

COMMITTEE ON HIGHER EDUCATION

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CITY COUNCIL
CITY OF NEW YORK

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TRANSCRIPT OF THE MINUTES

OF THE

COMMITTEE ON HIGHER EDUCATION

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Tuesday, October 28, 2025

Start: 1:03 P.M.

Recess: 2:08 P.M.

HELD AT: 250 Broadway - 8th Floor
Hearing Room 3

B E F O R E: Hon. Eric Dinowitz, Chair

COUNCIL MEMBERS:

Erik D. Bottcher

Gale A. Brewer

Oswald Feliz

Christopher Marte

Other Council Members Attending: Joseph

COMMITTEE ON HIGHER EDUCATION
A P P E A R A N C E S

Anne Lopes,
Interim Vice Chancellor for Academic and Faculty
Affairs, The City University of New York (CUNY)

Cheryl Smith,
Associate Dean of the Weissman School of Arts
and Sciences and Professor of English,
Baruch College, The City University of New York
(CUNY)

Andrea Soonachan,
University Dean of K-16 Initiatives, The City
University of New York (CUNY)

Christopher Leon Johnson—Self

COMMITTEE ON HIGHER EDUCATION

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SERGEANT MESITI: This is a microphone check for the Committee on Higher Education. Today's date is October 28, 2025—Located in 250 Broadway - 8th Floor—Hearing Room 3. Recording is done by Rocco Mesiti.

SERGEANT AT ARMS: Good afternoon, and welcome to today's New York City Council Hearing on Higher Education. At this point, and going forward, I'd like to remind everyone to please silence their electronic devices, and at no point will anyone approach the dais unless invited.

Additionally, no one will approach the witness stand unless they are invited to testify.

If you wish to sign up for in-person testimony, and you have done so already, please feel free to fill out a slip, outside in the hallway, with one of the Sergeant at Arms.

If you have any concerns or questions during this hearing, please see one of the Sergeant at Arms, and we will address your concerns swiftly.

Chair, we are ready to begin.

CHAIRPERSON DINOWITZ: [GAVEL] Thank you. Good afternoon. I'm Council Member Dinowitz, chair of the Committee on Higher Education—and of course, a

proud CUNY alum, the husband of a CUNY alum, the brother of a CUNY alum, and the son of a CUNY alum.

I welcome you to our hearing on today's topic: *The Reading and Writing Crisis Among College Students*.

We are also hearing Resolution Number 500 of 2024, sponsored by Council Member Rita Joseph, calling on the New York State Legislature to introduce and pass, and the Governor to sign, legislation entitled *The New York State College Safety Act* to require that all campuses of The State University of New York and The City University of New York permit autoimmune and immunocompromised students and faculty to learn and teach via remote instruction in as many courses as feasible whenever students or faculty are dealing with an unpredictable or temporarily debilitating impact of their condition.

In the past 18 months, there has been a lot of discussion in the education press about the deficiencies and the reading abilities of incoming college students, including at so-called elite colleges, and about the education profession's concerns regarding the impact of AI on students' writing ability.

Articles in highly respected publications like *The Chronicle of Higher Education* and *The Atlantic* have titles like these: "How to Get Your Students to Read,"—This is for college students, not, you know, your young children—"How Do You Get Your Students to Read?" "The Elite College Students Who Can't Read Books." "Is This the End of Reading?" "Is Reading Over for Gen. Z students?", and "AI, and the Death of Student Writing."

Reading and writing skills are undoubtedly a particular concern at CUNY, where many students whose first language is not English need good literacy skills to enter a competitive job market.

Many causes for this new status quo are cited in the press, including:

- Learning loss and a decline in student motivation as a result of the pandemic, perhaps directly as a result of a lowering of academic expectations during the pandemic.
- Whole-language reading instruction in elementary schools, which de-emphasized phonics and hurt reading fluency.

- An over-attentiveness to standardized tests, which use only relatively short reading excerpts, with associated questions.
- The rise of smartphones and apps, which do not require focused engagement with long written pieces.
- A decline in the number of 13-year-olds who said they read for fun almost daily—from 35 percent in 1984 to 17 percent in 2020, according to the National Assessment of Educational Progress.

On a personal note, I will just add that reading for fun or engagement and literacy doesn't end in college. And just this morning, I was with the president of Hostos Community College, Daisy Cocco De Filippis; I want to give her a shout out, because she and I were together reading her favorite book, Don Quixote, and I just have to say, reading this book for fun with someone as accomplished as she was, it was a really great way start my day, and something I wish a lot more of our students had the opportunity to do. And even relating to last month's hearing about the arts, and as we discussed the arts as it relates to free speech and criticism of our government, there is a lot in this book and a lot in so many of our literary texts that allow us as a society to retain our free speech and rightfully

criticize or provide dissent to our government and those in power. And if the president's watching, I just want to thank her publicly, even if she's not watching, I want to thank her publicly for our time this morning, and look forward to more of these conversations about this book and so many other things.

Writing in *The Atlantic*, Rose Horowitz's article, entitled "The Elite College Students Who Can't Read Books," offered another explanation. She noted that Nicholas Dames, who has taught Literature Humanities, a required great books course at Columbia University, for 25 years, had increasingly noticed that first-year students seemed unable to cope with his expectation of reading multiple books during the semester; one of his students explained that her public high school had never required her to read a whole book, but rather simply "excerpts, poetry, and news articles."

A majority of the 33 professors whom Horowitz interviewed for the article, including professors from Princeton, the University of Virginia, and Georgetown University, told stories about students' poor vocabulary skills, difficulty in understanding challenging works, and trouble focusing.

Horowitz pointed out that Carol Jago, a national literacy expert working on curriculum design with teachers, has said that teachers have stopped

1
2 teaching long-admired classic novels, like *My Ántonia*
3 and *Great Expectations*, perhaps in the face of
4 increased focus on state and federal testing
5 standards.

6 Mike Szkolka, a long-time educator in
7 Boston and New York schools, remarked, "There's no
8 testing skill that can be related to... Can you sit
down and read Tolstoy?"

9 The title of Community College adjunct
10 instructor Lisa Lieberman's article in *The Chronicle*
11 *of Higher Education* last year made a remarkable
12 statement: "AI and the Death of Student Writing."
13 She wrote the article about her interactions with
14 recent students who had used Grammarly and other AI
15 programs to do their writing assignments for her
16 classes and about her subsequent realization that
17 about one-third of her students were doing so. She
18 remarked on her own colleagues' use of AI, including
19 using it to grade student essays, or as she put it,
"Students will write their papers with AI and
teachers will grade them with AI."

