

CONGRESSIONAL TESTIMONY

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Education

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Partnership and Progress: The Success of the Genesee Early College at the University of Michigan-Flint

Good afternoon. My name is Vahid Lotfi, and I am the Interim Provost and Vice Chancellor for Academic Affairs at the University of Michigan-Flint. I welcome this opportunity to describe in some detail the extraordinary partnership between this university and the Genesee Intermediate School District which has resulted in the Genesee Early College. What I will speak to today is the success of this venture from the perspective of the university, and how well these students have assimilated into our campus culture as they pursue their career interests in the varied areas of the health professions.

But first, a bit about our campus.

The University of Michigan-Flint is one of three campuses of the world-renowned University of Michigan. We offer more than 120 degree programs, including undergraduate, graduate and two doctoral degrees. More than 7,700 students are enrolled on our campus. The symbiotic relationship between a campus and its community is evident in this city. The University of Michigan-Flint is the area's 11th largest employer, spending millions of dollars annually within Genesee County. The University of Michigan-Flint is known for its commitment to the community both economically and through partnerships such as the Genesee Early College.

The Genesee Early College is a direct response to the State of Michigan's Commission on Higher Education and Economic Growth which had the charge of developing a plan to double the number of college graduates in the state. In a report issued by the Commission in 2004, there was a specific recommendation for

expanding the opportunities for Early College achievement. The report states, quote, "...Rather than hold its students back, Michigan must be willing to accelerate the pace of learning to realize education gains that will translate into a stronger economy and better jobs." We joined the Genesee Intermediate School District in responding to the charge in 2007 with this unique school, which allows us to continue our commitment to providing an integrated K-16 experience for students, preparing them for careers in high-need, understaffed health professions pathways. The Genesee Early College is a lifeline, providing accessibility to education that is not readily available to all deserving students. The combination of high school and university classes gives bright young minds the chance to achieve at a high level, and gain access to one of the University of Michigan campuses.

Parents and students have found the University of Michigan-Flint to be a warm, welcoming place that provides an atmosphere, conducive to quality learning. Last week, over 100 Genesee Early College students arrived on our campus. They join what will be the largest student body in the history of our university when our official enrollment numbers are released next week. Impressive statistics from the 2008/2009 academic year clearly delineate the success of these students in a university setting.

During the last academic year, Genesee Early College students were enrolled in 78 separate UM-Flint courses and collectively earned over 1,900 UM-Flint (college) credits. The average 12th grader last year earned 26 UM-Flint credits and 11th graders have completed on average 13 credits. The overall grade point average of these students in their UM-Flint courses rose last year to an average of 2.87 compared to 2.62 for students who fall under the First Time In Any College (FTIAC) category.

These accomplishments are simply outstanding, and we are extremely pleased with the level of aptitude, preparedness and dedication these students are showing in their studies. University of Michigan-Flint faculty report that students from the Genesee Early College not only keep up with their fellow students, but in some cases excel beyond those who have graduated from high school. Now, an example that goes beyond the statistics and truly illustrates the character and dedication of Genesee Early College students to their education. It is a story of two students who sought out the opportunity to become part of the most prestigious program we offer at the University of Michigan-Flint: The Honors Program.

The University of Michigan-Flint Honors Program consists of the best and brightest students. With an emphasis on research at the undergraduate level, the

Honors Program offers students the chance to work one-on-one with professors to develop special projects. This method has led to a remarkable record of success. Graduates from the Honors program have been accepted in the most distinguished graduate and professional schools in the country including Harvard University and the Mayo Clinic, and 100% of honors program students applying to medical schools, graduate schools, and professional schools have been accepted.

Thaer Farhan and Abdul Kazmi are two Genesee Early College students who decided they wanted a challenge. They approached the director of the Honors Program, Dr. Maureen Thum, asking if they could enroll. Noting their strong academic records, Dr. Thum agreed. After a year in the Honors Program, Dr. Thum describes Thaer and Abdul as hard-working and goal oriented. She reports they have not only kept up with the college students in the Honors Program, they have higher achievements than some of their peers. In fact, Dr. Thum, who is also one of our English professors, states that Thaer and Abdul both write at a level, even higher than that of some high school graduates. As a result of the positive experiences of Thaer and Abdul, Dr. Thum has reached an agreement with the Genesee Early College to admit two new students each year to the UM-Flint Honors Program. As Dr. Thum recently said, “Genesee Early College students deserve the opportunity to be at the university level to discover what it is like to have a completely different level of competition.”

