

New York State Senate Committee on Education Committee
Maintaining Quality, Equity & Affordability in Public Higher Education throughout the
Pandemic and Beyond
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Testimony of Dr. Berenecea Johnson Eanes, President
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Good Morning Chairperson Stavisky and Members of Senate Higher Education Committee. I am Dr. Berenecea Johnson Eanes, President of York College, here in the heart of Jamaica, Queens. Thank you for inviting me to speak to the Committee: we are so pleased to be hosting this important discussion on Maintaining Quality, Equity & Affordability in Public Higher Education throughout the Pandemic and Beyond. I want to thank the supporters of CUNY and York present today to discuss this topic as it is of tremendous importance to me. These values – Quality, Equity, and Affordability – are central to the mission of York College, and our work during my time as President has reflected those priorities, notwithstanding the significant challenges imposed by the COVID-19 Pandemic.

Here at York College, we are helping students actualize their dreams and visions in a way that is transformative for their families and their communities. We ranked #11 on social mobility and tied for #19 top public schools in US News and World Report 2022. Located in the most ethnically diverse borough in the city of New York, our students reflect that diversity with 36.3% identifying as Black/African American, 26.3% Hispanic/Latino, and 23.3% Asian. 45% are born outside the mainland U.S. and 61% are first generation to graduate college. Looking forward, I am launching a Presidential Commission on Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion to evaluate, celebrate, and grow the amazing diverse community found at York. We remain steadfast in our commitment to foster a culture of student success with the support of talented faculty and staff who represent the best of CUNY.

York College cannot do that without a deeply rooted partnership with our local community that defines our humble beginnings, informs our history, and continues today just as strong, if not stronger. During the COVID-19 pandemic, York initially served as a COVID testing site for thousands of borough residents and then a Federal/State Mass Vaccination site administering over 250,000 vaccines. What a tremendous privilege to play a small role in “Vax Up CUNY” and the New York State efforts to test/vaccinate residents. We are also proud to serve as one of the first Early Voting sites in Queens for approximately 60,000 -100,000 residents during local, state, and national elections.

We are deeply committed to improving the graduation and retention of our students, but know we have work to do as we emerge from the pandemic and beyond. This requires a college-wide effort. We do see areas of promise. The 4-year graduation rate has been inching higher over the past 3 years. There has been a slight increase in the proportion of first-time students who earn 30 credits or more in their first year at York.

We have cast a wide net of resources and efforts to begin the shift in these areas. Our Child and Family Center received a \$183K (CCAMPIS) grant for School Age program, a \$161,800 Child Care Stabilization Grant, and \$2,999,000 million for 3K and UPK over 5 years until 2026 supporting our student parents and the community. We launched the York One Stop Welcome Center which serves students both virtually and in-person in the areas of: Admissions, Registrar, Bursar, Financial Aid, Advising, Student Health Services, and Information Technology. We supported the mental health of our students with an increase in programming and outreach with

\$260,174 from the CARES Act. Our Hunger for Knowledge Food Pantry supported over 400 households this year with a team of professional staff, health educators, and academic departments. Advancement had a banner year raising over \$600K (highest since 2017, the 50th anniversary year) and over \$150K was awarded to students in the form of scholarships, grants, and stipends. We also want our students to see themselves reflected in the faculty and staff on campus. When hiring 70 full-time new faculty (between 2016-2020 in either new positions or replacements), 60% were women and 3 of 5 represent a racial/ethnic minority group.

Fiscal Year 20-21 was a challenging budget year for CUNY overall and York College, primarily due to the pandemic. Some factors included decreased enrollment and decreased collections. These shortfalls were largely offset by Federal CARES Act and CRRSAA funds which enabled the college to end FY21 in a slightly positive position. Our faculty also secured 12 grants in 2020 totaling over \$1 million.

I am excited that CUNY has included The Academic Village & Conference Center at York College as one of its top priority capital budget requests. If funded, this 165,000 square foot facility would provide modern classrooms, computer labs, and conference rooms available for use by the community. It also would serve as the student center.

Moving from the possibility of a new building to what has already come to fruition, I am elated to announce that we have reached the long-awaited completion of three major facilities projects on campus: an HVAC upgrade, elevator & escalator replacement/upgrade, and emergency repairs to HPEC Hot Water Loop. Several upgrades are very near completion: building

management system (i.e., automated temperature control), renovations and technology upgrades to faculty dining room; lecture halls; biology lab; chemistry lab; and Greenhouse, and the waterproofing and roof replacement of this Performing Arts Center. We will be celebrating the supporters and partners who helped secure funding and made this work possible!! I invite members of this Committee to join us for a ribbon cutting celebration on December 3.

I thank the Committee for your time, and for your support of CUNY and our amazing students.

Once again, welcome to York College.