20 It's either pathetic, or I just want to
21 school at the wrong time. (LAUGHS) Years ago, before
22 AI was in college, we had courses that were marked
23 with a "W". And what that meant for us was that we
24 had to take courses where we actually had to write.
25 And I think I'm at that age where I am able to say,
"Back in my day", I'm old enough to do that, so Back
in my day, we had to engage in these courses where we

were required to do things like read entire books and write papers on our own, about these books, and about these articles that we had to read and write for the class. And this wasn't limited to English classes. Some of my writing credits came from my music history classes or my political science classes. Even in those classes, we were required to do intensive amounts of reading and writing.

I am looking forward to hearing about the degree to which CUNY campuses are seeing these reading and writing deficiencies in their incoming classes, and what they are doing to enrich reading assignments in the humanities and writing instruction across all disciplines. The Committee is interested in how CUNY professors are measuring their success in these arenas.

Finally, the Committee, as always, wants to know what additional support the City Council might need to provide.

I want to acknowledge my colleague on the Committee of Higher Education, who is present, Council Member Marte, and I want to turn the microphone over to Council Member Joseph to read a statement about the Resolution that we are hearing today.

COUNCIL MEMBER JOSEPH: Thank you, Chair Dinowitz. I think maybe we also need to reach back from K-12 and pull them before they get into higher Ed, so they can read and write on grade level.

Good afternoon, Chair Dinowitz and Members of the Committee on Higher Education. Thank you for considering my Resolution, 500, the New York State Legislature to introduce and pass, and the Governor to sign, legislation entitled The New York State College Safety Act. This legislation would require all campuses of the State of SUNY and CUNY to permit autoimmune and immunocompromised students and faculty to learn and teach via remote instruction in as many courses as feasible whenever students or faculty are dealing with an unpredictable or temporarily debilitating impact of their condition.

Many students, faculty, and staff in our state and city colleges live with autoimmune or immune-compromised conditions that have unpredictable or temporarily debilitating impacts. These challenges often prevent them from fully participating in person for classes or teaching responsibilities. Our resolution urges the state legislator to act swiftly to provide appropriate accommodations for these individuals by allowing them to continue their educations or teach remotely when necessary.

I want to thank my colleagues who cosponsored the legislation, as well as advocate Emanuel Segusen (phonetic), who worked closely with my team to draft this proposal, and the legislative drafters who helped bring this to the stage.

I look forward to hearing from the Administration representatives as well as

representatives from New York City and State higher education institutions, and members of the community who have vested interests in this policy. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON DINOWITZ: Thank you, Council member Joseph. I also want to acknowledge we've been joined by Council Member Bottcher, and on Zoom, we have Council Member Feliz.

I'd also like to thank Adam Staropoli, my Legislative and Budget Director, Jenna Klaus, my Chief of Staff, Julia Goldsmith-Pinkham, Senior Legislative Counsel, the Committee's Senior Legislative Counsel, and, of course, Regina Paul, the Committee's Senior Policy Analyst.

I would like to remind everyone who wishes to testify in person today that you must fill out an appearance card, which is located at the desk of the Sergeant at Arms near the entrance of this room. Please fill it out even if you have already registered to testify in advance.

To allow as many people to testify, public testimony will be limited to two minutes per person. I'm going to ask my colleagues to limit their questions and comments to five minutes.

Please note that witnesses who are here will testify before those who are on Zoom.

Now, in accordance with the rules of the Council, I will administer the oath. Please raise your right hand.

Do you affirm to tell the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth in your testimony before this committee and to respond honestly to Council Members' questions?

PANEL: (UN-MIC'D) (INAUDIBLE)

CHAIRPERSON DINOWITZ: Thank you. As a reminder to all of our witnesses, please state your name prior to your testimony for the record.

INTERIM VICE CHANCELLOR LOPES: Anne Lopes.

Good afternoon, Chairperson Dinowitz and Members of the City Council Higher Education Committee. Thank you for the opportunity to speak to you today about reading and writing education at CUNY.

I am the Interim Vice Chancellor for Academic and Faculty Affairs at the University. I'm joined today by my colleague Cheryl Smith, Associate Dean of the Weissman School of Arts and Sciences, professor of English, and Former Director of Writing Immersion, Former Coordinator of the Writing Across the Curriculum Program, and a former Director of the Great Works of World Literature Program at Baruch College. She will also provide testimony. And Andrea Soonachan, University Dean of K-16 Initiatives, is here as well to answer any questions you may have in her area.

Whether or not we're facing a reading and writing crisis among college students today,

particularly in the era of artificial intelligence, is a critical question we must ask ourselves as educators and as a society that is undergoing rapid transformations in how people learn, teach, and work.

At CUNY, we do not perceive the current shifts in student reading, writing, learning, and communication habits as a crisis, but what we have seen and continue to see, since the arrival of the internet, are transformations in how students learn, read, write, and communicate. We have been addressing these changes with clear expectations, research-based strategies, and the supports students need to succeed at the university and beyond.

Unlike many higher educational institutions, CUNY has always educated a very large, extraordinarily diverse, and multilingual student body from every borough of New York City. Over 80% of our entering students are educated in New York City's public schools, and we collaborate with New York City's public schools to ensure our students are prepared for college-level writing.

Thirty percent of the first-year students enter with CUNY credits, and our schools of education conduct extensive professional development for in-service teachers as well as educate those entering the profession. Serving such a broad range of learners underscores our mission of access and excellence. The diversity of our students as learners has taught us to continually update and adapt the

approaches we use that undergird access from course placement criteria to our general education requirements, from our pedagogies to our academic supports. The latter includes professional peer tutoring, professional tutoring, supplemental instruction, review sessions, formalized student-led study groups, and other services.

For our students with disabilities, we provide additional innovative support programs based on best practices to support their academic success and personal development, including arranging for crucial auxiliary aids and services, assistive technology services, note takers, readers, sign language interpreter services, distance learning networks, priority registration, alternative testing, and counseling referrals. We meet our students where they are and we move them to high levels of academic literacy.

Our admissions and support model for both associate and bachelor's degree programs are focused on student readiness and supporting their success. Reading and writing skills are important for college success, regardless of the student's degree program. We changed how we assess readiness in reading and writing in 2019. Prior to that year, CUNY used separate tests for reading and writing course placement. Nationally recognized research, including work led by CUNY researchers, demonstrated that high school performance is a stronger predictor of college

success than off placement exams. That research helped us set up a new standard and guided our own policy shift by bringing together the assessment of reading and writing. Even before that time, nearly all CUNY colleges treated reading and writing as inextricably linked. Students routinely write in response to readings, integrating comprehension, analysis, and expression.

Today, we use multiple measures to place students that reflect sustained academic performance and integrated literacy. These include the New York State Regents Examine English Language Arts, which itself combines reading and writing, high school GPA, and SAT and ACT English when available. Based on these measures, we place entering students in developmental English composition.