It is an indisputable fact that people with education beyond a high school diploma have an economic advantage. Furthermore, it has been proven that the key to sustained fiscal viability for a state and region is to have a highly educated workforce that can utilize creativity and innovation to provide solutions to today’s problems and invent tomorrow’s industries. The Genesee Early College is precisely in the right place at the right time. With approximately 80% of our alumni living and working in the state of Michigan, the University of Michigan-Flint can help to increase the number of people who have postsecondary education in the state because of its affiliation with the Genesee Early College. Exposing our children to a college environment during high school will increase the likelihood they will matriculate through to an undergraduate degree and beyond. I will now share with you the stories of two families, the Mateens and the Frys who are advocates for ensuring positive university experiences for their children.

The Mateen family has always told their children they will go to college. Jonathon and Tamra Mateen are two lifelong Genesee County residents. Both are employed in the health professions at Hurley Medical Center here in Flint. They have two children, Janay, who is a senior, and Jonathon—a sophomore—who are

enrolled at the Genesee Early College. As parents, Mr. and Mrs. Mateen are extremely pleased with the experience their children have had at the Genesee Early College. Janay is a senior who is actively pursuing a career in the field of Anesthesia. When she graduates, she will have earned her 60 college credits. The Mateens say they feel the Genesee Early College has given their children a distinct advantage, helping Janay and Jonathon focus on their studies while keeping an eye to the future.

Professor Donna Fry is the Director of the Physical Therapy Department at UM-Flint and the mother to 17-year-old twins, Kathryn and Kristina. They are 13th graders who have already earned 41 UM-Flint credits and perfect grade point averages. They did all of this while being incredibly involved, participating in everything from the UM-Flint Wind Symphony to volunteering for the Obama campaign to playing on the UM-Flint Ultimate Frisbee team. As a parent and education professional, Professor Fry is pleased with the outstanding experience her daughters have had at the Genesee Early College. Professor Fry states, “Medical clinical rotations through the Genesee Early College helped them to understand more about patient care and firmed up their interest in doing research in medical fields of study. Both girls are very mature for their age and the university environment allowed them to grow socially and to develop their self-identity as individuals much more than I think a typical high school environment would have allowed.” The Mateens and Professor Fry firmly believe that being part of a university community so early in their lives, their children will be prepared to face the job market of tomorrow and excel.

The Genesee Early College is just one example of why Congressman Kildee’s bill, H.R. 1578, the Fast Track to College Act, is so essential to the future of our state and country. By investing in early college and dual enrollment programs, the Fast Track is the right track to providing our children with the means necessary to compete on a global stage. Through the example of the Early College, you see how a university and its community partners can work together to provide an extraordinary educational experience for students who are willing to eschew a traditional high school setting for a learning environment that is both accelerated and accommodating. I strongly urge support for the Fast Track to College Act, since I witness every day the solid results that come from well-executed early college programs. It is precisely the type of partnership that must occur on a broader level, bringing together government, the educational system, and the people in the best interest of our children.

As you have heard, the Genesee Early College is a key component in providing accessibility to education in this community. A recommendation worth considering is to continue to invest significantly in Pell Grants and other federal programs so that successful graduates of the early college can complete their degrees with the comfort of knowing their education will continue to be funded. This financial vote of confidence would be particularly meaningful to these students and their families.

The campus community of the University of Michigan-Flint is united in the belief that this type of community partnership is essential to the advancement of our state. It is part of our mission to be civically engaged, working with other leading institutions to find solutions to critical issues that impact us all. During these difficult economic times for our state and our country, it is heartening to see the substantial support we have received from the Governor, Lieutenant Governor and legislators who approved the funding for this initiative. It is exactly this type of investment that will help Michigan to building a promising future for students such as Thaer, Abdul, Janay, Jonathon, Kathryn and Kristina. Let the Genesee Early College and others like it serve as a bold statement about the priorities that we are setting for the state of Michigan in the years to come.

Thank you for your time today, and I welcome your questions.