical support;
- Engaged psychologists to connect students with the right supports for their circumstance, at the right time in their academic journey; and
- Increased opportunities for continuing education and workforce development to provide individuals with the specialized skills and training required to enter the workforce or advance in their chosen careers.

As a result, our college community – and our city and state – are stronger. Because when our students succeed, we all succeed.

Despite this success, we – like virtually all community colleges across the country– are seeing declines in enrollment.

Now, more than ever, we must reinvest and reaffirm our commitment to ensuring that community colleges continue to work for the communities they serve. We are essential to the state’s prosperity. We are key to economic growth and stability. Queensborough, in fact, has been hailed by *The New York Times* and *The Chronicle of Higher Education* for its success at propelling low-income individuals into the middle class.

Though the pandemic took much, it galvanized our community to think more deeply, become more equitable and converse honestly about issues such as the Quality, Equity & Affordability of college.

In the summer of COVID, against the backdrop of longstanding systemic and institutionalized racism, Queensborough reexamined its place and purpose:

- We recommitted to our mission by deepening our understanding of our students, their experiences, and identities.
- We moved Equity to the forefront of our planning to increase opportunities for Hispanic, Latinx, and low-income students.

- We became one of only 49 “Truth, Racial Healing and Transformation Campus Centers” in the Country... The first and only in New York City to be designated by The Association of American Colleges and Universities.

Two weeks ago, we were notified of our eligibility for the highly coveted 2023 Aspen Prize for Community College Excellence because of our achievements in areas such as equity, degree completion, transfers, and workforce success.

At Queensborough, we focus on success and learn from each other. And, like our students, we defy expectations.

And like Andre said: THAT is a beautiful thing.

I thank you Chair Stavisky and members of the Committee and welcome any questions you may have.