The information we compile about our entering students tells us that their reading and writing skills have not changed considerably in recent years. To start, we place nearly the same percentage of entering students in developmental English composition today than we did in 2018. The percentage was 14.9% in 2018, and it is 14.3% today. In 2018, we placed all students who needed developmental work in standalone remedial non-credit courses. Based on the multiple measures we use, students identified as non-ESL who needed added support are now placed in credit-bearing courses with co-requisite support. Co-requisite support means

that, rather than three hours of weekly instruction, students typically have five hours of weekly instruction with faculty in English Composition, in class peer tutoring, supplemental instruction, and limited class size are strategies that are used.

While many students identified as ESL entrants are still well served by non-credit ESL courses that focus on language acquisition, several CUNY colleges also offer more advanced students English language adapted credit bearing English composition courses that include linguistic support. This approach has substantially decreased the time it takes for students to earn credits in English Composition. This is important because passing English Composition allows the student to move forward in their degree program.

Our gateway completion rates in English Composition have rebounded since COVID, whereas the rate of completion was 77.2% for all first-time freshmen in 2019; it dipped appreciably to 71.7% during COVID in 2020, and it stands now at 81.8% for the 2024 cohort.

Overall grade distribution in English Composition across the University has remained relatively consistent over the last five years.

Throughout an undergraduate's academic journey at CUNY, literacy and communication are not siloed. They are built into the curriculum across disciplines. Under our Pathways general education

framework, every student completes two English Composition courses. The emphasis on reading, analysis, and argument continues throughout the remaining general education requirements and within the majors. Reading, critical thinking, and evidence-based communications are expectations for all CUNY undergraduates, not just for English majors.

In the post-COVID period, we have also focused on preparing our students to read and write well in an AI-rich world. Our faculty teach students to evaluate sources, detect bias, and maintain authorship and voice amid digital and AI-generated text. Many instructors now include AI literacy, not as a shortcut, but as a critical skill.

To succeed as undergraduates, excel in graduate school, and enter the work world, students must learn when and how to use AI tools ethically and productively, and when not to. As part of the expansion of generative AI, CUNY recently updated its Academic Honesty Policy after deep university-wide dialogue about AI's role in academic work. The policy was fully updated in 2024 to integrate AI explicitly throughout. The policy provides clear guidance on appropriate and allowed uses of AI, so that students can practice transparency and integrity while developing modern communication skills. The policy makes clear that faculty retain the freedom to determine when and how AI can be used in their courses.

To support faculty, the University has invested in professional development for faculty from the beginning of the AI boom. The CUNY Innovative Teaching Academy has long been central to integrating AI into sound pedagogy and rethinking assessment where appropriate. The Academy has offered six major AI-focused workshops and events over the last 14 months, from an orientation on AI tools to a session on how AI can support growth mindsets. A book club on teaching with AI was also introduced, along with a CUNY-wide faculty fellowship program supported by a Building Bridges and Technology Initiative, funded by the Lumina Foundation. Over 900 faculty members participated in these AI learning activities. They are among our most popular programs, with some filling every available seat, even in large virtual formats. And that describes only the central activity. Campuses across the University have run their own intensive AI professional development series for faculty. At Lehman College, for instance, the Center for Teaching and Learning offered seven different sessions on AI to over 550 faculty in spring and summer 2025.

Through evidence-based placement at the start, academic supports and integrated curriculum policy, faculty development, and responsible AI pedagogy and research, CUNY demonstrates how a large public system can lead in literacy education. More of our students are completing first-year composition on

time, more are progressing into writing-intensive work across the disciplines, and faculty are increasing their abilities to help students navigate an AI-rich world for learning and beyond.

We welcome ongoing collaboration with the Council to share data, scale what works, and ensure that every New Yorker has access to the reading, writing, and communication skills that power, opportunity, and civic life.

That concludes my testimony. Thank you for your time. To further describe the reading and writing experiences of students at one of our colleges, I now turn to my colleague Cheryl Smith, Associate Dean of the Weissman School of Arts and Sciences at Baruch College, CUNY.

ASSOCIATE DEAN SMITH: Thank you so much, Anne.

Good afternoon, Chair Dinowitz, fellow reader, and the New York City Higher Education Committee. It's my privilege to speak to you today. In the interest of time, I won't outline all of my roles at the college. I just want to highlight a few that are relevant to the introduction.

As the Writing Across the Curriculum Coordinator at the college for about 10 to 12, maybe 15 years, I worked very closely on those writing intensive courses that you mentioned. We call them CICs or Communication Intensive Courses at Baruch. And Writing Across The Curriculum in the early aughts

had a very strong presence at CUNY, and I think it has really infiltrated the curriculum. Happy to talk to you about that more if you're interested.

Also, as Coordinator of the Great Works of World Literature program, I did that for five years, that program was established about 25 to 30 years ago with an NEH grant, and it's modeled on Columbia's Great Books program. All students at Baruch are required to take that class.

Students at Baruch take the two writing classes that are standard across CUNY, plus the Great Works of World Literature course, which is part of Baruch's unique core. These three classes are carefully scaffolded. They're both run out of the English Department, so the directors of Writing and Great Works work closely together. And many faculty teach in both programs and share resources such as faculty-run professional development. That happens quite regularly in our department.

We also train graduate students from the Graduate Center. Therefore, students spend up to three, usually consecutive semesters engaged in the work of developing their proficiency in advanced reading and writing, which are linked in the classroom. It's a real boon for us to have those three semesters with students.

Writing is always done in response to a text or informed by source texts. If students are not

doing and understanding the reading, they are unable to write for their classes meaningfully.

Students struggle in these three classes and with the demands of college level reading and writing. They come to college with some deficits in advanced literacy competencies, including the ability to read very dense, difficult texts like Don Quixote, use evidence effectively, apply reading and writing standards that are appropriate to the audience, and discipline and structure their writing for optimal clarity and impact. These are consistent struggles. I do not see their deficits and struggles as a literacy crisis, personally. If students aren't struggling, they aren't being challenged enough. And the deficits that I see in reading and writing currently have been consistent over my time at Baruch and before. I've been teaching college writing since 1994 as a PhD candidate, and then my first job was at another college before I was very privileged to take the job at CUNY.

I want to talk about how we support students as they struggle, but I want to point out that students love these classes. And I'm not saying that because I'm biased, of course I am. But they love their reading and writing classes. They're small, they get to know one another and their professor, and perhaps most importantly, they have the very rare benefit of having a careful reader of their work.

In our first year Writing and Great Works courses, we operate from a simple premise. Students write well about texts and topics they care about, for people who they believe care about them. We intentionally cultivate an environment of care in our classrooms, which provides a space for students to experiment, try something new, perhaps fail, recover, and try again. And they don't want to disappoint their teachers because they know their teachers care about them.

