

**Testimony of Geoff Johnson, Continuing Education Teacher  
Before the Board of Trustees of the City University of New York  
Concerning the University Budget Request for FY 2015-2016 as it  
Relates to the PSC-CUNY Collective Bargaining Agreement  
(Calendar Item 3.F.)**

*24 November, 2014*

My name is Geoff Johnson, and I am a reading and writing teacher in the CUNY Start program at the College of Staten Island. I've been a part of the City University of New York since 2004—as a student, a teacher, or both—and first want to say that I care deeply about CUNY as an institution, one which provides access to higher education for a huge number of students who otherwise would not have it. I want to speak in reference to Item 3F, the proposed CUNY Budget, and the need for a budget that includes funds for collectively bargained changes in the structure of teaching positions in CUNY Start.

CUNY Start is an important and innovative program that caters to a growing and historically under-served population of college students—those with remedial instructional needs who wish to pursue their degrees. I'm privileged to work with these students, and the City University of New York should be proud of CUNY Start and what it is accomplishing. But let me be frank. Like most every CUNY Start teacher, I am severely overworked and underpaid, one of many who cannot continue working for long under the current conditions. While we are nominally paid for roughly 30 hours per week (only when classes are running), the actual hours I put in almost always exceed this number—often dramatically so. (I'll spare you the details of many a 2:00-3:00 AM wake-up in order to comment on student work before class.) As a father with an infant son at home, the relatively low pay, high workload, and lack of job security means that being a CUNY Start teacher under current conditions is not a long- or even medium-term career option. I genuinely wish that were not the case, but it's an unfortunate fact.

Let me be frank about something else, hopefully without sounding too self-aggrandizing. I'm quite good at my job, and most people would not be. I have specific, relevant expertise and experience, and I go well beyond the extra mile for my students as a matter of course in a challenging classroom environment. I wouldn't have it any other way. The work I am doing has a real, direct impact on the lives of my students, and they deserve excellent teachers just as much as a student with a great high school GPA and no remedial needs.

I am not at all special in terms of my commitment and abilities, at least within CUNY Start. The same is true for most every teacher I have worked with, talked with, or observed in classrooms in the last two years. But it does take a certain kind of person, with certain abilities and a certain temperament, to do right by college students with lagging skills who are motivated to succeed. It's not a job for everyone. Luckily CUNY has done very well recruiting and training talented teachers and advisers to fill the ranks of the CUNY Start program, but its failure to budget in a way that treats those jobs as serious, full-time positions threatens, in my view, CUNY's potential to be a leader in developmental education, because the current model is simply not sustainable in terms of retaining those who make the program run (and succeed) day-to-day.