In my experience, CUNY students are willing to falter, fail, and try again. They're profoundly motivated to succeed academically and professionally. And I say this is someone who taught at two elite private liberal arts colleges before coming to Baruch, CUNY Students are uniquely motivated, and I am uniquely motivated to teach them well.

We support their learning processes and success in coordination with the Writing Center and a student academic counseling center. So students have access to peer tutors if they prefer that, or professional tutors if they prefer that. I'm happy to talk about those resources at the college, if you have any more questions about that, but in the interest of time, I'm going to jump ahead.

We also have a Center for Teaching and Learning that supports faculty. And in the past year or really three years, many of our CDL events have

centered on artificial intelligence, which we know is expanding rapidly. We're all rushing to keep up with what that means in our classes and in our professional landscape.

In the 2023-2024 academic year, the Center for Teaching and Learning at Baruch actually partnered with a group of student research fellows to investigate whether and how undergraduate students at the college were being impacted by the increasing availability of generative AI tools. The researcher leading that group was our writing director, a tenured English professor and my colleague. The main research question was, "How are college students at a large urban public university in the US using and experiencing generative AI as a tool in their learning context?" What better way to address this question than faculty and students working side by side? And that report is actually on our website. There's a link to the website where all the generative AI tools that we provide for our faculty and students--open source--you can see it on our website, and you can read that report. And I welcome you to--invite you to do that. I think you'd find it really interesting. Now, this was in the early days of Generate AI. A lot is changing.

Finally, the Weissman School has a grant from the Teagle Foundation. It's part of their Cornerstone for Living initiative to support the inclusion of transformative text in the humanities

and general education curriculum. I'm the co-PI on that grant. Our Teagle-funded initiative is called Reading is Human. It creates defined pathways through general education humanities courses that center students' active engagement with both reading and writing with these transformative texts while elevating the value of the humanities in their developing cultural awareness, civic involvement, and educational and professional success.

We also aim to cultivate students' softer skills, which I think literary study should always cultivate, including empathy, interpersonal connection, and aesthetic appreciation. We read because it's a beautiful experience. Using the Teagle funds, we're embedding transformative text in select courses as determined by panels of faculty in the participating programs and departments, which include first-year seminars. All students take that first year writing, Great Works, Philosophy, and Black and Latino Studies in the pilot year, and we hope to expand it to history and other departments in the future.

With the support of our Center for Teaching and Learning, faculty are developing active learning strategies for reading and responding to difficult texts, ways to engage in the slow and recursive processes that research shows help develop critical close-reading skills. Students don't come to college with those skills fully developed, but that

has not changed, in my view, in the many years I've been in the college classroom. These processes include reading a text first for surface understanding, annotating the text while reading, with or without guidelines, briefly free writing in response to a reading, rereading part of the text aloud with the whole class, perhaps while isolating sections that are harder to understand and annotating them collectively, working in small groups, reaching out back out to the larger group. This scaffolded practice builds reading community in the classroom and helps ensure comprehension and engagement with the text. Our approach aims to make reading a positive, not punishing experience. Students are then better prepared to take on higher stakes writing tasks that engage with the reading.

Students don't come to college having mastered reading and writing. They're still on that journey. They will encounter more readings, longer readings, and more difficult readings in college, and they need time to develop the muscle to rise to the challenge of reading more complex texts. Similarly, they'll encounter more challenging writing requirements in college and will need to ethically navigate evolving digital tools. Their success with these challenges is determined by their ability to read critically and carefully in collaborative environments and accurately evaluate the unique contexts, audiences, and purposes for discrete

1 writing tasks. It's always changing, and you've got
2 to be on your toes.

3 I hope my testimony has provided some
4 insight into how our colleges are providing the time
5 and tools for students to build their literacy muscle
6 and graduate with the reading and writing
7 competencies we know they need for academic,
8 personal, and professional success.

9 Thank you for your interest in our work
10 to advance student literacy and for your ongoing
11 support of CUNY.

12 CHAIRPERSON DINOWITZ: Thank you so much
13 for both of your testimonies. I want to share one
14 thing. I want to affirm, I agree with you that
15 struggle, like to struggle through, is a good thing.
16 That's what kind of all courses should be like
17 because if it's too easy or if you know everything
18 going in, you wouldn't need the course. But that is
19 distinct and different from a crisis, which is-- and
20 it sounds a little bit like we're talking about like
21 things on a parallel track, but with some
22 distinctions, like some basic questions of can you
23 read a book? And is that book a classic book? Is that
24 something that's still done?

25 And so I just want to confirm what I
26 heard in both of your testimonies, that besides the
27 students who come in needing co-requisite courses or
28 besides the students who come in with English as

their second language, you do not see a literacy crisis in those incoming classes of students?

INTERIM VICE CHANCELLOR LOPES: Absolutely not. So it's pretty clear, based on the fact we're using the same measures, right? And students are doing similarly on those measures. Same with the English as a second language students who are taking these credit-bearing courses, we're seeing similar kinds of results.

CHAIRPERSON DINOWITZ: And that was something interesting to me in your testimony, because you cited the English Regents as one of those measures of knowing where to place kids, students. And, in my opening, I said, you know, a lot of the tests that are used to measure student success don't include books. They don't include long writing. They don't even include all the state standards of writing drafts, rewriting, and going back and researching. And the English Regents is one of those examples where they just give you a short passage and you answer some multiple choice questions. Maybe you write an argumentative paragraph or a short essay with three paragraphs, but it doesn't seem aligned with some of the more long-form skills and more intensive skills that students need in the classroom.

INTERIM VICE CHANCELLOR LOPES: Absolutely. That's why we use multiple measures. We look at their whole high school performance as well, how they did in English in high school, the credits

they took, the courses they took, as well as the Regents and SAT-ACT, if available. So it's all of those measures that are important for placement.

CHAIRPERSON DINOWITZ: So I want to move on from placement, but I did just want to point out that because the standards can change, right? And I believe they've gotten lower. You need a 75 on the English Regents to be considered college-ready. I don't personally believe that's college-ready, and it's 75 on a test that I would hope we all acknowledge doesn't measure that.

But let's talk about what's happening at CUNY, because I'm interested to know-- we can agree or disagree about the placement and how kids, uh, students come in. But I want to use the phrase you use in your testimony--clear expectations. I'm interested to hear more about what those clear expectations are for students.

INTERIM VICE CHANCELLOR LOPES: The general education curriculum, 42 credits of curriculum, has very clear expectations for students around writing, reading, critical thinking, and communication skills. Those expectations establish learning outcomes in each of the courses students take. They take composition, these two courses in composition, where the expectations are clearly set, we have a Discipline Council, an English discipline council. English is a large department in probably every CUNY... (CROSS-TALK)

CHAIRPERSON DINOWITZ: And, sorry, and I don't mean to interrupt, but I just want to clarify that those expectations are CUNY-wide or each school has its own... (CROSS-TALK)

INTERIM VICE CHANCELLOR LOPES: CUNY-wide... CUNY-wide expectations around general education, yes.

CHAIRPERSON DINOWITZ: I have five bullet points up, and there are just... From your website, it says you need to take two courses that are considered composition, among other courses, one math and quantitative reasoning, and one life and physical science. But as it relates to the English composition, I see five bullet points. Are there more expansive standards or expectations that CUNY has outlined?

INTERIM VICE CHANCELLOR LOPES: So, the bullet points... (CROSS-TALK)

CHAIRPERSON DINOWITZ: For the courses?

INTERIM VICE CHANCELLOR LOPES: are learning outcomes. Those are then broken down further in the cores. Cheryl, could you give an example?

ASSOCIATE DEAN SMITH: Sure. There's always... there's definitely a learning goal there about writing with sources, like incorporating sources into a written argument. And those would be learning goals. Again, just for those required core courses, the ones that you listed are part of CUNY's required core. We also have a flexible core that

would be a lot of the humanities, social sciences, and other courses that students are required to take across CUNY. And there's a lot of writing embedded in those two. They would be the history course, a philosophy course, or a History of Art course, so we also have those courses. I think that the expectations across CUNY are that students in any writing class are writing and revising at least three polished pieces of writing that are generally longer than five pages. And they can vary. You might go from shorter to longer. So it depends on how the instructor scaffolds those assignments and breaks them up.

CHAIRPERSON DINOWITZ: I'm going to say it again, back in my day...

ASSOCIATE DEAN SMITH: Yeah.

CHAIRPERSON DINOWITZ: I said it. Ugh, and now my back is starting to hurt, because I said, Back in my day... (CROSS-TALK)

ASSOCIATE DEAN SMITH: (INAUDIBLE)

CHAIRPERSON DINOWITZ: No, because I'm old.

ALL: (LAUGHTER)

CHAIRPERSON DINOWITZ: No, back in my day— So, that leads to more of my questions. Because it doesn't say it on the website, or at least not where I see it, but you are starting to say, well, you're required to write at least five pages. I know with my writing courses, I think it was at least 10 pages,

ASSOCIATE DEAN SMITH: Well, that would vary by college, college to college, right? So I think colleges have their own internal structures for deciding how they're going to scaffold out the writing, but I think it's fairly standard. There's a Writing Discipline Council as well as the English Discipline Council. So writing directors across CUNY get together and talk about those. And I wasn't Writing Program Director, but I was Great Works Director, and I could talk to you about how we used writing in those classes. And those classes are much more focused on reading literary texts. But freshman composition classes are not necessarily focused on reading literary texts; they're focused on... (CROSS-TALK)

CHAIRPERSON DINOWITZ: So, what are those CUNY-wide standards? Because what I see here are goals, and I'm hearing you talk about expectations that aren't written here. So what are the more concrete... (CROSS-TALK)

ASSOCIATE DEAN SMITH: Well, the standard
is going...

CHAIRPERSON DINOWITZ: Yeah?

INTERIM VICE CHANCELLOR LOPES: So the way that courses are designed is that you have these goals, that faculty get together in these discipline councils, and they discuss what does that look like concretely? Each department reviews the extent to which... faculty peer review, the extent to which the syllabi, through curriculum committees, meet those goals, and meet what's been discussed in the discipline council, right? So those standards happen through the practice of teaching, through the practice of developing those syllabi based on those learning outcomes. That's a traditional way that we establish standards and disciplines at the collegiate level, right?

CHAIRPERSON DINOWITZ: No, I get all of that. That sounds, then it's like each college kind of has its own way they're interpreting these goals?

INTERIM VICE CHANCELLOR LOPES: Well, I mean, it's also, you know, the Discipline Council has a lot to do with it. Our courses also need to transfer across the system, right? And so to do that, there is a CUNY-wide vetting process of these, you know, Gen. Ed syllabi and their ability to go across the system as well. So there's engagement of faculty across the system. It's a faculty-led process, let me put it that way.

CHAIRPERSON DINOWITZ: Right. I'm still not quite hearing, like, what are the measurable expectations? So, for example, if I'm CUNY Central

and I'm trying to audit all of these syllabi or look at all these disciplines, am I looking and saying, okay, for a literature course or a writing credential, a writing course, there needs to be X number of papers, there needs to be X number of books that are written. Are there any... (CROSS-TALK)

INTERIM VICE CHANCELLOR LOPES:

(INAUDIBLE) quantitative, it's qualitative.

CHAIRPERSON DINOWITZ: Okay.

INTERIM VICE CHANCELLOR LOPES: So it has a student... are students... You know, there are rubrics that are developed by these councils where they, you know, there's scoring that happens. It's not necessarily the number of pages per se or the quantity, but is the argumentation critical? Have students used sources reliably? Do they know how to endnote, footnote, and reference text? Do they know how to recognize an authoritative text? And they're scored on these kinds of things, right? They're marked on these kinds of things over the course of their academic career.

There's also writing across the curriculum, and there are writing intensive courses throughout the curriculum that faculty across the University discuss and develop standards about what should be in your rubric, for instance, for evaluating student work.

CHAIRPERSON DINOWITZ: Maybe we could talk a little more specifically about Baruch, at a particular college. Can you talk some more about some of those, the particular rubric that's used to say, yes, our students can sit down and read a book, they can write on their own. What are some of those standards in that rubric?

ASSOCIATE DEAN SMITH: So, in the rubric in the writing class, it's going to affect a lot of what was just said, but we use mostly thesis, evidence, structure, and style. Now, faculty talk about thesis as a focus, a main argument, but we want to make sure that students understand, here's your prompt, here's what you're writing about. Are you answering that prompt? And are you evolving a rich and clear thesis and placing it in the right place where it should be placed for the context of the writing that you're doing? Usually, it's toward the beginning of an essay, but writing can happen in different places. Evidence—are you using the correct evidence? Are you incorporating it accurately into your piece of writing? Are you analyzing that evidence and showing the reader how it supports your argument? Very important. And that's one of the

standards in our rubric. Structure is, does the way you've put your piece of writing together make sense? Is it clear? Is it following a clear plan? Is it maybe growing, building in momentum? Does the direction make sense? Is it easy for the reader to follow? And style is generally grammar and usage, but also is your voice there? Is it appropriate for the audience that you are supposed to be writing this piece for? So there's definitely grammar in there. There's usage, there's, are you employing grammatical tools rhetorically, which is what we want from advanced writers, not just correctly, but rhetorically. Does it make sense that you structured that sentence the way you've structured it, that you've structured that paragraph the way you've structured it? Does it build logically? Is there rhythm in your writing? So style is grammar and usage, but it's a little bit more advanced at the college level. To be an effective writer, you have to employ those tools... (CROSS-TALK)

CHAIRPERSON DINOWITZ: The Committee likes the rubric?

ASSOCIATE DEAN SMITH: Yes, and... (CROSS-TALK)

CHAIRPERSON DINOWITZ: (LAUGHS) I'm just kidding. I'm just kidding.

ASSOCIATE DEAN SMITH: It's, test, test...
(CROSS-TALK)

CHAIRPERSON DINOWITZ: Yeah, test...
(CROSS-TALK)

ASSOCIATE DEAN SMITH: You need to remember, thesis, evidence, structure, and style...
(CROSS-TALK)

CHAIRPERSON DINOWITZ: Yes, and you...
(CROSS-TALK)

ASSOCIATE DEAN SMITH: Test.

CHAIRPERSON DINOWITZ: I got it. Got it. And then, anecdotally, your professors are reporting to you? Because I outlined in my opening a number of articles, you know, I said "so-called elite universities." You haven't anecdotally heard professors talking about students' vocabulary, or students' ability to sit and read a book?

ASSOCIATE DEAN SMITH: Professors do complain about students reading, and they have well before AI and well before the last five years or since COVID. I think, you know, students take shortcuts with reading. Here's what happens when they

1
2 go to college: they suddenly have 200 or 400 pages of
3 reading to do in a week. They never had that for the
4 most part in high school. So students are struggling
5 to keep up, and they're going to take shortcuts with
6 their reading. So we have a lot of faculty
7 development around how to support reading, and that's
8 why I applied for that Teagle grant. I wanted to come
9 up with more ways to support reading in the
10 classroom, so that's not new. I'm not going to say
11 that there's... (CROSS-TALK)

12 CHAIRPERSON DINOWITZ: So, can I... I want
13 to read from my... I don't mean to interrupt, I want
14 to read from my opening statement, because, yes, a
15 student is going to take shortcuts, but my
16 question... I'm really less concerned with what
17 students are doing and more with how we are
18 addressing what students are doing because students
19 are always going to take shortcuts.

20 ASSOCIATE DEAN SMITH: Mm-hmm.

21 CHAIRPERSON DINOWITZ: Also, by the way,
22 grownups are going to take shortcuts. This isn't
23 unique to students. But, Rose Horowitz, uh, noted
24 that, "Nicholas Dames, who has taught Literature
25 Humanities, a required great books course at Columbia

University, for 25 years, had increasingly noticed that first-year students seemed unable to cope with his expectation of reading multiple books during the semester."

Has the number of books that are assigned each semester decreased? Like that is one measurable question that addresses one of the concerns we have as a city and as society. Has the number of books that have been assigned decreased?

ASSOCIATE DEAN SMITH: In the college classes that I have been teaching for the last 20-some years at CUNY, no, have not decreased the number of books. So in a Great Works course, it's a survey course. It's broken into two halves. Students can choose a half. It's cut off at 1650. So it's from Antiquity to 1650, and 1650 roughly to the Contemporary Age. That's a big time period. I always teach at least two full length novels. Usually, they're shorter novels. I won't choose a Don Quixote; although, certainly, we might teach excerpts of that, but I would teach all of, you know, a Shakespeare play, always, in the first half. I would teach all of the *Odyssey*. I would teach all of *Frankenstein* in the second half of the course. That's a common one I

1 teach. Then we do full books of poetry or selections,
2 essays. We do full plays often, I mentioned
3 Shakespeare, but others as well. So absolutely, that
4 has not changed.
5

6 CHAIRPERSON DINOWITZ: I would say, by the
7 way, I spent, we were talking over an hour this
8 morning just about Cervantes' biography. And like two
9 lines. So, it's a lot. It was a lot. I made it out
10 alive.

11 ASSOCIATE DEAN SMITH: I have not seen
12 that there has been a reduction in the teaching. And
13 maybe one of my more important credentials that I
14 haven't mentioned is that I'm the mother of a senior
15 in high school, a public high school in New York. So
16 I see the kind of reading he did for Regents class. I
17 see that many, many students are coming to CUNY with
18 AP credits, AP Lit, and AP Lang 2, AP courses that
19 are commonly transferred in. There's a lot of reading
20 in those classes. So they are doing full-length
21 reading. I mean, he read the *Odyssey*; he didn't read
22 the whole thing, they excerpted it. But he's usually
23 reading full-length text in high school.

24 CHAIRPERSON DINOWITZ: So, for your
25 entire, you know, for however many years you've been

teaching, your typical is two full-length novels plus some excerpts for a semester? That's like...

ASSOCIATE DEAN SMITH: That's in The Great Works of World Literature class because I'm trying to cover such a broad period. So I would say two full-length novels, a full play, and I always do a play because I like to teach dramatic literature. I like to do a lot of different genres. And I like to teach a full collection of poetry as it was published, not just selected poems, so that students get the arc of the poet's work. So I'm doing at least in-- and this is in a survey course, I'm doing at least four to five full-length texts. And then I do essays and short, you know, excerpts, speeches, like to do a lot of different short stories. And yeah, that's fairly typical. So, five full-length literary works in a Great Works course, because it's a survey class. When I teach American Literature class, I might teach anywhere from eight to 10 full-length novels. When I did regional literature, I think I taught about eight full-length novels in that class.

CHAIRPERSON DINOWITZ: And have the faculty positions in literature and humanities been

cut in recent years? And, if so, have those cuts been comparable to cuts in other academic fields?

INTERIM VICE CHANCELLOR LOPES: I would have to look at the data. So, I don't want to base it on my experience at one college before this position. So, I'd have to look at the data and see if that were true. I don't think there were cuts in those fields. And we need a significant number of faculty in the humanities to teach the general education curriculum. I don't know, though. Let me check and see if I can get that data. I'm not sure we can centrally without surveying all the campuses. This is campus-based data as opposed to central data.

ASSOCIATE DEAN SMITH: At Baruch College, in the School of Arts and Sciences, the English Department, in terms of the number of full-time faculty, is one of the largest. Even though our majors and minors in English are... It's not one of the largest groups where we have the most majors and minors in the arts. Baruch means business, so most of our students are in the Zicklin School of Business, but we have many, many majors in arts and sciences. The two largest departments for majors are psychology and communication studies. English has about the same

number or rivals the number of faculty in those departments because we teach so many students.

CHAIRPERSON DINOWITZ: You fill out that the checkbox, by the way, which was that you have to say Baruch means business at least once, right?

ALL: (LAUGHTER)

CHAIRPERSON DINOWITZ: So, kudos.

ASSOCIATE DEAN SMITH: Well, well, from my perspective, we mean so much more. We're all about building empathy, so.

INTERIM VICE CHANCELLOR LOPES: So the School of Humanities and Social Sciences at Brooklyn College, where I was formerly Provost, has more faculty than any other school at Brooklyn. So, or did when I left there two years ago.

CHAIRPERSON DINOWITZ: Okay.

INTERIM VICE CHANCELLOR LOPES: Significantly more.

CHAIRPERSON DINOWITZ: And just going back to what we're discussing before. Have you compared, or how often are course syllabi compared regarding reading and writing requirements across campuses to determine whether similar expectations are being set?

ASSOCIATE DEAN SMITH: There is a General Education Committee, so a CUNY-wide committee, and that addresses similar expectations in courses for them to be part of the Gen. Ed. So there is a faculty-led committee that does that work around syllabi departments and on the college level, and through the Discipline Council, compares those syllabi.

CHAIRPERSON DINOWITZ: Mm-hmm. And you've been part of those conversations?

ASSOCIATE DEAN SMITH: Yes, especially in my current role as Associate Dean, we do work with the Pathways appeals process, looking at Pathways courses that would be the flexible core in particular. But we have had lots of discussions. You know, students are transferring from any of our community colleges to Baruch, and they have taken the writing courses at LaGuardia, BMCC, or any of our sister colleges in the system. We accept those credits. That's part of the CUNY pack. We want to make sure that students are moving through their curriculum and graduating in a timely fashion, and we work hard on that. So we have to trust that those courses are preparing our students to take the Great

1 Works. So as the Great Works Coordinator, I would
2 receive transfer students into my classes and often,
3 you know, poll them, talk to them, see what any kind
4 of deficits they may have in Great Works, whether
5 they're native Baruch students or whether they had
6 transferred in. And then I could work as a Writing
7 Across the Curriculum Coordinator with the writing
8 programs and faculty at other schools. We had a very
9 close relationship with LaGuardia in particular. I
10 worked a lot with those faculty.

12 CHAIRPERSON DINOWITZ: And the courses
13 outside of standard English literacy courses, can you
14 talk about the interactions you have with those
15 departments to ensure the writing standards are up to
16 CUNY standards?

17 ASSOCIATE DEAN SMITH: Sure. Some of the
18 most difficult reading, I think, in our flexible core
19 are the Gen. Ed curriculum, in our philosophy
20 classes. It's really difficult. Those are literary
21 texts as far as I'm concerned, but they're very dense
22 and difficult literary texts.

23 So we work really closely with faculty in
24 the other humanities departments, in particular about
25 the reading they're assigning, how much reading

1 they're doing, and how they're asking students to
2 respond to the reading. Now disciplinary norms come
3 into play. Philosophers and historians want students
4 to be able to read and write in different ways.
5 They're looking for different information when
6 they're mining a text, and they're looking for
7 different, maybe approaches to writing than those of
8 English faculty who are literary studies scholars. So
9 we work really closely. We work through the CTL. We
10 have, in fact, I'm having a meeting next week with
11 some thought leaders from philosophy, Black and
12 Latino Studies, which is an interdisciplinary major,
13 and history faculty are coming—first-year seminar
14 faculty and English faculty are coming. They're
15 meeting with the CTL representatives. We have three
16 folks from CTL who are supporting us, that's our
17 Center for Teaching and Learning, and we are working
18 together next week over lunch to plan a larger-scale
19 faculty development program for faculty and
20 philosophy, history, English, First-Year Seminar, and
21 Black and Latino Studies.

22
23 CHAIRPERSON DINOWITZ: You said over
24 lunch?

ASSOCIATE DEAN SMITH: Yeah, we're meeting over lunch. But I have a Teagle grant that is paying for that.

CHAIRPERSON DINOWITZ: I was going to say, who pays for the food?

ASSOCIATE DEAN SMITH: Teagle. When you get a grant, that's one thing you can do. You can feed your faculty and work together over lunch.

CHAIRPERSON DINOWITZ: That's so nice. We're not allowed to feed our staff here in the City Council.

ASSOCIATE DEAN SMITH: I know, it's private money—Teagle grant.

CHAIRPERSON DINOWITZ: (LAUGHS) I'm sure we can't take that either.

UNIDENTIFIED: (UN-MIC'D) (INAUDIBLE)

CHAIRPERSON DINOWITZ: What's that? I can't change... You change the laws. Who do you think I am? I can't change the laws. (LAUGHS)

So you spoke about some of what you're getting from the DOE and the standards you're using, like the Regents and the grades, but what communication is done in the reverse? What conversations happen for you to discuss with New York

City Public Schools what CUNY expectations are so that public school teachers are better able to prepare them for college?

INTERIM VICE CHANCELLOR LOPES: I can answer part of that, and then I am going to call on one of my colleagues who is here to answer the rest of that.

So part of that is we prepare many, many New York City public school teachers ourselves, right? Most of them come from CUNY, right, graduated from CUNY, and teach in New York City public schools. So there is a standard there based on that. We also do a lot of professional development for in-service teachers in New York City Public Schools. It's part of what CUNY does. And then there are formal networks in formal structures that also work on that alignment. And my colleague, Andrea Soonachan, is here and might be able to address that.

CHAIRPERSON DINOWITZ: Oh, you need to... Raise your right hand.

Do you affirm to tell the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth in your testimony, before this committee, and to respond honestly to council member questions?

DEAN SOONACHAN: Yes.

CHAIRPERSON DINOWITZ: Thank you. State your name for the record, please.

DEAN SOONACHAN: Andrea Soonachan.

So I think the primary venue that we have for really bridging the high school experience to the post-secondary experience is our dual enrollment work. So about 30% of New York City Public School students who matriculate into CUNY come with CUNY college credits through our dual enrollment programs. The majority of those students have successfully taken actual CUNY courses, right? So they have become accustomed to how to read a syllabus, how to annotate a research paper correctly, and how to read longer texts. We focus a lot, uh, most of those courses are sort of core CUNY Pathways courses. So students are taking the credits that they will need as first-year students and really getting acclimated to those college-level expectations.

CHAIRPERSON DINOWITZ: And have the number of those classes expanded in recent years?

DEAN SOONACHAN: Yes, we've grown by several thousand students over the last several years, and we hope to continue to do that. So last

year we enrolled about 34,000 students. Part of that is the expansion of new funds through Future Ready NYC. Through a New York City Public Schools. So yeah, we hope to, and then there's some new state funding for P-Tech and Smart Scholars. So we continue to grow the portfolio of high schools that are engaged in dual enrollment and dual credit.

CHAIRPERSON DINOWITZ: Do you see a difference between the students who come in with those CUNY credits and students who are college-ready on the Regents, do well in high school, but don't have those CUNY credits? Can you tell just by the way that they write or their ability to sit and read a book?

ASSOCIATE DEAN SMITH: Definitely. I would say, you know, we have a lot of students coming in with a lot more credits when they're starting as entering freshmen. And many of the students in the College Now program who are in the dual enrollment program can take the first semester of the required writing course. A lot of students will transfer that credit, or they will transfer it in through getting a four or a five on the AP. So those students will take the second in our sequence of two writing classes in

1 their first semester in the fall. And anecdotally, I
2 can say those are very popular classes to teach—a
3 lot of faculty love to teach those. We don't offer as
4 many of those second in the sequence of writing and
5 for first-semester freshmen, but those students come
6 in exceptionally well prepared. Yeah, they have a
7 little boost. As was mentioned, they are able to read
8 a syllabus, and they are also not in shock about the
9 reading and writing requirements. So they are able to
10 jump right in. I definitely see a difference with
11 them. I think it's really good.

13 INTERIM VICE CHANCELLOR LOPES: The
14 national data shows that as well. There's a real
15 difference in student outcomes when they do college-
16 level work in high school, uh, both in completion and
17 in academic achievements, so both of those areas.

18 CHAIRPERSON DINOWITZ: And what role do
19 you think the Council can play to support even
20 enriched reading and writing courses and instruction
21 throughout the university system?

22 INTERIM VICE CHANCELLOR LOPES: The
23 Council could be helpful in also advocating for more
24 supplemental instruction for our students and more
25 work, as well as more support structures for our

1 students. So our tutoring programs, both peer
2 tutoring and professional tutoring, are really highly
3 used, right? I mean, really incredibly used. We could
4 use more online tutoring, you know, being available
5 24/7 for our students. Our students are older, and
6 many of our students are returning students as well.
7 We need to make our services available at all times.
8 It's a little uneven. We could use more funds to be
9 able to do that for certain; all of our support
10 services could always be boosted. Students can always
11 use more, and they would excel even further.

13 CHAIRPERSON DINOWITZ: Money, money,
14 money. Yeah, we would love to-- I think this council
15 has been a real champion of CUNY. I think we've time
16 and again shown how valuable CUNY is both to our city
17 and as an economic engine of our city. And it's the
18 right thing to do morally to support our students and
19 our education system.

20 I want to, you know, thank you for
21 testifying today, for coming today to talk about this
22 topic.

23 (PAUSE)

24 CHAIRPERSON DINOWITZ: I want to thank
25 everyone from CUNY for coming today and for your

testimony, and I look forward to continuing these conversations.

And I will now call up the first panel.

I now open the hearing for public testimony. I remind members of the public that this is a formal government proceeding and that decorum shall be observed at all times. As such, members of the public shall remain silent at all times.

The witness table is reserved for people who wish to testify. No video recordings or photography is allowed from the witness table. Further, members of the public may not present audio or video recordings as testimony, but may submit transcripts of such recordings to the Sergeant at Arms for inclusion in the hearing record.

If you wish to speak at today's hearing, please fill out the appearance card with the Sergeant at Arms and wait to be recognized. When recognized, you will have two minutes to speak on today's hearing topic: *The Reading and Writing Crisis Among College Students*.

If you have a written statement or additional written testimony that you wish to submit

for the record, please provide a copy of that testimony to the Sergeant at Arms.

I will now call the first panel:
Christopher Leon Johnson and Cheryl Thomas.

CHRISTOPHER LEON JOHNSON: Ready? Yeah, hello, my name is Christopher Leon Johnson, and I'm here to show support for the children in CUNY who actually need to learn to read and write. Let me explain what's going on in CUNY. The big issue with CUNY is that CUNY is more hell bent on pushing for books that... I know I can't say it on live TV and New York 25, but they say some of the most vile stuff that you could ever hear of. CUNY is more hell bent on pushing "woke ideology" in these schools, in these colleges. That's the reason why these kids have a hard... have a hard issue with reading and writing. There was a time when I was at CUNY Kingsborough, they'd give us intermediate books to buy about \$80.00 and above, but those books was intermediate and they had really hard words that really helped kids out through, uh, people like me out to understand terminologies in this world. But now, CUNY has gone to this route, instead of taking all of that stuff out of the curriculum and putting LGBTQ vile books in

the schools, and they push these books in these kids' faces, and all these books, all they talk about is, uhm, sexual innuendos (sic). Instead of, like, the schools going back to say, okay, when will be push, like, old history, like, Mozart, Shakespeare, Othello, and all these real topics, they put... they more hell bent on pushing this stuff, uh, sex. These schools are more hell bent on pushing sex to appease... to try to get money from the Ford Foundation and all these foundations, like the Open Tides and all these foundations. They completely lost out... they completely took out the real essence of learning inside of schools. These schools completely gone woke (sic). That's the problem with these schools. I know that you don't have... You don't have... I know you're scared of losing your chairship in Higher Education, but this city council is a woke city council, and nothing's gonna change, because we have a woke city council that is way over the real ones like you up here. I know you care about the children (TIMER), but we have members in this body that don't give a crap about the children. And so what happens is that they allow this to happen. We

have a city council... Wait, wait, we have a city council that's hell bent on...

CHAIRPERSON DINOWITZ: Thank you.

CHRISTOPHER LEON JOHNSON: pushing drag queen story hour, and that need to stop (sic). So thank you so much.

CHAIRPERSON DINOWITZ: Thank you so much for your testimony today. I appreciate it.

CHRISTOPHER LEON JOHNSON: Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON DINOWITZ: That concludes the in-person portion of our public testimony. We will now move to remote testimony. If you are testifying remotely, please listen for your name to be called. Once your name is called, a member of our staff will unmute you, and you may then start your testimony once the Sergeant at Arms sets the clock and cues you to begin.

Great, if there is anyone else present in the room who has not had the opportunity to testify, but wishes to do so, please raise your hand. Seeing no one else wishing to testify, I want to thank CUNY and thank everyone for tuning in and for attending today about the reading and writing crisis in our colleges. I think there is a lot more conversation

1 that needs to be happening. When we are in the
2 confines of our school or CUNY, it is very easy to
3 think things are going well, but I believe there is
4 enough evidence to show that the students need a lot
5 more support and help when it comes to the things I
6 mentioned in my opening testimony—sitting down on
7 their own, without the support of AI writing papers
8 for them—sitting down on their own and reading
9 through a book. And that work is done both at the
10 CUNY level and in the K-12 space and in the 0-5
11 space. So, we have a lot of work to do as a city and
12 as a country to make sure that we are diving in deep
13 to texts, and that we are supporting good quality
14 readers and writers. And I look forward to continuing
15 to work with CUNY to make sure that our college
16 students are ready for anything life has to throw at
17 them.
18

19 And with that, this hearing is adjourned.

20 [GAVEL]
21
22
23
24
25

C E R T I F I C A T E

World Wide Dictation certifies that the foregoing transcript is a true and accurate record of the proceedings. We further certify that there is no relation to any of the parties to this action by blood or marriage, and that there is no interest in the outcome of this matter.



Date October 31, 2025